

For Meeting on
1 March 1999

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Addition of Family Members to Public Rental Housing Tenancies of Single Elderly Tenants

PURPOSE

To inform Members of the current policy in respect of addition of family members to public rental housing (PRH) tenancies of single elderly tenants, and the current space allocation standards for such tenants.

ADDITION OF FAMILY MEMBERS

Current Policy

2. Under normal circumstances, persons who can be added into a PRH tenancy include -

- (a) tenant's spouse;
- (b) new-born babies or children under the age of 18 if both parents are authorized occupants or if one parent who is an authorized occupant is genuinely alone, e.g. deserted, widow and widower, etc.;
- (c) dependent parents; and
- (d) the spouse and children of one of the tenant's married children under a one-line continuation of the family, **provided that the married child is an authorized occupant of the tenancy.**

3. Under normal circumstances, adult children cannot be added into the tenancy. However, temporary stay can be granted to genuine cases where the elderly require the personal attention of their adult children. Requests from elderly tenants for addition of children aged over 18 may be considered and

approved only on exceptional grounds and individual merits, taking into account the justifications given and the circumstances of the elderly tenant such as health, economic and social conditions, the genuine dependence of the elderly tenant on the person-to-be added or vice versa and the occupancy position of the flat etc. If such addition is considered not acceptable, but there is a genuine need for the person-to-be-added to stay in the flat temporarily to look after the elderly tenant, temporary stay may be granted with duration depending on individual circumstances.

Criticism

4. There has been some criticism against the Housing Authority (HA) for adopting a double standard as addition of tenant's adult children and other supporting/dependent relatives is discretionary whilst inclusion of second generation families under the one-line continuation of the family is generally allowed. The accusation is purely a misconception. There are fundamental differences between these two categories of addition. In the latter cases, the married child is an authorized PRH occupant while in the former, the person-to-be-added is not registered in the PRH tenancy. In order to avoid an inequitable situation whereby persons so added can by-pass the normal channel in gaining access to PRH, the requirement to establish an absolute need of the elderly tenant concerned for the addition is considered appropriate. The existing practice has already taken into account the interest of the elderly tenant concerned on the one hand while an equitable allocation of public housing resources is maintained on the other.

Housing Department's View

5. If the current policy is to be relaxed, it will not only encourage more people to come forward to apply for addition, thereby creating an undesirable situation where not only the added persons could obtain priority access to PRH, but also lead to subsequent additional demand for additional public housing resources on grounds such as overcrowding, requests for splitting etc. at a later stage. However, in order to increase transparency in management practices and to further enhance consistency in the granting of such approvals, the Housing Department is conducting a detailed review on the current criteria for the processing of applications in respect of addition of persons on special grounds.

6. For Members' information, a copy of the Department's recent response to the South China Morning Post on the issue is at the Annex.

ALLOCATION STANDARD

7. According to the current allocation standard, one-person and two-person households will be allocated small units with internal floor areas of about 16m² in harmony blocks. Where situation permits, 2-person flats of 22m² are built for allocation to 2-person elderly households.

Design and Layout of Flats

8. The HA always monitors feedback from elderly residents with a view to improving the flat design to cope with their needs. Specifically, the following facilities are now provided in the units for elderly households -

- (a) shower seat in the bathroom;
- (b) handrail in the bathroom;
- (c) drying rack with movable laundry strings; and
- (d) special facilities needed by wheelchair bound elderly.

9. The following improvement items are also being considered -

- (a) a longer bench in the kitchen for a double stove;
- (b) repositioning of the door of the toilet to avoid blocking by the main door; and
- (c) increase in the size of the toilet.

10. The HA has recently endorsed improvements to the design of standard Harmony Blocks to meet the changing needs of elderly tenants. Such improvements include -

- (a) increasing the size of 1-2 person flats from 16.32m² to 17.09m² to provide sufficient space for two single beds and to allow more manoeuvring space in the bathroom; and

- (b) introducing a new type of flats for 2-3 person households with an internal floor area of 21.69m².

Housing Department
February 1999

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

South China Morning Post GPO Box 47 Hong Kong Fax: 2811 1048 or 2811 1278 Internet: scmplet@scmp.com
We reserve the right to edit all letters. They must carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number, not necessarily for publication.

Housing Authority actively cares for elderly

I refer to the story headlined "Elderly tenants at risk of eviction" (*South China Morning Post*, January 26). It suggests that the Housing Department will throw registered elderly tenants out of our housing estates. This, I believe, might have misled readers.

Caring is one of the three core values of the Housing Authority and we have always put caring into our heart in developing policies and providing services, in particular to the elderly.

For our waiting list, we have three priority schemes in place: the Families with Elderly Persons Priority Scheme, the special Scheme for Families with Elderly Persons and the Elderly

Priority Scheme, in giving incentives for families to look after the elderly as well as shortening the waiting time for elderly persons to get public housing.

Some 12,000 families have been granted three years' credit waiting time and obtained public rental housing flats to live with their elderly parents under the Families with Elderly Persons Priority Scheme. 28,400 elderly applicants have been allocated flats under the Elderly Priority Scheme.

We also have 6,600 places of Housing for Senior Citizens projects where 24-hour warden services are provided to the elderly. Elderly applicants on the waiting list can normally get re-

housing within two years after registration, compared with the average 6½ years of other households.

In our estates with high concentration of elderly population, we have estate liaison officers paying regular visits to elderly tenants who are living alone to assist them in setting up mutual care networks. We also provide financial assistance to elderly households to install alarm systems to suit their own needs.

Though we have priority and incentive schemes for the elderly, we have the responsibility of making sure that the public housing units rented to them are properly occupied.

Under normal circumstances, adult children cannot be added into the tenancy. However, temporary stay can be granted to genuine cases where the elderly require the personal attention of their adult children.

For the cases mentioned in Chai Wan Estate, our estate housing manager will get in touch with the concerned households in rendering the appropriate assistance.

With the above clarification, I hope your readers may have a better understanding of our services to the elderly.

Y K CHENG
Assistant Director
of Housing

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