

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)685/20-21
(These meeting notes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/HG/1

Panel on Housing

**Notes of informal meeting for policy briefing by videoconferencing
held on Thursday, 17 December 2020, at 3:30 pm**

Members participating : Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing, MH (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, GBS, JP
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, SBS, JP
Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP
Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen, BBS, JP
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Ir Dr Hon LO Wai-kwok, SBS, MH, JP
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan, JP
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP

Public Officers attending : Mr Frank CHAN, JP
Secretary for Transport and Housing

Mr Donald TONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for Transport and Housing
(Housing)

Dr Raymond SO, BBS, JP
Under Secretary for Transport and Housing

Mrs Alice CHEUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing
(Housing)

Ms Connie YEUNG, JP
Deputy Director of Housing
(Development & Construction)

Mr Ricky YEUNG
Deputy Director of Housing (Estate Management)

Clerk in attendance : Mr Derek LO
Chief Council Secretary (1)5

Staff in attendance : Ms Anita SIT
Assistant Secretary General 1

Mr Fred PANG
Senior Council Secretary (1)5

Action

Briefing by the Secretary for Transport and Housing on the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address

(LC Paper No. CB(1)293/20-21(07))

— Administration's paper on housing-related initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement)

(Index of proceedings of the meeting is attached at the **Appendix**.)

The Chairman reminded members that as this meeting was an informal meeting, the Rules of Procedure of the Legislative Council would not apply and the privileges and immunities provided by the Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance (Cap. 382) would not be available to the participants.

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for Transport and Housing briefed members on the housing-related initiatives as stated in the 2020 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement.

Inspection of communal drainage pipes in public rental housing estates

3. Members noted that as part of its anti-epidemic measures amid the Coronavirus Disease 2019 ("COVID-19") pandemic, the Hong Kong Housing Authority ("HA") had launched an 18-month drainage inspection programme for communal drainage pipes in public rental housing ("PRH") in October 2020. Members questioned why HA had not launched the programme earlier, and suggested that HA should adopt a faster way and put more resources to inspect the drainage pipes of PRH to address PRH residents' concerns on the spread of COVID-19 due to defects of the drainage or vent pipes in their buildings.

4. The Administration replied that the inspection programme would cover inspection of the drainage pipes of all PRH blocks, and the Administration/HA would strive the best to complete the programme as early as possible. By adopting a risk-based approach, HA would give inspection priorities for drainage pipes to those PRH blocks with confirmed COVID-19 cases. For other estates, inspection priorities would be determined according to the criteria including the percentage of elderly households, age of housing estates or buildings, and drainage leakage/backflow history. HA would deploy inspectors to inspect the drainage pipes including those inside the rental flats. If defects such as pipe leakage and loose pipe brackets or connections were identified, HA would make immediate arrangements to repair the defects for the tenants or request contractors to follow up the rectification works. If unauthorized alterations to the drainage system by tenants were identified, inspectors would give advice to the tenants concerned on whether they should arrange rectification works at their own expenses. Apart from the inspection programme, HA had been proactively inspecting and undertaking immediate repair works for drainage pipes of all PRH flats which shared the same drainage system with units with confirmed COVID-19 cases. If tenants had any questions about the current conditions of their drainage pipe works while waiting for inspection, they could contact the respective estate management office for appropriate follow-up actions.

Rent Assistance Scheme of the Hong Kong Housing Authority

5. Members enquired whether HA would consider special measures to relax the eligibility criteria of its Rent Assistance Scheme ("RAS") to help needy PRH tenants who were facing additional economic difficulties under the pandemic.

6. The Administration replied that currently, about 23 000 PRH households were RAS beneficiaries. To simplify the application procedures for rent assistance in hardship cases with drastic change of family circumstances supported by relevant documentary proofs, HA would exercise discretion to count only the current assessable income (i.e. the household income for the month of

application) instead of the average household income for the past three months. In addition, HA had put in place a temporary measure to assist its PRH tenants with financial difficulties by withholding the issuance of Notice-to-Quit on grounds of rent arrears up to March 2021. HA had so far approved such applications from 640 PRH tenants under this temporary measure, and would continue to assist needy residents in completing the relevant application procedures.

