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Panel on Housing

Special meeting on 24 May 2010

**Updated background brief on progress of
the provision of barrier-free access in public housing estates
(position as at 14 May 2010)**

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 at meetings of the Council and 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. The Design Manual was updated in 2008.

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.

Progress of provision of barrier-free access in PHEs

5. Phase I improvement works for the elderly and people with limited mobility have been carried out in phases to meet the Design Manual as far as possible having regard to the actual environment, engineering feasibility and views of residents. By April 2009, the improvement works have been completed in about 150 PHEs. Over the same period, Phase II improvement works for the visually-impaired residents have been completed in more than 130 PHEs. Those of the remaining 20 PHEs are expected to be completed in mid-2009.

6. Alteration works for the in-flat facilities of individual elderly or disabled tenants have been carried out to suit their needs in accordance with the advice of their therapists. If alteration of the existing flat is infeasible due to environmental constraints, tenants may apply for transfer to other more suitable flats. On the other hand, HD has implemented the "Universal Design" concept in all new buildings since 2002 to provide a safe and convenient living environment for 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. HD has also set up a joint task force with various welfare and medical agencies to arrange for the tetraplegics to move to the modified flats in PHEs to help them to re-integrate into the community.

7. Housing Authority (HA) plans to install lifts in 35 buildings in more than 12 PHEs currently without lift services to provide convenient access for the elderly and the needy. To reduce the inconvenience of access along hillside ramps, HA is also planning to provide lift towers and escalators to connect elevated platforms on different levels in some 20 PHEs. As part of ongoing lift modernization programme for PHEs, HA will replace some 500 lifts currently in use, and exits will be added to the buildings if structurally feasible. The improvement and lift upgrading works will be completed within the next four years and the total expenditure is estimated at \$950 million.

Major concerns raised at meetings of the Council and the Panel

8. The addition of lifts in existing PHEs and progress of provision of barrier-free access in PHEs were discussed at the Panel meetings on 5 January and 4 May 2009 respectively.

9. The Panel generally welcomed the provision of barrier-free access in PHEs to cater for the disabled and elderly. Given that Design Manual had been updated in 2008, HA should gradually adopt the relevant design requirements in all new buildings and improvement works to existing buildings to provide barrier-free access for the elderly and the disabled. When implementing barrier-free access improvement works, in particular the installation of lifts and escalators, efforts should be made to consult the residents at the design and planning stage so that the facilities could be provided in such a way and in such location that would best suit the needs of the community. There was also a need for HA to expedite the provision of these facilities given that some of the installations would require a lead time of four years.

10. On addition of lifts in existing PHE blocks, 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. Consideration should be given to introducing a marking scheme to allow for an objective assessment on the need and priority for the addition of lifts and escalators. Some members also 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 opined that the programme should 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. There was also a need for proper maintenance of lifts and escalators to ensure safety.

11. 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. To enable Government officials to 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 held on 5 March 2009.

12. A question on the barrier-free environment was raised at the Council meeting on 18 November 2009. The question and the Administration's response are hyperlinked below for ease of reference.

Latest development

13. The Administration proposes to brief the Panel on new initiatives for barrier-free access in new PHEs at the special meeting of the Panel on 24 May 2010.

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)

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Housing Panel meeting on 4 May 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/papers/hg0504cb1-1447-4-e.pdf>

Minutes of the Housing Panel meeting on 4 May 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/minutes/hg20090504.pdf>

Question raised by Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che at the Council meeting on 18 November 2009

http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/counmtg/agenda/cm20091118.htm#q_12

Administration reply to question raised by Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che at the Council meeting on 18 November 2009

<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/200911/18/P200911170215.htm>

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