

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Review of Transfer Arrangements for Public Housing Tenants

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the Housing Authority's recent review of flat transfer arrangements for existing public housing tenants.

Background

2. From time to time public housing tenants seeking to improve their living conditions may request transfer to other public rental flats. Currently, the Housing Authority provides three main channels to meet their requests.

A. *Overcrowding Relief Transfer*

3. Families with average space allocation of less than 5.5 m² internal floor area (IFA)^{Note} per person are considered to be overcrowded as their living space is short of the minimum allocation standard. To improve their living conditions, the Housing Authority has made arrangements through territory-wide overcrowding relief exercises to transfer them to larger flats within or outside their estates subject to the availability of suitable flats. Since 2001, the Housing Authority has launched territory-wide overcrowding relief exercises twice to thrice a year. Overcrowded families can apply for transfer to larger flats meeting their needs through these exercises. The priority for flat selection is determined in the order of living density, family size and length of residence. Since 2001, ten territory-wide overcrowding relief exercises had been conducted. In each of the exercises, the number of flats offered exceeded the number of applicants.

^{Note} Internal Floor Area (IFA) is the total area inside the flat measured to the internal face of external and/or party walls (i.e. common walls between two flats). For major public housing block types, 1 m² IFA is approximately equivalent to 1.11 to 1.20 m² Saleable Area, which is the floor area unit commonly used in private-sector property transactions.

B. *Special Transfer*

4. Tenants can also apply for special transfer to another flat if they have genuine difficulties in continuing to live in their flats due to medical or social reasons, or other justified special circumstances. Such request can be made as and when the special need arises. The transfer, considered on individual merits, can be internal transfer to another flat within the same estate or external transfer to another estate, as need and circumstances warrant.

C. *External Transfer*

5. Subject to availability of resources, the Housing Department launches external transfer exercises from time to time to provide opportunities for public housing tenants, including families who wish to move to more spacious flats, to transfer to other flats meeting their preferences. These exercises are initiated mainly for three purposes : first, recovering flats of suitable size in target locality to meet special operational needs (e.g. to recover smaller flats in certain districts in order to meet the demand of the Waiting List applicants comprising mostly small families); second, expediting the letting of larger flats surplus to Waiting List demands; and third, providing opportunity for living space enhancement for existing tenants.

Review of Transfer Arrangements

6. Through the implementation of overcrowding relief and other transfer schemes, the number of overcrowded households has been reduced from around 20 000 (3.4% of tenants) in 2000 to around 5 800 (0.9% of tenants) at present. The overcrowding conditions in public rental housing have been significantly alleviated. In light of the concerns expressed by tenants with average living space of or marginally above the benchmark of 5.5 m² per person, the Housing Authority decided to introduce a new Living Space Improvement Transfer Scheme to provide more transfer opportunities for non-overcrowded families.

Living Space Improvement Transfer Scheme

7. The new Living Space Improvement Transfer Scheme, modeled on the existing overcrowding relief exercise, is aimed to provide more opportunities and choices for public housing tenants seeking to improve their living space. Public housing families with space allocation of less than 7 m² per person may apply for transfer to a larger flat through the new scheme. The priority for flat selection will be determined in the same way as territory-wide overcrowding relief exercises mentioned in paragraph 3 above.

8. As at end September 2005, there are 40 174 households with average living space of less than 7 m² per person who are eligible under the new scheme. Of them, about 10 000 are living in estates scheduled for redevelopment within the next three years. They will be rehoused to larger flats in the course of estate redevelopment. For other eligible families, the Housing Authority will set aside about 5 000 flats a year for overcrowding relief and living space improvement transfer exercises having regard to the availability of flats and actual demand from tenants.

Relaxation of Locality Restriction

9. Currently, applicants for overcrowding relief transfer are subject to the locality restriction, i.e. tenants of estates in the New Territories can only choose flats in the New Territories, while those in the extended-urban area can choose flats in the New Territories and the extended-urban area. Urban tenants can choose flats in all districts. The Housing Authority has decided to relax this locality restriction for the territory-wide overcrowding relief exercise and the new Living Space Improvement Transfer Scheme so as to allow tenants whose public housing tenancy exceeds ten years to choose available flats in any geographical district.

Other Transfer Channels

10. In parallel with implementation of overcrowding relief and the new Living Space Improvement Transfer Scheme, the Housing Authority will continue to consider special requests of tenants for transfer to other flats on a need basis. Other transfer exercises will continue to be arranged from time to time for stock management purposes as explained in paragraph 5 above. Tenants not eligible for overcrowding relief or the new Living Space Improvement Transfer Scheme can apply.

Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau
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