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Panel on Housing

Meeting on 4 May 2009

**Background brief on progress of
the provision of barrier-free access in public housing estates**

Purpose

This paper sets out the progress of the provision of barrier-free access in public housing estates (PHEs), and gives a brief account of the views and concerns expressed by the Panel on Housing (the Panel).

Background

2. Following the enactment of the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) in 1995, discrimination against persons with a disability by failing to provide a means of access or by refusing to provide appropriate facilities is prohibited. To ensure compliance, the Administration issued “Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997” which sets out the obligatory and recommended design requirements for provision of access and facilities for the disabled. This manual applies to the design and construction of new buildings or alterations and additions to existing buildings.

3. In 2001, the Housing Department (HD) rolled out a \$20 million improvement works programme covering all 160 PHEs. Under the programme, improvement facilities rendering barrier-free access for wheel-chair bound tenants, such as ramps, handrails and dropped kerbs, were provided. In parallel, HD embarked a \$100 million improvement works programme to cater for the special needs of the visually impaired, under which installation of tactile warning stripes, tactile guide paths, voice synthesisers in lift cars, tactile marking and braille on all lift buttons, lock pads and letter boxes were provided. In PHEs with large number of elderly tenants, facilities and landscape improvements were designed to cater for the elderly. Apart from additional facilities in common areas, HD also carried out flat alterations in accordance with the individual needs of elderly tenants. These involved lowering door thresholds, replacing thresholds with ramps and improving toilet layouts and shower facilities.

4. To further improve pedestrian access, particularly for PHEs on hillsides which are normally provided with staircases for connecting the different platforms within the estate or with the adjacent estate or public road, HD has provided lifts or escalators to some of these estates over the past two years. In view of an ageing population, there is an increasing need to provide lift services to tenants. HD aims to take a holistic approach in formulating an overall work programme on the additional of lift towers, escalators, footbridges and other lift improvement works in existing PHEs, with a view to enhancing the pedestrian circulation and allow barrier-free access for the disabled and elderly.

Addition of lifts, escalators and footbridges at external areas

5. The addition of facilities such as escalators or lifts with footbridges is considered an effective means for the pedestrians to overcome level differences. Escalators are however not suitable for wheelchair users and would only be used under circumstances where lift installations are technically not suitable due to site constraints. In evaluating the need and priority on the addition of lifts and escalators on hillsides and at external areas, the following guiding principles will be adopted -

- (a) Vertical level difference - the vertical level difference between the platforms to be connected should not be less than six metres (footbridges six metres above ground or equivalent to two-storey high would normally be provided with lifts);
- (b) Land status - the proposed locations of any escalator, lift tower and associated footbridge must be within the estate boundary;
- (c) Technical and social feasibility - every proposal is subject to a feasibility study including the space requirement, clearance of underground utilities or obstructions, and the site geotechnical aspects etc;
- (d) Social acceptability - HD will consult the tenants and concerned groups and evaluate the impact on tenants during construction before committing to the additional facilities; and
- (e) Priority - higher priority will be accorded to estates with a higher percentage of elderly tenants and where the additional facilities would benefit a larger number of tenants.

Based on the above guiding principles, HD has started a survey among existing estates with a view to formulating an overall work programme. A list of the estates where feasibility studies, design or works are being carried out is given in Appendix I to LC Paper No. CB(1)490/08-09(05) which is hyperlinked below for ease of reference. Once

feasibility studies and consultation are completed, the relevant estates will be included in the overall work programme which is expected to spread over a period of five years and cost about \$230 million.

Addition of lifts in existing PHE blocks without lift service

6. At present, there are 35 blocks in 12 estates which are without lift service. These blocks are mostly seven storeys high. HD has planned to add new lifts to these blocks under a five-year programme, subject to feasibility study and consultation with tenants and concerned groups. The provision of lifts will in general take the form of a lift tower built adjacent to the block, with connections to the block on every floor. A pilot scheme in Tai Hing Estate has been completed and two new lifts have been put to use since 2008. Construction and preparation work are underway in other estates, as detailed in Appendix II to LC Paper No. CB(1)490/08-09(05) which is hyperlinked below. HD aims to complete the programme by 2013 with an estimated expenditure of \$220 million.

Modernization work for lifts in existing estates

7. A structured lift modernization rolling programme has been put in place where the conditions of all lifts over 25 years of age are evaluated regularly. Lifts are replaced in accordance with priority based on their age, breakdown rates, and the benefits after replacement in terms of improved safety, comfort, travel time and energy efficiency. Opportunity is also taken to provide lift openings for every floor if not previously provided, where the structure permits. HD plans to replace about 100 lifts each year over the next five year with a total estimated expenditure of \$500 million.

Deliberations by the Panel

8. The addition of lifts in existing PHEs was last discussed at the Panel meeting on 5 January 2009.

9. While welcoming the provision of barrier-free access in PHEs to cater for the disabled and elderly, members expressed concern about the long lead time for completion of the lift improvement programmes, as only four estates with addition of lifts already completed or in progress, while 18 estates were pending outcome of feasibility studies. There were also uncertainties associated with the addition of lifts for PHE blocks without lift service. The Administration was requested to provide regular progress reports on these programmes. Some members also opined that consideration should be given to introducing a marking scheme for the guiding principles to allow for an objective assessment on the need and priority for the addition of lifts and escalators.

10. On addition of lifts, escalators and footbridges at external areas, some members noted that the locations of these facilities must be within the estate boundary. If so, many deserving cases would be excluded from the programme. These included the connection between Kwai Chung Estate and Kwai Hing MTR Station where residents had to rely on a long and steep flight of stairs to have access to the latter. Members held the view that Government officials should see for themselves how difficult it was for those on wheelchairs to have access to Kwai Hing MTR Station using the existing facilities. A visit to Kwai Chung Estate was subsequently held on 5 March 2009.

11. On implementation details, members expressed concern that if the lift installation programme would be subject to the World Trade Organization Agreement on Government Procurement, local contractors might not be able to succeed in tendering the works. They asked if the programme could be tendered out under several smaller contracts to enable the participation of local contractors, thus benefiting the local economy through the creation of more job opportunities for the local workforce. They also stressed the need for proper maintenance of lifts and escalators to ensure safety.

Latest development

12. The Administration proposes to brief the Panel on the latest progress of the provision of barrier-free access in PHEs at the next Panel meeting on 4 May 2009.

Relevant papers

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Housing Panel meeting on 5 January 2009

[http:// www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/papers/hg0105cb1-490-5-e.pdf](http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/papers/hg0105cb1-490-5-e.pdf)

Minutes of the Housing Panel meeting on 5 January 2009

[http:// www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/minutes/hg20090105.pdf](http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/minutes/hg20090105.pdf)