

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Housing for the elderly provided by the Hong Kong Housing Authority and the Hong Kong Housing Society

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the measures introduced by the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) to improve the utilization of the Housing for Senior Citizens (HSC) and its overall housing arrangements for the elderly, and the Hong Kong Housing Society's (HKHS) housing schemes for the elderly.

HA's Housing for Senior Citizens

2. In the late 1980s, the HA introduced the hostel-type HSC with 24-hour warden service. Tenants have to share kitchen and/or toilet facilities. As most applicants prefer small self-contained units with independent kitchen and toilet facilities, and the waiting time has shortened as a result of the increase in supply of these units, many applicants refused to move into the HSC, resulting in a relatively high vacancy rate of HSC since the late 1990s. In November 2000, the HA endorsed the cessation of the construction of HSC.

3. In order to improve the utilization of HSC units, the HA has introduced a number of improvement measures since 2001. The HA reviewed these measures in July 2006 and briefed the Legislative Council Panel on Housing on the outcome of the review in February 2007. The Panel requested the Administration to report the progress of the various improvement measures in the 2007/08 session.

(I) Allocating HSC to non-elderly singletons

4. In 2001, the Audit Commission carried out an investigation into the HA's 'Residential Services for the Elderly'. In view of the relatively high vacancy rate of HSC, the Audit Commission recommended that the HA should consider allocating vacant HSC units to other public rental housing (PRH) applicants. As a result, the HA lifted the age restriction for HSC in November 2001, allowing non-elderly applicants to be allocated HSC. This measure allows a better use of public housing resources and enables singletons with urgent housing needs to be

allocated with PRH flats within a shorter time. As at March 2008, about 16% of the HSC tenants were non-elderly singletons.

(II) Including HSC in the Express Flat Allocation Scheme (EFAS)

5. To further reduce the vacancy rate, the HA has included HSC units in the EFAS for applicants to select since December 2001. In the past seven EFAS exercises, a total of 1 335 HSC units were let. This arrangement helps improve the letting position of HSC and expedite the allocation of PRH to families with housing needs.

(III) Converting HSC with higher vacancy rates into normal PRH flats or for other purposes

6. In 2002, the HA launched a trial scheme to convert HSC units with higher vacancy rate into normal PRH flats, including some of the HSC units in Chung On Estate in Ma On Shan and Wah Lai Estate in Lai Chi Kok. In view of the success of the trial scheme, the HA endorsed it as a long term measure in July 2006 and planned to convert about 500 HSC units with relatively high vacancy rates per annum. The HSC included in the conversion programme will no longer be allocated to applicants on the Waiting List or under the EFAS.

7. The Housing Department (HD) will brief tenants of HSC units included in the conversion programme on the details of the programme and conduct surveys on their intention to move out. Whether to move out is entirely a voluntary decision of the tenants. The choice of the tenants concerned is a main consideration in the implementation of the conversion programme. The HD will arrange adequate self-contained one-person flats for the transfer of the affected tenants. Subject to the availability of resources, the HD will endeavour to arrange flat transfer for elderly tenants according to their housing preferences, or arrange elderly tenants in the same estate who know each other well to be transferred together to another estate or neighbouring estates. Removal allowance will be granted to those who join this voluntary exercise. Moreover, in order to reduce the difficulties that may be encountered by the elderly in the course of moving and to allay their worries over the moving arrangements, the HD has engaged an elderly service agency to assist them in the moving arrangements and refer cases with special needs to the Social Welfare Department for follow-up. The HD will liaise with local organizations, such as social centres for the elderly, mutual aid committees and Estate Management Advisory Committees to organize recreational

and community activities in order to help the elderly who have just moved in to adapt to the new living environment.

8. In late 2007, the HD launched the first phase of the HSC conversion programme, involving 430 HSC units in Tak Tin Estate in Lam Tin, Ko Yee Estate in Yau Tong, Tin Chak Estate in Tin Shui Wai and Tin King Estate in Tuen Mun. Recently, a press report suggested that the HD had unilaterally issued notices to tenants requesting them to move out without any prior consultation. As mentioned above, it is entirely the voluntary decision of the HSC tenants included in the conversion programme to move out or not. Tenants who do not wish to move may continue to stay in their units which will not be converted. The HD is conducting a survey on tenants' intention to move. Upon the completion of the survey, a conversion programme with suitable transfer arrangements will be worked out.

