

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1) 2408/08-09
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by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/HG/1

Panel on Housing

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 1 June 2009, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH (Chairman)
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH
Hon CHAN Hak-kan
Hon WONG Sing-chi

Members absent : Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS

Public officers attending : **For item III**

Ms Eva CHENG, JP
Secretary for Transport and Housing

Ms Ada FUNG, JP
Deputy Director (Development & Construction)
Housing Department

Mr CHAN Nap-ming
Assistant Director (Development & Procurement)
Housing Department

For item IV

Mr YAU Shing-mu, JP
Under Secretary for Transport and Housing

Mr LAU Kai-hung, JP
Deputy Director (Estate Management)
Housing Department

Mr LEE Cert-quinn
Assistant Director (Estate Management) 1
Housing Department

Mr Sunny IP
Chief Manager/Management (Support Services 3)
Housing Department

Mr Allan WONG
Head (Total Maintenance Scheme)
Housing Department

For item V

Mr YAU Shing-mu, JP
Under Secretary for Transport and Housing

Mr LAU Kai-hung, JP
Deputy Director (Estate Management)
Housing Department

Mr LEE Cert-quinn
Assistant Director (Estate Management) 1
Housing Department

Mr Deryk YIM
Chief Manager/Management (Support Services 4)
Housing Department

Mr Frankie LAM
Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment
(Financial Monitoring)
Environment Bureau

Clerk in attendance : Miss Becky YU
Chief Council Secretary (1)1

Staff in attendance : Mrs Mary TANG
Senior Council Secretary (1)2

Miss Mandy POON
Legislative Assistant (1)4

Action

I. Information paper issued since last meeting

Members noted that no information paper had been issued since last meeting.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(1) 1680/08-09(01) — List of follow-up actions
LC Paper No. CB(1) 1680/08-09(02) — List of outstanding items for discussion)

2. When the subject of "Construction programme of public housing" was discussed at the meeting on 17 April 2009, members held the view that timely provision of land was crucial to ensure steady supply of public housing. As land supply for public housing straddled the purviews of the Panel on Housing and the Panel on Development, members agreed to hold a joint meeting of both Panels on Monday, 6 July 2009, at 2:30 pm to discuss "Land supply for public rental housing production". As a result, the regular meeting scheduled for the same day would be postponed to be held at 4:00 pm to discuss "Installation of metal gates for public rental housing flats".

3. Mr Fred LI noted that as part of the new round of relief measures announced by the Financial Secretary on 26 May 2009, households living in the rental units of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HS) would be offered two-month rent payment. He considered it necessary for the Panel to discuss the proposal before it was submitted for approval by the Finance Committee. Given that tenants of retail premises of HA and HS were not covered under the new round of relief measures, Mr Tommy CHEUNG suggested that a special meeting should be held to discuss relief measures for commercial tenants of HA and HS. Mr CHAN Kam-lam however did not support the holding of a special meeting to discuss the new round of relief measures as otherwise there would be proliferation of meetings by different Panels. Besides, the new round of relief measures had already been discussed by the Panel on Financial Affairs. After deliberation, it was agreed that a special meeting be held to discuss the two subjects.

(Post-meeting note: With the concurrence of the Chairman, the special meeting was scheduled for 17 June 2009 from 8:30 am to 9:30 am.)

III. Provisions for green, safe and healthy living in new public rental housing developments

(LC Paper No. CB(1) 1680/08-09(03) — Administration's paper on provisions for green, safe and healthy living in new public rental housing developments)

4. The Secretary for Transport and Housing (STH) briefly introduced the latest provisions for green, safe and healthy living in new public rental housing (PRH) developments. The Deputy Director of Housing (Development & Construction) (DDH(D&C)) gave a power-point presentation on the various green initiatives which HA had implemented, including the “Twin Tanks” design in water supply system, “Common W-Trap System” in waste water drainage, enhanced electrical supply system for lift services, and strengthened provisions for safer building maintenance.

(Post-meeting note: A set of power-point presentation materials was circulated to members under LC Paper No. CB(1) 1790/08-09(01) on 2 June 2009.)

