

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Rent Collection in Public Rental Housing Estates

Purpose

This Paper informs Members of the enhanced rent collection services provided by the Hong Kong Housing Authority for public rental housing (PRH) tenants.

Background

2. In the past, PRH tenants could only pay their rents through the following channels -

- (i) the shroff office in the estate management office concerned;
- (ii) autopay through banks;
- (iii) payment-by-phone service (PPS) or internet banking; and
- (iv) Automatic Teller Machines (ATM).

Enhanced Rent Collection Services

3. The Housing Department (HD) launched the new Estate Management and Maintenance System in late 2005. This new information technology system has not only enhanced the operational effectiveness of the Department, but also made it possible to introduce more convenient modes of rent payment. Starting from December 2005, tenants have been issued e-Payment Cards to replace the paper Rent Cards that needed to be replaced every two years. With the e-Payment Cards, tenants can now pay rents at some 800 7-Eleven Convenience Stores and 50 MTR Customer Service Centres (MTRCSC) located across the territory, apart from the shroff offices located in the estate management offices. This has significantly increased the number of conveniently located rent collection points. Moreover, tenants can now pay their rents outside office hours.

4. Besides, rent allowances granted to some 130,000 PRH households receiving the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance have been directly credited to the HD by the Social Welfare Department with effect from 1 June 2007. This arrangement has greatly reduced HD's administrative work and proved convenient for the tenants concerned.

Tenant Rent Enquiry Hotline

5. For the convenience of tenants, we introduced the 24-hour "Rent Enquiry Hotline" (2712 0660) in March 2007 for PRH tenants to check the monthly rent payable and the latest rent payment status so that they do not need to enquire at the shroff offices of their estates in person. The hotline's database is updated every day so that the tenants can obtain the latest information.

Service Adjustments for Shroff Offices and Measures to Help Tenants with Special Needs

6. Since the implementation of the above measures, the functions of the traditional shroff offices at estates have been diminishing and the pattern of rent payment of tenants has also changed. The amount of rents now collected at HD's shroff offices has dropped substantially by 40% as compared with January 2007. The HD will therefore make appropriate adjustment to the services of the shroff offices, so that resources can be redeployed to strengthen and improve other areas of work and services, and tenants may be encouraged to pay rents through other more convenient channels. The HD has also introduced appropriate measures to help tenants get used to the changes and provide assistance to those with special needs.

7. After consultation with the Estate Management Advisory Committees, shroff offices have started to operate on a half-day basis since 1 October 2007. On the whole, the arrangement runs smoothly and is generally accepted by tenants. As there are about 30 shroff offices in small estates where more convenient rent collection points (e.g. convenience stores or MTR stations) are located in the estate or in the vicinity, they will be closed with effect from 1 January 2008. We will review the above measures some time after their implementation to work out the way forward.

8. As some elderly or disabled tenants may find it inconvenient to go to convenience stores or MTRCSC or may not be accustomed to the electronic modes of rent payment, the HD staff are ready to offer them assistance in applying for autopay or payment by phone service. Where necessary, we would provide door-to-door rent collection service to tenants with special needs.

Publicity

9. We have already briefed the Estate Management Advisory Committees of the enhanced rent collection services and the service adjustments for shroff offices. We would continue to publicize these measures through the Housing TV Channel, departmental hotline, estate newsletters, leaflets and posters.

Transport and Housing Bureau
October 2007