

Policy on Interim Housing

Purpose

This paper sets out the Housing Authority's policy on Interim Housing.

Background

2. The Government's policy is to ensure that no one will become homeless as a result of natural disasters or clearance operations. Temporary accommodation in Transit Centres or Interim Housing will be provided to affected families who are not immediately eligible for allocation of public rental housing.

Reduced demand for Interim Housing

3. Following completion of Po Tin Interim Housing in 2001, the number of Interim Housing flats was increased by 8 736 flats from 3 736 in 2000 to 12 472 in 2002. In recent years, however, the demand for Interim Housing has been decreasing for the following reasons :

(a) *Quick turn-over*

We are committed to maintaining the average waiting time for public rental housing at around three years. With increased supply in public rental housing in recent years, the average waiting time has shortened from an average of over four years in 2000-01 to around two years currently. As a result, most families accommodated in Interim Housing are rehoused to public rental housing more expeditiously, resulting in quicker tenant turn-over and higher vacancy.

(b) *Relaxation of rehousing criteria for squatter clearerees*

The major occupants of Interim Housing are squatter and rooftop structure clearerees who are ineligible for immediate rehousing to public rental housing. The eligibility criteria for rehousing have been relaxed since December 2002 : in the past, only clearerees who had been registered in the 1984-85 Occupancy Survey could be rehoused to public rental housing but now clearerees are rehoused to public rental housing if, subject to

compliance with other criteria^{Note 1}, they have lived in the structures concerned for two years prior to announcement of clearance. As a result, most clearerees are eligible for public rental housing upon clearance. This factor, coupled with the scaling down of clearance projects and advanced access to public rental housing for clearerees under the Anticipatory Housing Scheme^{Note 2}, has significantly reduced the demand for Interim Housing. In 2003 and 2004 (up to September) combined, only 260 families affected by clearance operations were rehoused in Interim Housing, in comparison with 451 households in 2002.

4. Due to the factors explained above, the vacancy rate of Interim Housing had increased, to about 45% (or about 4 000 flats) in March 2001. This level of vacancy was high even taking into account the need to set aside some flats to meet emergency rehousing needs. To make good use of Interim Housing flats, in March 2001 the Housing Authority invited families on the Waiting List for public rental housing to apply for temporary accommodation in Interim Housing. This arrangement allowed applicants for public rental housing to improve their living condition while reducing the high vacancy of Interim Housing flats. A similar exercise was launched in 2003.

5. Notwithstanding the above, due to high tenant turnover resulting from faster allocation of public rental housing, the overall vacancy rate of Interim Housing remained high, standing at 43.4% in March 2004. We foresee that the surplus situation will continue in the years to come. The high vacancy position, especially in Po Tin Interim Housing with some 8 700 flats, has also affected somewhat the operation of the retailers and market-stallers in the ancillary commercial facilities.

Note 1 To qualify for public rental housing, persons affected by clearance of squatters or enforcement against illegal rooftop structures should meet the following eligibility criteria:

- (i) comply with the Comprehensive Means Test for Waiting List applicants for public rental housing;
- (ii) must not own any domestic property; and
- (iii) meet the residence requirement, i.e. at least half of the family members have lived in Hong Kong for seven years. Children under the age of 18, regardless of their birth place, are deemed to have satisfied the seven-year residence rule if one of their parents has lived in Hong Kong for seven years.

Note 2 Under the Anticipatory Housing Scheme, affected clearerees who have already applied for public rental housing and are due for allocation of public housing flat within the next 12 months at the time of clearance are rehoused to public rental housing immediately.

Conversion of Po Tin Interim Housing to Public Rental Housing

6. In comparison to the old-style Temporary Housing Areas, Po Tin Interim Housing flats are self-contained and fully-fledged with standard fittings and facilities commonly found in public rental housing estates. It is also well-connected to public transport system and supported by a range of communal facilities such as wet market, shopping centre, schools and youth centre. In many respects, Po Tin Interim Housing offers a living environment comparable to public rental housing.

7. To better utilise the vacant flats in Po Tin Interim Housing, the Housing Authority decided in June 2004 to convert Po Tin to public rental housing after implementing some enhancement measures. The vacant flats are being allocated to applicants on the Waiting List. The existing Interim Housing occupants will continue to stay at Po Tin until their turn for allocation of public rental housing is due. As at 30 September 2004, some 4420 vacant flats in Po Tin Interim Housing have been transferred to public rental housing. The remaining 4 280 flats will be transferred in about five years' time.

Supply of and Demand for Interim Housing

8. As at 30 September 2004, there are 7 880 flats in five Interim Housing estates, namely Kwai Shing East, Shek Lei II, Long Bin, Sha Kok Mei and Po Tin, accommodating 6 425 households on monthly licence. According to latest forecast, we will only require around 600 Interim Housing flats annually in the next three years to accommodate families affected by clearance operations and those with emergency housing needs. The current stock of some 1 500 vacant Interim Housing flats in Kwai Shing East, Shek Lei II, Long Bin and Sha Kok Mei, together with an average of 500 flats to be recovered from existing licensees annually, should be sufficient to meet such demand.

9. We will review the supply of Interim Housing regularly. In case a shortfall of Interim Housing is anticipated, two contingency measures will be implemented. First, we will flexibly reserve some vacated flats in Po Tin Interim Housing as temporary housing stock. Second, trawling exercises will be carried out on a need basis to rehouse eligible Interim Housing occupants to public rental housing so as to release more vacant flats.