“Twin Tanks” design in water supply system

5. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung was concerned about the poor performance of water pump of the drainage system in many estates which had led to frequent breakdown of the flushing system. He enquired if the “Twin Tanks” design in water supply system could resolve the problem of frequent suspension of flushing water supply as in the case of Kwai Chung Estate. DDH(D&C) said that the “Twin Tanks” design would allow continuous water supply to tenants during tank cleansing operations. Meanwhile, stainless steel pumps would be used in new estates to ensure better performance. The Assistant Director of Housing (Development & Procurement) explained that the frequent suspension of flushing water supply in Kwai Chung Estate was attributable to various factors, including defective pipe brackets, frequent damage of pipework caused by falling objects from height and tank cleansing operations. The problematic pipe brackets had since been replaced while additional protection to exposed pipework was being studied.

“Common W-Trap System” in waste water drainage

6. Noting that the “Common W-Trap System” had been applied to the waste water discharge system in all new PRH developments, the Chairman enquired if older estates could also be retrofitted with the system to prevent the spread of foul air, germs and epidemic diseases between floors. DDH(D&C) explained that there were technical difficulties in applying the “Common W-Trap System” to older estates because of the different size and design of the waste water discharge system, which might not be compatible with the new trap design according to the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123). Tenants of these older estates were reminded to ensure that the water seals in the waste water discharge system were not dried up.

7. Mr Frederick FUNG opined that there should be ways to accommodate the new trap system through modifications to the drainage system of older estates. The

Administration should endeavour to install the “Common W-Trap System” in waste water discharge system of existing estates. DDH(D&C) reiterated that there were space and technical constraints in retrofitting the waste water discharge system of older estates with the new trap design. The alteration works would inevitably involve a major change in the design of the entire system which would require modifications to building layout.

Enhanced electrical supply system for lift services

8. Mr Frederick FUNG welcomed the enhanced electrical supply system for lift services as this would enable basic lift services to be maintained during periodic inspection, testing and certification, thereby providing the much needed convenience to tenants, especially the elderly and people with disabilities. He would support the implementation of enhanced system in all estates as soon as possible. DDH(D&C) said that while the enhanced system was a standard feature in new estates, there were difficulties in implementing it in existing estates due to space and technical constraints in installing the electrical cable and back-up power supply systems.

9. The Chairman enquired about the feasibility of using separate electrical supply system for each lift such that lifts could operate independently of each other. In this way, lift service would not need to be suspended altogether during inspections and maintenance. Older estates could be easily retrofitted with such separate system without problem. DDH(D&C) explained that there were technical and space constraints in the provision of additional electrical supply systems for lifts in the lift machine rooms let alone the need for back-up electrical supply systems at the roof level. Besides, the major alteration works would inevitably cause much inconvenience to the tenants concerned. Meanwhile, efforts would be made to minimize the inconvenience to tenants during periodic inspections and maintenance of lifts.

Strengthened provisions for safer building maintenance

10. Prof Patrick LAU sought elaboration on the strengthened provisions for safer building maintenance, and whether these could be applied to existing estates. DDH(D&C) explained that to enable future building maintenance using gondola and lifeline to be carried out more safely and conveniently, adequate structural provision in the roof parapet and waterproof power sockets would be provided to facilitate installation and operation of gondola and lifeline. However, these strengthened provisions might not be applicable to older estates as the roof parapet could not provide adequate structural support for these facilities. Nevertheless, the HA would look into the feasibility of extending these provisions in some of the existing estates where possible.

11. Mr Frederick FUNG remarked that as part of green initiatives, consideration should be given to including sewage treatment systems in the design of new PRH blocks so that waste water could be treated and recycled for watering of plants and cleansing of floors within the estates. Waste separation facilities should be provided at each floor to facilitate recycling of waste. Greening should also be applied to

rooftops, corridors and lobbies of PRH blocks. HA should work out a comprehensive package of green measures for PRH estates in consultation with green groups.