Measures to address housing difficulties of households of subdivided units

7. Members opined that the Administration should implement the Cash Allowance Trial Scheme and provide the cash allowance to needy households as early as possible. The Administration advised that the Government aimed to start receiving applications for the Cash Allowance Trial Scheme in mid-2021 and disbursing the cash allowance to eligible applicants from July 2021. On members' concern about the long time taken to complete the study on tenancy control of subdivided units ("SDUs"), the Administration advised that the Task Force for the Study on Tenancy Control of SDUs ("Task Force") strived to complete the study in the first quarter of 2021, and had received some preliminary reports from its consultants. The Government would expedite its work to follow up the Task Force's recommendations upon receiving its study report.

8. Members opined that to prevent landlords from increasing the rent of SDUs upon implementation of the Cash Allowance Trial Scheme, introduction of tenancy control of SDUs should dovetail with the implementation of the trial scheme. The Administration should start working on the legislative amendments to implement tenancy control of SDUs when waiting for the completion of the Task Force's study, so that the relevant Bill would be introduced in a timely manner, such as within the first quarter of 2021.

9. The Administration replied that members' views regarding tenancy control of SDUs had been relayed to the Chairman of the Task Force, who would attend the relevant meeting of the Panel in February 2021 to discuss with members the progress of the study and the initial views of the Task Force. The Task Force had appointed consultants to undertake a thematic research on legal aspect which would study the technical feasibility of tenancy control over SDUs from the legal perspective.

10. Ms Alice MAK reminded the Administration that she would introduce a Member's Bill to prohibit consumers such as SDU landlords from profiteering from the sale of water provided by the Water Authority from the waterworks to the Legislative Council, subject to the Chief Executive's written consent, and requested that the Chief Executive's reply on the matter be given soonest possible.

11. The Administration replied that the Transport and Housing Bureau ("THB") would relay the request to the Development Bureau ("DEVB"). The Water Supplies Department was conducting a consultation, covering water charges for SDUs, and this showed that the Administration all along paid heed to the public views on the matter.

Waiting time for public rental housing

12. Members expressed concern that the PRH waiting time might continue to maintain at five years and enquired whether and when the average PRH waiting time would reduce and be shortened to about three years. Given that the Government had announced that it had identified the 330 hectares of land required for providing 316 000 public housing units, members urged the Administration to expedite the public housing construction on the land identified.

13. The Administration replied that based on the information available, it was expected that the average PRH waiting time would be reduced in the latter half of the coming 10-year period, i.e. around 2026. To expedite public housing production, HA carried out design work for its public housing projects in parallel with the planning process where practicable to shorten the lead time at planning and design stage. Regarding construction of public housing at spade-ready sites, HA had been making use of innovative construction technologies to improve the workflow of housing construction. HA would continue to use precast concrete components and study the use of Modular Integrated Construction method in its projects. HA had also adopted new measures such as Building Information Modelling to streamline the public housing construction works.

Land and public housing developments

14. Members opined that to put the infrastructure-led approach into practice, it was important for the Administration to ensure the provision of adequate infrastructure/facilities to cater for the transport demand generated from land and public housing developments. Members also enquired about the schedule for the production of 316 000 public housing units within the coming 10 years.

15. The Administration replied that it usually took about 10 years to transform a piece of "primitive land" into a "spade-ready site", and from construction of housing to its completion. Of the 316 000 public housing units, about one-third were scheduled for completion in the first five-year period (i.e. 2021-2022 to 2025-2026) whereas the other two-third fell in the second five-year period (i.e. 2026-2027 to 2030-2031). The timetable of projects within the first five-year period was more certain as relevant consultation, statutory rezoning and other

processes of most projects had been completed. As regards projects with scheduled completion dates falling in the second five-year period, while the statutory rezoning of most sites concerned had been completed, such sites were still subject to other processes such as land resumption and clearance, reprovisioning of affected facilities, site formation and infrastructural works, etc. before housing construction could proceed.

16. In view of the uncertainty about the production of public housing units in the second half of the next 10-year period, members suggested that the Administration should provide more information regarding the land and public housing development situation in the coming 10 years, such as the annual breakdown on the supply of the 316 000 public housing units.

17. The Administration replied that THB would communicate with DEVB regarding the suggestion. To expedite the land and housing development process, the Administration would expand the composition and remit of the Steering Group on Streamlining Development Control ("Steering Group") under DEVB to include vetting departments other than those under DEVB. The Steering Group would review comprehensively the approval processes of development projects, and rationalize the development-related requirements imposed by different bureaux. The Chief Executive had also announced that she would take part directly in matters relating to land and housing developments.

