

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Public Housing Allocation Policy for Strengthening the Family-based Support Network

Purpose

The Housing Authority (HA) recently reviewed its public housing allocation policy in order to strengthen the family-based support network. This paper gives an account of the revised measures.

Background

2. The Chief Executive emphasized in his 2006/07 Policy Address the importance of close and harmonious relationships among family members. To support the Government's policy of fostering harmonious families, the Subsidized Housing Committee of the HA endorsed five enhanced public housing allocation policies in May 2007, namely the Families with Elderly Persons Priority Scheme (FEP), Special Scheme for Families with Elderly Persons (NFEP), Addition Policy for Harmonious Families, Enhanced Transfer Scheme for Harmonious Families and Amalgamation of Tenancies for Harmonious Families.

3. The objective of enhancing the existing measures is to promote 'ageing in place' for the elderly and encourage mutual support among family members, so as to establish a family-based support network. Meanwhile, the HA would ensure that the enhanced measures are consistent with the prevailing management and allocation policy and would not result in abuse or queue-jumping, so as to ensure that the public housing resources will be allocated in an equitable manner and the impact on other Waiting List (WL) applicants will be minimized.

Enhanced Priority Schemes for Application for Public Housing by the Elderly

4. To encourage younger families to take care of their elderly parents/relatives¹, the HA introduced the FEP and NFEP in 1982 and 1990 respectively, under which applicants may enjoy earlier allocation up to a maximum of three years and two years. In addition, FEP applicants may choose any district (including the Urban District)² and NFEP applicants are offered two separate flats in the same estate in the New Territories (NT).

5. The HA has recently enhanced the above two priority schemes. The minimum waiting time for applicants will be reduced from two years to 18 months. As a result, around 700 FEP applicants will become immediately due for allocation³. The HA will also relax the restriction on the applicants' choice of district under the NFEP. Applicants will be able to choose flats in any district except the Urban District, instead of only the New Territories as in the past. The Chinese name for NFEP (新市樂天倫優先配屋計劃) will also be changed to 天倫樂優先配屋計劃. We estimate that the relaxation of choice of district will attract some 2 000 existing two-person elderly households and their younger families to apply under the Scheme.

Housing arrangements for public housing tenants

(a) Addition Policy for Harmonious Families

6. Under the existing addition policy, only the addition of six categories of persons (i.e. the tenant's spouse, newborn babies / children under the age of 18 of authorized occupants, the spouse and children of one of the tenant's married offspring, dependent parents, dependent grandparents and dependent relatives in exceptional circumstances for whom constant care is essential) are permitted. If an adult offspring needs to take care of his / her elderly parents, he / she would only be allowed conditional temporary stay.

¹ Elderly parents/relatives refer to those aged 60 or above.

² At present, only applications registered on the WL on or before 30 September 2004 are allowed to opt for the Urban District.

³ As at 1 January 2007, there were 6 379 FEP applications on WL, of which 652 had waited for more than 18 months. There is currently no application for NFEP.

7. To promote 'ageing in place', the HA has decided to relax the addition policy to allow one adult offspring and his/her family members to be added to the tenancy so that the elderly tenants would be better taken care of. In accordance with the current policy, the whole household has to pass the Comprehensive Means Test (CMT)⁴ and Domestic Property Test (DPT).

8. To avoid abuse, the condition of no subsequent splitting after addition of a second generation family will also apply to the households applying for addition under the above policy. The revised addition policy would not only foster harmonious families but also help HA let out the larger flats and to a certain extent alleviate the problem of under-occupation.

(b) Enhanced Transfer Scheme for Harmonious Families

9. To encourage the younger generation living in PRH to look after their elderly parents, a scheme is already in place to allow them to apply for transfer to NT estates to live in a flat within the same block where their elderly parents live. In consideration of the fact that quite a number of elderly PRH tenants live in the urban area, the HA has decided to enhance this scheme. Under the new arrangement, the younger families may apply to move to the same estate where their elderly parents live or to a nearby estate, regardless of the district where their parents live. The HA will set aside for the transfer scheme up to 1 000 flats per year, mainly in the Urban District. The districts for selection will be the District Council districts so as to provide the applicants with more options. The CMT and DPT will also be waived.

(c) Amalgamation of Tenancies for Harmonious Families

10. At present, younger families living in PRH may apply for amalgamation of tenancies with their elderly parents or dependent relatives living in PRH in the urban area, and the amalgamated household will be rehoused to a PRH unit. To enhance the scheme, the amalgamated household may opt to move to any district and will be offered a new PRH flat, subject to availability of resources. The younger household has to undertake to take care of and live with the elderly tenants, but the CMT and DPT will be waived. The initiative would also help HA let out the larger flats and to a certain extent alleviate the problem of under-occupation.

⁴ Under the Housing Subsidy Policy, the income limit for PRH tenants is doubled than that applicable to WL applicants, and is therefore more lenient.

Implementation

11. After the necessary enhancement of the relevant information technology system, the HA will implement the enhanced measures with effect from 1 October 2007.

Publicity

12. We expect that the enhanced schemes will be well received by PRH tenants and applicants. The HA will publicize the measures through estate newsletters, pamphlets, posters, the HA Channel and the media.

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