Others

12. Noting that PRH tenants used to hang-dry their clothes/quilts on the railings in public areas, Mr Frederick FUNG held the view that there was a need to improve the cloth-drying facilities in PRH estates. Consideration should be given to set aside a vacant floor within an estate block for recreation purposes as well as for drying of clothes and beddings. To foster closer community relationship among tenants within the same block, there might be a need to set up more than one mutual assistance committee for estate blocks with say more than 40 storeys. STH said that HA had to ensure compliance with the plot ratios and height restrictions in the development of new PRH estates. Care would need to be taken to optimize the usage of land to provide more flats to meet demand. Hence, it might not be possible to leave one or two floors vacant for recreation and cloth-drying purposes. DDH(D&C) supplemented that only buildings with more than 40 storeys would be provided with a refuge floor, and this was quite rare for PRH development given the height restrictions. Besides, the provision of vacant floors would reduce the number of PRH flats to be delivered. As regards Mr FUNG's request for space to allow tenants to hang-dry their quilts, DDH(D&C) said that HA would look into the issue. Meanwhile, new cloth-drying racks had been provided in new estates coming on stream.

IV. Provision of services in public rental housing estates through "Mobile Office"

(LC Paper No. CB(1) 1680/08-09(04) — Administration's paper on provision of services in public rental housing estates through "Mobile Office")

13. The Assistant Director of Housing (Estate Management)1 (ADH(EM)1) gave a power-point presentation on the progress and way forward of HA's initiatives to provide services in PRH estates through the "Mobile Office".

(Post-meeting note: A copy of the power-point presentation materials was circulated to members under LC Paper No. CB(1) 1790/08-09(02) on 2 June 2009.)

14. Prof Patrick LAU sought elaboration on the concept of "Mobile Office" and how this could apply to circumstances where tenants could not be reached. The Deputy Director of Housing (Estate Management) (DDH(EM)) said that the concept of "Mobile Office" was applied to housing management service as well as maintenance and repair service. HA had applied the concept of "Mobile Office" to housing management service and introduced the use of portable Personal Digital

Assistants (PDAs) to carry out day-to-day outreach management duties. ADH(EM)1 added that with the use of mobile technology, HA developed and applied the Mobile Application System for Housing Management ("MASHM") in late 2008 to the biennial inspection of PRH flats. The use of PDAs had streamlined the business processes by dispensing PRH tenants with the need to fill in forms, since all procedures were completed on site during inspections. This had helped avoid errors in form applications and accelerate the progress of inspections by 30%. As MASHM enabled "round-the-clock" operations anytime and anywhere, frontline staff were better supported when performing out-of-office duties, including enhancing emergency support and management of environmental hygiene under the Marking Scheme for Estate Management Enforcement in PRH estates ("Marking Scheme"). Apart from checking the lists of tenants with special needs kept in the management offices, duty staff could retrieve relevant information from PDAs so as to take prompt action and provide support in case of emergency. They could also use PDAs to instantly check tenants' record under the Marking Scheme and give appropriate advice and response. For example, they could immediately download the information of tenants who were allowed to keep dogs from the central database and check whether the tenants concerned had obtained the necessary approval.

15. In respect of maintenance and repair service, DDH(EM) said that the concept of "Mobile Office" had been adopted for the Total Maintenance Scheme (TMS) to enable frontline staff to record on-site maintenance conditions and work progress of individual PRH flats. The TMS mobile service model was further extended to daily in-flat repair work not covered by TMS. Dedicated in-flat technical teams had been set up in district maintenance offices and PDAs were used to promptly respond to tenants' requests for repairs.

16. As the "Mobile Office" was proven to be very useful in maintenance and repair services, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung held the view that each maintenance officer should be provided with a PDA to enhance operational efficiency. This would assist the keeping of updated maintenance records and monitoring of progress of works. DDH(EM) said that there were over 1 000 PDAs for use by frontline staff in the management and maintenance of PRH estates. The Head (Total Maintenance Scheme) added that with the completion of the first round of TMS in four to five years' time, a complete maintenance record of all PRH flats could be made available.

