

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Utilization of the Housing for Senior Citizens and Improvement Measures

Purpose

This paper sets out the utilization of the Housing for Senior Citizens (HSC) and the improvement measures.

Background

2. The vacancy rate of HSC units has remained constantly on the high side. As at the end of December 2006, there were around 2 000 (approximately 20%) vacant HSC units out of a total of 9 820. In order to reduce the surplus in the long run, the Housing Authority (HA) has formulated a plan to change the use of surplus HSC units.

Allocating HSC to non-elderly singletons

3. In November 2001, the HA relaxed the age restriction for HSC tenants, allowing non-elderly singletons to apply for HSC units. The relaxation has not only allowed better utilization of public housing resources, but also accelerated the provision of public housing to singletons in urgent need. At present, about 10% of the HSC tenants are non-elderly singletons.

4. It has always been the HA's concern whether HSC can provide a suitable living environment for the elderly and other tenants, and enable them to integrate into the community. In 2005, the HA conducted a survey of the living conditions of HSC tenants. The results revealed that HSC tenants could live together harmoniously as a whole, despite the few disputes arising from different living habits of the residents. During the year between 2004 and 2005, there were only three dispute cases involving non-elderly tenants, among the 7 600 HSC tenants. The ages of tenants and the differences in age-related living habits therefore do not seem to be directly related to the disputes among tenants. With the mediation by resident wardens and social workers, the majority of the disputes could be resolved. For isolated cases which could not be resolved, the HA would consider arranging transfer of tenants on a case-by-case basis.

Conversion of HSCs with a high vacancy rate into normal PRH flats

5. The HA launched a trial scheme in 2003 to convert the HSC units in Chung On Estate in Ma On Shan and Wah Lai Estate in Lai Chi Kok into normal PRH flats. In July 2006 the HA endorsed as a long term measure the scheme to recover HSC units with a high vacancy rate for conversion into normal PRH flats by phases. The HSC units with a high vacancy rate are usually those with shared kitchen and toilet facilities. Owing to architectural and structural constraints, it is not possible to provide independent kitchen and toilet facilities in HSC units. The above measure therefore would not only enable better utilization of resources, but also help solve the problems arising from elderly tenants sharing kitchen and toilet facilities.

6. The HA plans to convert around 500 HSC units per year. To cope with the implementation of the conversion programme, the HA will provide self-contained one-person PRH flats for HSC tenants to move into on a voluntary basis. We will maintain close liaison with the Social Welfare Department, non-government elderly services providers and elderly welfare organizations in the course of programme implementation to ensure that affected tenants are properly rehoused.

7. The HA must retain sufficient HSC units to ensure that the demand of elderly tenants for hostel-type public housing would be met. We therefore do not plan to convert all the existing HSC units. The progress of the conversion programme depends on the letting position of HSC units, the willingness of the elderly to move out and the supply of self-contained one-person flats. In fact, due to the limited supply of self-contained one-person PRH flats at present, the HA could only set the target of converting 500 units a year.

Conversion of HSC with a higher vacancy rate for other uses

8. The HA has also converted some vacant HSC units into residential care home, social services centre, elderly community centre and other uses. The HA has already converted the HSC in Fu Tai Estate in Tuen Mun into a Residential Care Home for the Elderly cum Day Care Unit. The vacant HSC units on the sixth floor of Tin Chak Estate will be let to some welfare organizations, including the Caritas Hong Kong, St. James Settlement and Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service as elderly community centre,

social services centre and teenagers community centre. The HA will continue to explore the feasibility of converting HSC units with a high vacancy rate to other uses having regard the local demand for various type of social services.

Incorporating HSC in the Express Flat Allocation Scheme (EFAS)

9. The HA will continue to let HSC units not included in the conversion programmes to applicants on the Waiting List. To further reduce the vacancy, HSC units have been incorporated in the EFAS since December 2001 for applicants to select. During the last five EFAS exercises, 750 HSC units have been successfully let and 650 units are under offer, pending execution of intake formalities. This measure would not only improve the letting position of HSC, but also allow families in need to be provided with public housing in a shorter time.

10. The HA will review the letting position of HSCs from time to time and formulate suitable arrangements with a view to achieving better utilization of public housing resources.

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