

For discussion on
11 May 2015

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Provision of Social Welfare Facilities in Public Rental Housing Developments

Purpose

This paper sets out the existing arrangements regarding the provision of welfare facilities in public rental housing (PRH) developments.

Background

2. In the light of community demand for welfare services, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has been exploring various means to secure suitable accommodation to cater for the ongoing welfare service needs, both territory-wide and at the district level. In this regard, SWD has been maintaining close communication with other Government departments concerned to explore the possibility of reserving suitable sites and premises in new housing developments and redevelopments, including among others PRH development projects, for setting up welfare facilities. Continuing efforts have also been made by SWD to identify available premises including those in PRH estates for conversion into welfare uses.

3. Insofar as PRH premises are concerned, SWD has been working in close collaboration with the Housing Department (HD) to explore the incorporation of welfare facilities in new PRH development projects and the conversion of appropriate vacant non-domestic premises of existing public housing estates into welfare uses. The detailed arrangements are elaborated in paragraphs 4 to 8 below.

Provision of Welfare Facilities in New PRH Developments

4. Under the existing mechanism, when a development area or site is identified as having potential for PRH development, the Planning Department (PlanD) or HD will collaborate with departments concerned (including SWD) and in consultation with District Councils to plan for the provision of community facilities (including recreational, education, welfare facilities, etc.). This arrangement enables SWD to explore the provision of suitable welfare facilities in a comprehensive manner at an early stage. In general, SWD will take into account the needs of the local community, the overall demand from the welfare service perspective, the floor area requirements of different welfare facilities, the location and accessibility of the site as well as the advice from PlanD or HD on site constraints, development parameters and limitations (including such environmental issues as noise and quality) in drawing up an optimal mix of proposed welfare facilities for a particular planned PRH site to meet the service demand arising from such development and also to cater for the wider consideration of addressing the larger community demand. HD, when considering whether the welfare facilities could be incorporated as proposed in a particular PRH development, will take into consideration such factors as individual site constraints, feasibility and suitability of the required facilities, demands for various community facilities, funding arrangements, relevant Ordinances, rules and regulations (such as the Town Planning Ordinance, the Building (Planning) Regulations and the Practice Note). The collaboration between HD and SWD in this regard will enable the optimal use of the site to meet the demands for public housing and also provision of various community facilities.

5. If the proposed welfare facilities are preliminarily assessed as feasible, the initial proposals will be included in the planning briefs of the PRH developments concerned. When considering the exact location of the proposed welfare facilities within a particular development, HD will take into account the relevant factors such as the individual site condition, the design and operational requirements, etc. As a general practice, for easy accessibility, the welfare facilities will be provided either on the ground or lower floor(s) or the podium of the domestic blocks, or co-located with other facilities (such as kindergarten, car park and retail facilities) in an ancillary

facilities block in order to enhance the social integration of these facilities. In some PRH development projects, owing to the relatively large number of welfare facilities involved, some or all of the proposed welfare facilities will be grouped in a dedicated welfare block to enhance accessibility and user-friendliness of the facilities.

Conversion of Non-domestic Premises/Spaces in PRH Estates

6. SWD has been working with HD to explore the feasibility of converting appropriate vacant non-domestic premises in PRH estates for welfare uses. With the assistance of HD, various vacant non-domestic premises in these estates (including those previously used as schools, kindergartens, car parks, etc.) have been identified and converted for the provision or reprovisioning of welfare facilities. The feasibility of converting non-domestic premises for welfare uses is subject to a number of factors, including residents' support on the proposed change of use of the premises concerned, compatibility of the proposed welfare uses with other uses permitted for the PRH sites concerned as well as other technical considerations, such as requirements under the relevant Ordinances and regulations (in particular for those uses which are governed by relevant licensing requirements), barrier free access requirement and additional requirement for fire service installations. As such, not all available vacant non-domestic premises in PRH estates are suitable for setting up welfare facilities.

7. Apart from the availability of vacant non-domestic premises in PRH estates, SWD has also been working with HD to identify suitable empty bays at the ground level of domestic rental blocks for conversion into welfare premises. However, many of the empty bays were designed at the outset to maintain proper ventilation for the estates and some have been deployed for provision of recreational facilities for local residents. Furthermore, the conversion of empty bays for welfare uses will be subject to the assessment of the relevant technical constraints (such as the propriety of converting empty bays for alternative uses, the restriction on the stipulated maximum gross floor area for the PRH estates concerned, etc.) as well as the views of local residents received during consultation. Even if

the abovementioned constraints could be overcome, it is worth noting that, owing to the relatively small area of the empty bays and their scattered locations within a PRH estate, they would normally be considered for the provision of sub-bases or expansion of nearby centre-based facilities such as elderly centres, integrated family service centres or integrated children and youth services centres. In most cases, it is not feasible to convert these empty bays for setting up welfare facilities which would normally require larger floor area and involve stricter licensing requirements, such as residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs).

8. In view of the long waiting lists for certain welfare services, in particular RCHEs and RCHDs, it has recently been suggested that PRH flats be considered for conversion into such residential welfare facilities. Apart from such considerations as relevant land use restriction building height, headroom, corridor width, fire escape, lift facilities, parking spaces, etc., and the views of the local community including those of both stakeholders and domestic residents, implementation of the proposal would imply a reduction in the number of rental units of PRH estates, and result in adverse impact on the public housing supply which is also subject to an acute demand.

Way Forward

9. SWD will sustain its efforts in exploring with relevant departments the possibility of reserving suitable sites and premises in new housing developments and redevelopments, etc., and working with PlanD and HD to optimise the provision of welfare facilities in new PRH developments whilst at the same time exploring every possibility of converting appropriate vacant premises, places or sites within PRH estates for the provision of suitable welfare facilities. SWD will continue to examine in consultation with HD the provision of welfare facilities on the ground or lower floors of the residential blocks as far as possible. HD will provide social welfare facilities in PRH developments in accordance with SWD's request as far as the development potential and site constraints permit, and SWD will confirm funding availability of the facilities concerned.

Advice sought

10. Members are invited to note the above on-going arrangements with regard to the provision of welfare facilities in PRH developments.

**Social Welfare Department
Housing Department
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