17. The Chairman was concerned about the security of information kept by the "Mobile Office". He enquired about the level of authority required for access to the system, and whether frontline staff were allowed to bring PDAs home. DDH(EM) said that HA kept a log book on users of PDAs, and that frontline staff were not allowed to bring PDAs home. Those who had downloaded information from PDAs were required to comply with the security guidelines provided by HA. As all information kept in PDAs were encrypt, outsiders could not have access to such information. The security system of PDAs had been certified by the Symantec Company which was renowned in the computer field for its protective software. Thus far, there had not been any loss of information associated with the use of PDAs. ADH(EM)1 added that the level of access to information had been worked out when the concept of the "Mobile Office" was developed. A Housing Manager was able to

access to all the information regarding the management of his estate, while an Assistant Housing Manager was only allowed access to relevant information within his purview. Users of PDAs were provided with individual passwords and they would have to log in to the system before operation.

V. Supply and cost of liquefied petroleum gas in public housing estates

- (LC Paper Nos. CB(1) 329/08-09(01), — Submissions from Mr LAI
CB(1) 513/08-09(01) and Ming-hung expressing concern
CB(1) 528/08-09(01) about the high cost of LPG
supplied in public housing
estates (Chinese version only)
- LC Paper No. CB(1) 630/08-09(01) — Referral from the Complaints
Division regarding the concern
raised by the Mutual Aid
Committee of Ka Man House of
Oi Man Estate about the high
cost of LPG supplied in public
housing estates (Chinese
version only)
- LC Paper No. CB(1) 1680/08-09(05) — Administration's paper on
supply and cost of LPG in
public housing estates
- LC Paper No. CB(1) 1735/08-09(01) — Information note on regulation
of price adjustments of
domestic LPG)

18. The Chairman said that in the light of concern about the high cost of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supplied in public housing estates raised in submissions to the Panel and cases handled by the LegCo Redress System, he had raised a question on the subject at a Council meeting. According to the Administration's advice, the subject was scheduled for discussion at the present meeting. At the Chairman's invitation, DDH(EM) briefed members on HA's policy and monitoring issues concerning the provision of central LPG in public housing estates.

Price of LPG

19. Noting that the Shell Hong Kong Limited (Shell) was the only LPG supplier which adopted a voluntary pricing review mechanism to enhance transparency of their pricing, the Chairman was concerned about the means through which HA could ensure the price adjustment of domestic LPG was reasonable. Consideration should be given to requiring other LPG suppliers to adopt similar pricing review mechanism. There was also a need to standardize the charging basis for LPG as some suppliers were charging by volume (cubic metres) and others by weight (kilogrammes), making price comparison rather difficult. The Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment (Financial Monitoring) (PASE(FM)) said that while other LPG suppliers had not established any mechanism to regularly and openly review LPG prices and release relevant information, the adjustment made by these suppliers in the price of

piped LPG had been close to that of Shell. Besides, the Environment Bureau also monitored whether the adjustment in local price of domestic LPG was reasonable in light of the movements in international LPG prices and local import prices. In addition, the LPG supply contracts already stipulated that the suppliers should not levy any charge higher than that in the prevailing private market. DDH(EM) supplemented that the prices charged by the five LPG suppliers were very competitive, at an average of \$27.65 per cubic metre. The Under Secretary for Transport and Housing (USTH) added that HA would continue to closely monitor the performance of LPG suppliers. It would also examine ways to strengthen communication with the suppliers and keep tenants better informed of the movement of LPG price.

20. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that tenants were more concerned about the high cost of LPG rather than the movement of LPG price. Given that tenants did not have much choice on gas supply, there should be adequate price control over central LPG supply in public housing estates. In view of the extent of monopoly, LPG suppliers should offer a discounted rate to tenants. DDH(EM) explained that under HA's policy, Towngas would be provided for public housing estates wherever available. Nonetheless, HA would engage central LPG suppliers for public housing estates in remote locations or estates developed years ago when there was no coverage of Towngas at the time of construction of the estates concerned. Of the 153 public housing estates under HA's management, only 15 were installed with central LPG supply system. So far, all 15 estates were satisfied with the service provided by the LPG suppliers. It was also worth noting that apart from the 15 public housing estates, a number of large-scale private residential developments, such as Pokfulam Gardens and Mei Foo Sun Chuen, were also installed with central LPG system. As LPG price was subject to market forces and was applicable across the board to both public and private housing estates, it was not appropriate for HA to request the fuel suppliers to charge a lower price for public housing estates.