Supply of subsidized sale flats

18. Members expressed concern that the number of subsidized sale flats ("SSFs") such as Home Ownership Scheme ("HOS") flats offered for sale annually would not be adequate to meet the demand, and enquired whether the Administration/HA would put in place a waiting list system for HOS with a pledge on the waiting time for purchase of such flats.

19. The Administration replied that according to the latest projection of the Long Term Housing Strategy, for the next 10-year period from 2021-2022 to 2030-2031, the supply target of "other SSFs" (including new HOS units under HA and SSFs under the Hong Kong Housing Society) was 91 000 units. In the five-year period from 2020-2021 to 2024-2025, the estimated production of "other SSFs" was about 30 800 units. To help meet home ownership aspirations, apart from "other SSFs", HA would also convert PRH developments under construction to flats under the Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme ("GSH") where appropriate and the Government had entrusted the Urban Renewal Authority with a new mission to provide more Starter Homes in its redevelopment projects. To further increase the supply of various types of public housing including HOS, the fundamental solution was to increase land supply.

20. Members opined that PRH households might wish to purchase GSH flats which were larger in size than the PRH units they were residing in order to improve their living environment, and enquired whether HA would take this into account when planning the sale of GSH flats in future. In view that most of the unsold flats in the previous GSH sale exercise were small-sized units, members enquired whether HA would consider reducing the number of such units for sale in future GSH projects.

21. The Administration replied that as there had been a shortage of land supply in Hong Kong, the average size of flats offered for sale under GSH in the last sale exercise was relatively small. In selecting PRH developments for conversion to GSH projects in the future, HA would take into account the PRH supply situation and members' views regarding the aspirations of PRH households for purchasing larger-sized GSH flats, etc.

22. Members suggested that HA might consider relaxing the eligibility criteria for the unsold small-sized GSH flats so that some one-person PRH applicants, such as those in younger age groups who were waiting for PRH and were not yet due for detailed eligibility vetting, would be allowed to buy such flats. The Administration replied that under the existing mechanism, non-elderly singletons who wished to apply for PRH were required to submit applications under the HA's Quota and Points System ("QPS"). Unlike general PRH applicants, the priority of QPS applicants for PRH allocation was not determined according to the time at which they submitted their applications. Therefore, HA would not be able to accord these QPS applicants with priority over General Applicants for purchasing unsold GSH flats. Moreover, under the current acute PRH supply situation, it might not be practicable to take forward the suggestion.

Sale of public rental housing units

23. Given that the 2019 Policy Address had mentioned that the Administration would look into the request for a re-launch of Tenants Purchase Scheme ("TPS") when there was more certainty on the overall public housing supply, members enquired about the Administration's current position in this regard. The Administration replied that the Administration/HA would first accelerate the sale of the unsold flats in the 39 TPS estates, and would study other related issues later after the shortage of PRH had become less acute.

Redevelopment of aged public rental housing estates

24. Members enquired whether the Administration/HA had any holistic and long-term plan to redevelop or refurbish the PRH blocks aged 35 years or more.

In view that many aged PRH estates were dilapidated, members opined that HA should commence redevelopment of such estates in a timely manner, while giving due regard to its manpower and other resource constraints.

25. The Administration replied that HA had been undertaking a number of PRH redevelopment projects and would continue to consider whether to redevelop individual PRH estates taking into account the actual circumstances and relevant principles. HA had launched the Comprehensive Structural Investigation Programme ("CSIP") in 2005 to ascertain the structural safety of PRH estates with buildings approaching or over 40 years old, with a view to assessing the repair works needed for sustaining these estates for 15 years or above and their cost-effectiveness. In addition to implementing CSIP, HA had also implemented other measures and programmes to improve the building conditions of PRH estates, including the Total Maintenance Scheme which provided in-flat inspection and maintenance services, and the Responsive In-flat Maintenance Services providing customer-oriented in-flat maintenance services to tenants' daily works requests.

Transitional housing

26. Regarding the transitional housing projects announced by the Task Force on Transitional Housing, members enquired whether the 8 600 transitional housing units involved would be provided at a single land site. The Administration replied in the negative and advised that these 8 600 units would be provided under several projects at different sites.

27. Members opined that the Administration should set targets and timeframes for providing transitional housing units in hotels and guesthouses, and simplify the relevant procedures to facilitate the early provision of such units. The Administration advised that the Government had not set any target for the number of transitional housing units to be provided in hotels and guesthouses, and would seek funding from the Community Care Fund to implement a pilot scheme to subsidize non-governmental organizations to rent suitable hotels and guesthouses for use as transitional housing. The Administration had met representatives of the hotel and guesthouse trades to listen to their views about the proposed provision of transitional housing in hotels and guesthouses, and would continue to communicate with the trades on the subject matter.