9. If the implementation of the first phase of the HSC conversion programme is successful, the HA will extend the conversion programme to 14 other HSC estates with relatively high vacancy rates. The HA will also explore the feasibility of converting HSC with higher vacancy rates into other community or welfare uses having regard to the local demand.

HA's housing arrangements for the elderly

Living Environment

10. Although the HA no longer develops purpose-built HSC for the elderly, it has been striving to provide a safe and convenient living environment for elderly tenants to allow them to "age in place". To this end, the HA has been improving the estate and building design by implementing the following initiatives:

- (i) Since 2002, "universal design" has been adopted in all new projects with the objective to provide a living environment suitable for the use of all residents. Under the concept of universal design, we have introduced a number of elderly-friendly facilities and improved access design, etc.

- (ii) Since 2001, the HA has been improving the access design in existing PRH estates. In 2006, the Barrier-free Access Improvement Programme was implemented to install additional ramps, handrails, voice synthesizers and Braille in lift cars to facilitate the access of the elderly and the physically and visually impaired.
- (iii) Retrofitting the facilities in the flats of elderly tenants in accordance with their individual needs, including installing handrails, widening doors and re-positioning electricity switches.
- (iv) Implementing Estate Improvement Programmes in some PRH estates to renovate or provide additional recreational and leisure facilities for the elderly, such as tai-chi areas, foot massage paths and long benches. In addition, lifts are installed to facilitate access by the elderly.
- (v) Letting appropriate non-domestic premises in PRH estates to social service organizations to provide suitable community services for the elderly.

Allocation Arrangements

11. To encourage younger families to take care of elderly parents / relatives so as to foster a family-based support network, the HA has put in place various PRH allocation schemes which accord priority to elderly applicants, including Single Elderly Persons Priority Scheme, Elderly Persons Priority Scheme, Families with Elderly Persons Priority Scheme and Special Scheme for Families with Elderly Persons, to shorten their waiting time and allow earlier allocation of PRH flats to them. The HA has also introduced measures to enhance its policies on addition and amalgamation of tenancies and flat transfer. Since October 2007, the HA has implemented the Addition Policy for Harmonious Families, Enhanced Transfer Scheme for Harmonious Families and Amalgamation of Tenancies for Harmonious Families to encourage younger families to move to live closer to their elderly parents or to live with them in the same flat so as to take better care of them.

HKHS' Senior Citizen Residence Scheme (SEN)

12. The Government granted two sites respectively in Tseung Kwan O and Jordan Valley (i.e. Jolly Place and Cheerful Court) to the HKHS at nominal premium for operating from 2003 and 2004 onwards the SEN on a pilot lease-for-life basis. At present, all 576 units are rented out and interested applicants have to register on a waiting list. Recently, the HKHS proposed to the Government a new development site for SEN on the Hong Kong Island. We are discussing the project details with the HKHS in conjunction with other policy bureaux and departments, with a view to enabling the early implementation of the project. Moreover, we understand that the HKHS is studying with other organizations the development of other forms of housing scheme for the elderly.

13. The concept of HKHS's SEN is to provide one-stop services, including housing, community recreational and healthcare services, to those elderly persons who have sufficient economic means to live independently. This model offers an additional choice for the elderly. However, we understand that some elderly persons prefer to purchase their own properties, or to live with or in the proximity of their non-elderly family members for better mutual care. In fact, the Government has been putting a lot of emphasis on care for the elderly. The departments concerned are committed to providing appropriate and easily accessible community, recreational and medical services to the elderly living in different parts of the territory. We will consider in conjunction with the relevant bureaux and departments any new ideas or proposals on elderly housing put forward by the HKHS or other organizations.

Transport and Housing Bureau
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