21. As it was generally accepted that LPG, with its associated storage problem, was not as safe as Towngas, Mr WONG Sing-chi considered that there was room for negotiation with the LPG suppliers for a lower price for central LPG supply for the 15 public housing estates, which were mostly older estates with elderly tenants who had much difficulty coping with the high LPG cost. He shared Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's view that these tenants had to rely on LPG supply as otherwise they had to switch to electricity, which was even more expensive. DDH(EM) said that under the LPG contracts, the suppliers could not restrict users in public housing estates to use the piped central LPG supply. Instead, other forms of fuel, such as portable bottled LPG from any source may be used as the users saw fit. Besides, the LPG supply contracts also stipulated that the suppliers should not levy any charge higher than that in the prevailing private market. LPG suppliers were also required to maintain their installations to ensure a safe and steady supply of LPG. Based on a survey conducted by the Consumer Council in 1999, the percentages of consumers using gas, electricity and LPG were 40%, 30% and 30% respectively. USTH supplemented that both Towngas and LPG were safe for use. While the current price of LPG was higher than Towngas, there were times when the price of Towngas was higher than that of LPG. Tenants would be consulted on the use of fuel upon the expiry of the existing LPG supply contracts. PASE(FM) added that fuel

prices in Hong Kong were determined by individual companies having regard to their commercial practices and operating costs. While the price of Towngas was at present slightly lower than that of piped LPG, it had once been higher than LPG before the introduction of liquefied natural gas as an additional feedstock. Since the two types of domestic fuel were completely different in terms of constituent gases/feedstock, it was not possible to predict the future price comparison between Towngas and LPG.

Conversion to Towngas

22. Prof Patrick LAU held the view that the use of LPG was not desirable on account of the safety hazard associated with LPG storage facilities. Consideration should be given to providing Towngas to the 15 public housing estates with central LPG supply. Opportunity should be taken to work out with the Towngas Company plans to convert the piping system and the distribution network from LPG to Towngas when the estates were under major renovation. His views were shared by the Chairman who pointed out that the proposed conversion would have the added benefit of removing the unwanted LPG storage facilities to make way for the much needed recreational facilities. USTH said that under the existing contract with LPG companies, the installation of Towngas distribution network could only commence after the expiry of the existing LPG supply contracts. Complete demolition of the entire LPG plants and piping systems and extensive works would be required within the estates and inside all domestic flats. As it was estimated that the conversion works would take about 12 months, during which piped gas supply would be suspended, the affected tenants would need to be consulted on whether they were prepared to accept the disturbance and inconvenience associated with the works.

23. The Chairman enquired if consultation on the conversion from LPG to Towngas had been held in any of the 15 public housing estates with central LPG supply and if not, whether HA would undertake to do so upon expiry of the existing LPG supply contracts. Noting that Wah Fu Estate would undergo major refurbishment, Prof Patrick LAU asked whether the estate management advisory committee was consulted on the need for conversion from LPG to Towngas. DDH(EM) said that if the outcome of consultation indicated that some households preferred to continue with the use of LPG, it would not be appropriate to proceed with the conversion to Towngas as this would require changes in the piping systems and the replacement of heaters and stoves, all of which would have cost implications on individual households. Given the practical difficulties and the high costs associated with the proposed conversion, it was not considered cost-effective to proceed with the conversion. Besides, there was no immediate urgency for the conversion when the LPG suppliers were providing the 15 public housing estates with a steady and stable LPG supply, with a high degree of transparency in their pricing. As regards Wah Fu Estate, DDH(EM) said that tenants were generally satisfied with the central LPG supply and the estate management advisory committee had not requested a conversion to Towngas. At members' request, the Administration undertook to provide information on the expiry dates of the LPG supply contracts in respect of the 15 public housing estates with central LPG supply. It would also relay to HA members' request for consultation with tenants on the desirability of converting to Towngas upon expiry of the existing LPG supply contracts.

Development of solar energy

24. Prof Patrick LAU pointed out the need for the development of solar energy in public housing estates. USTH said that HA was committed to providing estates with facilities which were both environment friendly and sustainable.

VI. Any other business

25. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:30 pm.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
3 August 2009