

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Utilization of the Housing for Senior Citizens and the Improvement Measures

Purpose

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

Background

2. The Housing Authority (HA) introduced HSC in the 1980s, providing a hostel-type public rental housing (PRH) with 24-hour warden service for singleton applicants aged 60 or above, with the objective of fostering mutual support and social interaction among the elderly residents. The earliest HSC units were made available through partitioning a normal domestic PRH flat into two or three smaller units. Tenants have to share communal toilet and kitchen facilities. Later, individual toilets were provided in some HSC units, but tenants still have to share kitchen facilities. The vacancy rate of HSC has been on the high side due to applicants' preference for self-contained flats, and the shortened waiting time for small self-contained PRH flats as a result of an increase in supply. The vacancy rate of old-style HSC units in which toilet and kitchen facilities are shared is particularly high, with the refusal rate standing at 90%. As at the end of October 2006, there were 2 042 (20.8%) vacant units out of a total of 9 820.

Improvement measures to increase the HSC utilization rate

3. As the demand for HSC has diminished over the years, the HA decided in November 2000 to cease its construction. Meanwhile, the following improvement measures have been introduced to better utilise the units.

(1) Lifting the age limit for HSC

4. In November 2001, the HA relaxed the age restriction for HSC tenants, allowing non-elderly singletons to apply for HSC. At present, about 10% of the HSC tenants are non-elderly singletons.

(2) *Incorporating HSC in the Express Flat Allocation Scheme (EFAS)*

5. Under the EFAS, the HA invites eligible applicants on the Waiting List to choose from a pool of unpopular vacant PRH flats in the territory. Since December 2001, HSC units have been included in EFAS for applicants to select. In the past four EFAS exercises, a total of 1 810 HSC units were selected and 726 units were successfully let. In the latest EFAS exercise, 876 out of 1 300 available HSC units have been selected and the allocation work is in progress.

(3) *Conversion of HSC with higher vacancy rate into normal PRH flats or other uses*

6. The HA launched a trial scheme in 2003 to convert HSC units of a high vacancy rate for a long time into normal PRH flats or other uses in a phase manner, so as to better utilise the housing resources. The scheme was endorsed by the HA in July 2006 as a long term measure. Each year, about 500 HSC units are to be converted. The HA has adequate self-contained one-person PRH flats for HSC tenants to move in on a voluntary basis. We shall 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 HSC tenants are properly re-housed.

7. Under the conversion programme, the HSC units in Chung On Estate in Ma On Shan and Wah Lai Estate in Lai Chi Kok have been converted into normal PRH flats. On the other hand, the HSC in Fu Tai Estate in Tuen Mun has been converted into a Residential Care Home for the Elderly cum Day Care Unit. Part of the HSC in Tin Chak Estate in Tin Shui Wai has been converted into non-domestic uses including social service centre, elderly community centre and estate management office in order to make the best use of the resources.

8. The HA is committed to enhancing the utilization rate of HSC and making better use of the housing resources through conversion of some HSCs, in order to allow more eligible applicants on the Waiting List to be allocated with flats within a shorter time and to improve their living conditions.