28. Members expressed concern that it might not be feasible to provide transitional housing in guesthouses which had no cooking facilities. The Administration advised that the trades had expressed a similar concern. As some guesthouses provided cooking facilities in rooms or common pantries, they would be more suitable for providing transitional housing.

Redevelopment of factory estates of Hong Kong Housing Authority

29. Members opined that the Administration/HA should expedite the relevant study for redevelopment of HA's factory estates for public housing, and enquired about the supporting facilities to be provided for residents of the future public housing developments at these factory estate sites and in the nearby residential developments. In view that the study showed that three of these factory estate sites were suitable for public housing use, members asked whether the Administration/HA would consider converting the other three factory estates into transitional housing.

30. The Administration replied that the latest letting rate of the six factory estates under HA was more than 90%. As these factory estates were situated in non-residential areas, the Administration needed to carry out technical assessments on environment, traffic, infrastructure and air ventilation, etc. to ascertain the feasibility of residential use at these sites. It was expected that the necessary studies could be completed in the first quarter of 2021. If the sites were suitable for public housing use, rezoning would be required to change the use of the sites for residential purpose. Relevant government departments would also follow the established mechanism to formulate and implement appropriate traffic improvement measures as part of the public housing development projects.

31. The meeting ended at 4:56 pm.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
22 March 2021

**Proceedings of the informal meeting for policy briefing
by videoconferencing of the Panel on Housing
on Thursday, 17 December 2020, at 3:30 pm**

Time Marker	Speaker	Subject(s)	Action Required
Briefing by the Secretary for Transport and Housing on the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address			
000000 – 000143	Mr Tommy CHEUNG ("Chairman")	Meeting arrangements	
000144 – 000953	Administration	Briefing by the Administration	
000954 – 001617	Chairman Mr Michael TIEN Administration	Redevelopment of factory estates of the Hong Kong Housing Authority Transitional housing Measures to address housing difficulties of households of subdivided units	
001618 – 002230	Chairman Ms Starry LEE Administration	Waiting time for public rental housing Supply of subsidized sale flats	
002231 – 002743	Chairman Mr Vincent CHENG Administration	Measures to address housing difficulties of households of subdivided units Inspection of communal drainage pipes in public rental housing estates	
002744 – 003320	Chairman Ms YUNG Hoi-yan Administration	Land and public housing developments Redevelopment of factory estates of Hong Kong Housing Authority	
003320 – 003831	Chairman Mr KWOK Wai-keung Administration	Land and public housing developments Measures to address housing difficulties of households of subdivided units Inspection of communal drainage pipes in public rental housing estates	
003831 – 004338	Chairman Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok Administration	Inspection of communal drainage pipes in public rental housing estates Redevelopment of aged public rental housing estates	

Time Marker	Speaker	Subject(s)	Action Required
004339 – 004824	Chairman Mr Wilson OR Administration	Waiting time for public rental housing Rent Assistance Scheme of the Hong Kong Housing Authority Redevelopment of factory estates of Hong Kong Housing Authority Measures to address housing difficulties of households of subdivided units	
004825– 005324	Chairman Administration	Measures to address housing difficulties of households of subdivided units Land and public housing developments	
005325 – 005344	Chairman	Meeting arrangements	
005344 – 005858	Chairman Ms Starry LEE Administration	Measures to address housing difficulties of households of subdivided units Supply of subsidized sale flats	
005859 – 010328	Chairman Mr Vincent CHENG Administration	Transitional housing	
010329 – 010836	Chairman Ms YUNG Hoi-yan Administration	Inspection of communal drainage pipes in public rental housing estates Redevelopment of aged public rental housing estates	
010837 – 011252	Chairman Mr KWOK Wai-keung Administration	Supply of subsidized sale flats Redevelopment of aged public rental housing estates	
011253 – 011648	Chairman Ir Dr LO Wai-kwok Administration	Land and public housing developments	
011649 – 012206	Chairman Mr Wilson OR Administration	Supply of subsidized sale flats Sale of public rental housing units	

Time Marker	Speaker	Subject(s)	Action Required
012207 – 012644	Chairman Ms Alice MAK Administration	Measures to address housing difficulties of households of subdivided units	

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
22 March 2021