

## **Legislative Council Panel on Housing**

### **Progress of the provision of barrier-free access in public housing estates**

#### **Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the progress of the provision of barrier-free access by the Hong Kong Housing Authority (“HA”) in the existing Public Rental Housing (“PRH”) estates.

#### **Background**

2. In order to cater for the needs of the disabled and the elderly, the HA has, since April 1998, set out in all new tenders for public housing construction contracts that comprehensive barrier-free access for those in need should be provided to meet the requirements of the “*Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997*” (“Design Manual”) of the Buildings Department. As regards other public facilities and pedestrian ways in the existing PRH estates, the HA has commenced improvement works in two phases since 2001.

#### **Details of the Progress**

##### ***Phase I: Improvement Works for the Elderly and People with Limited Mobility***

3. The Phase I improvement works were mainly proposed to assist the elderly and people with limited mobility. Having inspected the public access in the PRH estates, the HA mainly carried out various improvement works in phases to meet the requirements of the Design Manual as far as possible having regard to the actual environment, engineering feasibility, and the views of residents. These improvement works include –

- (a) the provision of wheelchair-accessible ramps in major access and building entrances;
- (b) the installation of handrails and tactile warning strips for ramps and stairs;
- (c) the construction of dropped kerbs and the installation of tactile warning strips at major junctions; and
- (d) the installation of signs to facilitate users to identify barrier-free access routes.

4. The improvement works have been completed in about 150 PRH estates in Hong Kong, costing about HKD20 million.

### ***Phase II: Improvement Works for the Visually-Impaired Residents***

5. Taking into account the views of those concerned, Phase II of the improvement works mainly include –

- (a) the provision of tactile guide paths connecting each block and major facilities within the estate;
- (b) the installation of voice synthesizers announcing on arrival of each floor, and the addition of tactile markings and braille letters to the call buttons inside lift cars;
- (c) the addition of tactile markings and braille letters to door-phones and combination lock panels at building entrances;
- (d) the addition of braille letters to letter boxes located at the ground-floor lobby upon request from the visually-impaired residents;
- (e) the enhancement of illumination level at specific locations upon request by the visually-impaired residents; and
- (f) the repainting of bollards, thresholds and periphery walls in contrasting colours.

6. By April 2009, more than 130 PRH estates have completed Phase II of the improvement works. Those of the remaining 20 PRH estates will be completed in mid-2009. The total expenditure for the whole project is estimated at HKD100 million.

### **Other Services**

#### ***Alteration of In-flat Facilities***

7. The HA has been carrying out alteration works for the in-flat facilities of individual elderly or disabled tenants since 1982 to suit their needs in accordance with the advice of their therapists. These alteration works include –

- (a) replacing door thresholds with ramps;

- (b) improving toilet layouts, widening toilet doors, improving shower and toilet facilities;
- (c) raising the floor slab of the balcony to make it level with that of the living room;
- (d) repositioning electricity switches; and
- (e) installing flashing-light doorbells for the hearing-impaired tenants.

If alteration of the existing flat is infeasible due to environmental constraints, tenants may apply for transfers to other more suitable flats.

8. The Housing Department (“HD”) has implemented its “Universal Design” concept in all new buildings since 2002 to provide a safe and convenient living environment for its various tenants, including the elderly and people with disabilities. Ample width has been allowed for at the building entrances, lifts, corridors, flat doors, kitchen doors and bathroom doors, for the easy access of wheelchairs and walking aids. Safety materials, such as non-slip floor tiles, are widely adopted as well.

9. Arrangements have been made by the joint task force, set up by the HD with various welfare and medical agencies, for the tetraplegics to move to the modified flats in PRH estates under the HA to help them re-integrate into the community.

### ***Continued Efforts to Keep Contact with Residents in Need***

10. To help the residents in need, the Estate Management Offices of the HD continue to keep close contact with them. Every Estate Management Office has a list of residents-in-need with information on elderly singleton, visually-impaired, hearing-impaired and physically-disabled in the estate. In case of emergency, such as suspension of electricity or water supply, and the outbreak of fire, frontline management staff will call the residents-in-need or contact them personally to inform and assist them as soon as possible.

### **The Way Forward**

11. Besides the aforementioned Phase II improvement works, the HA has planned to install lifts in 35 buildings in more than 10 PRH estates currently without lift services to provide convenient access for the elderly and the needy. To reduce the inconvenience of access along hillside ramps, the HA is also planning to provide lift towers and escalators to connect elevated platforms on different levels in some 20 estates. Moreover, as part of the ongoing lift

modernisation programme for PRH estates, the HA will replace some 500 lifts currently in use, and exits will be added to the buildings if structurally feasible. The above improvement and lift upgrading works will be completed within the next 4 years and the total expenditure is estimated at HKD950 million.

12. As the Buildings Department has just issued an updated version of the Design Manual in 2008, the HA will gradually adopt the relevant design requirements in all new buildings and improvement works to existing buildings in future.

13. We are also aware of the public concern that some guide paths do not cover public areas beyond the purview of the HA, such as The Link's shopping centres and the pedestrian ways managed by the Highways Department or the MTR Corporation Limited etc. We will actively enhance communication and discussion with the concerned departments and organisations to continue with the implementation of feasible barrier-free access improvement works.

14. Members are invited to note the progress of the provision of barrier-free access in public housing estates.

**Transport and Housing Bureau**  
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