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Panel on Housing

Overcrowding relief to public housing tenants

Background brief

Introduction

At present, the minimum allocation standard for public rental housing (PRH) is 5.5 square metres (m²) internal floor area^{Note1} (IFA) per person. Public housing households with a living area of less than 5.5 m² IFA per person are categorized as “overcrowded” households. These households are given priority for overcrowding relief (OR) through transfer to larger flats. In addition, tenants living in congested flats in old-style estates can also be relocated to more spacious flats in new housing estates through the Comprehensive Redevelopment Programme. As at November 2002, there were 10 324 overcrowded public housing households.

Provision of overcrowding relief

2. In the past, OR was provided on individual estate basis. As such, the flats available for selection were limited and there was mismatch in the supply and demand of flats for provision of OR in different district. To make fuller use of available resources for OR, and to enhance the range of choices for overcrowded households, the Housing Authority has since 2001 implemented centralized, territory-wide OR exercises to be held twice or thrice a year. All overcrowded households are invited to apply. The priority of allocation is determined, in sequence, by living density, household size and length of residence in existing tenancy. Up to November 2002, three OR exercises were launched and 9 170 PRH flats were set side for these exercises, of which 72% were new flats and 67% were located in urban or extended urban areas. A total of 7 480 applications were received and 3 310 of them were transferred to bigger flats of their choice.

^{Note1} Internal floor area is the total area inside the flat measured to the internal face of external and/or party walls (i.e. common walls between two flats).

3. Apart from OR, HA has also launched a number of transfer exercises to meet the different needs of public housing households. These include -
- (a) Management transfers to address the increased aspirations of many public housing households for more spacious flats exercises. Subject to the availability of suitable flats, all households irrespective of living density can apply. In the interest of equitable allocation of housing resource, households with higher living density are accorded higher priority for flat allocation. Up to November 2002, 4 037 households were allocated flats of their preferences;
 - (b) Compassionate transfers upon recommendation of the Social Welfare Department to meet the unique personal and medical needs of some public housing households. Up to November 2002, 4 055 such special transfers were made; and
 - (c) Branch family members of PRH households can apply for allocation of a separate flat through the Waiting List. From 1999 to 2002, 15 000 branch families of PRH households were rehoused.

Previous discussion on overcrowding relief

4. When the subject of OR was discussed by the Panel on Housing at its meeting on 2 December 2002, some members reiterated their request for the Administration to relax the space standard for OR from 5.5 m² to 6 m² IFA per person, particularly when the IFA per person for some applicants on the Waiting List had reached 10 m² upon flat allocation. They cautioned that such a discrepancy might give rise to social disharmony. Apart from the centralized, territory-wide OR exercises, consideration should be given to providing OR in individual estates to cater for the needs of eligible households. A scoring system should be worked out to take account both the living density and waiting time in determining their priority for OR. The Administration should also consider converting overhung Home Ownership Scheme flats to PRH to expedite the pace of OR.

5. Concern was also raised on the problem of overcrowding resulting from additional family members coming from the Mainland for family reunion. Some members urged the Administration to take into account their plight when considering OR for these families. In view of the increase in PRH supply over the past few years, they also considered that the Administration should adopt a more flexible approach to arrange for compassionate transfer for branch family members.