

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Employment of Information Technology to Enhance Services for Tenants of Public Rental Housing

Purpose

This paper aims to brief Members on the employment of information technology by the Housing Department (HD) to enhance services for public rental housing (PRH) tenants.

Background

2. In order to meet the expectations of the community for the public services standard, HD is committed to the application of information technology in raising service quality and efficiency. Over the past few years, HD has applied information technology to provide PRH tenants with more diversified and convenient channels through which they can enjoy the services in a more flexible manner that suits their needs. Besides, HD has introduced several mobile technology application systems to strengthen the outreaching services to tenants, and to enhance the quality management of these services. The key initiatives are highlighted in the ensuing paragraphs.

e-Payment Card

3. HD launched the e-Payment Card in end-2005. It has significantly expanded the rent collection network for PRH tenants and made rent payment more flexible. PRH tenants can now pay rent at any 7-Eleven convenience stores, at the service counters of MTR stations, or through other electronic means (including Autopay, internet banking and PPS). With an expanded rent collection network and the increased payment locations and hours, the queuing time for rent payment has been reduced, and the rent payment process has become more efficient and convenient.

4. The new service is well-received by tenants and the result is satisfactory. Nowadays, the proportion of payments made via electronic means (including Autopay, internet banking and PPS) accounts for about 30% of the total rental income on average. The proportion of rent payment being made at 7-Eleven convenience stores or MTR stations service counters is steadily on the rise, which now accounts for 19% of the total rental income.

5. In collaboration with the Social Welfare Department (SWD), HD introduced electronic transfer for rent payment to remove the unnecessary step of rent payment at estate offices by the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients after they have received rent allowance from SWD. The initiative has not only made payment easier for tenants but also enhanced the service efficiency. The amount of rent collected via electronic transfer per month accounts for 21% of the total rental income on average.

6. The latest statistic shows that each month the amount of rent paid through all abovementioned electronic channels accounts for about 70% of the total rental income. As the demand for payment at estate offices is on the decline, HD will review the service from time to time so that manpower can be properly redeployed to provide other tenant services. Being recognised by the industry and the Government, the e-Payment Card was awarded the third prize in the Civil Service Outstanding Service award Scheme – General Public Service, and the Silver Award of the Best Public Service Application Award in the Hong Kong Information and Communication Technology (HKICT) Award.

Diversified Self-Services

Self-Service Kiosk

7. To tie in with the flexible rent payment arrangement, HD has set up a 24-hour Interactive Voice Response System which allows tenants to check their rent payment records of the past 6 months and rent status via the telephone. From early 2009 onwards, tenants may instantly print out information of the rent payable and rent status in those estates with a Rent Enquiry Kiosk. Currently, there are about 100 PRH estates installed with the self-service kiosk.

8. HD usually adopts a gradual approach in introducing new services. We see much room for expansion in the concept of the self-service kiosk. Additional self-services to be launched in the next phase include:

- (i) enquiry on tenant scores under the Marking Scheme for Estate Management Enforcement in Public Housing Estates (Marking Scheme);
- (ii) enquiry on the status of 'Notice-to-Quit';

- (iii) enquiry on the status of General Waiting List application;
and
- (iv) provision of tenancy particulars for applications of updating / changing / addition or deletion of household members, etc.

Internet Service

9. In support of the e-government strategy, HD is committed to the promotion of e-services. Since end-2008, HD has provided internet enquiry service for tenants and the public to make on-line enquiries about various information. Internet enquiry services in the first phase include: access to rent payment history, tenant scores under the Marking Scheme, the use of Rent Smart Calculator (to facilitate tenants in checking the amount of rent they should pay), enquiry about the status of the General Waiting List application and eligibility criteria for application.

10. HD will devise additional e-services such as “electronic application forms” and “real time information update” according to the needs of residents for internet service, in an effort to provide its tenants and the public with more value-added services.

Outreaching Services

11. Since most of HD’s services are conducted on-site, the Department has information technologies in its “Mobile Office” strategy to enhance the efficiency of services. The concept of “Mobile Office” has now been applied to the Total Maintenance Scheme System as well as the Mobile Housing Management service.

Outreaching Maintenance Service

12. In the past two years, HD applied mobile digital technologies to different sectors of service. In 2006, HD developed the unique Total Maintenance Scheme System, which incorporates innovative concepts such as “Mobile Office” and “Instant Information Network”, to support the Total Maintenance Scheme in achieving proactive inspection and prompt response. The system adopted a number of mobile digital technologies, for instance, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), Bluetooth mobile printer, Interactive Voice Response System, internet and mobile communication, so that tenants, HD staff, contractors and maintenance workers can maintain close contact. As such, it can enhance the quality of HD service and improve the living environment of the tenants.

13. Under the Total Maintenance Scheme System, tenants may use diverse communication channels such as the Interactive Voice Response System, internet and temporary customer service stations to make appointments for inspection and repairs, as well as to check on the status of maintenance work. In addition, the central database of the system provides repair and maintenance records of individual units for maintenance staff to make accurate assessment. In doing so, repeated inspection of maintenance items can be avoided and waiting time of tenants shortened.

14. The outreaching maintenance service won several awards in 2007, including the third prize of Departmental Service Enhancement Award under Civil Service Outstanding Service award Scheme, Silver Award of Best Public Service Application (Innovation) Award in HKICT Award and Bronze Award of Best Public Service Application (Most Favored) Award.

Mobile Housing Management

15. In end 2008, HD introduced a Mobile Application System for Housing Management (MASHM) in estate management and, with the aid of the system, conducted a “biennial inspection” of housing flats. Frontline staff can use PDAs to download the tenant information required from MASHM in advance of the inspection for verification of the occupancy position of tenants, and to record the findings of inspection. Thanks to the system, tenants no longer need to go through the procedures of completing and submitting Declaration Forms on Occupancy Position, helping the tenants to complete the inspection smoothly. This has also reduced paper consumption and hence achieved the purpose of “Green IT”.

16. For the security of personal data, HD has devised a comprehensive data security system when developing this mobile service. Apart from verifying the users’ identity, the system can encrypt sensitive information to ensure that personal data are held in strict confidence and tenants are provided with safe and efficient services. HD has planned to extend the application of MASHM to other management services.

17. MASHM won the Bronze Award in the HKICT Awards: Best Public Service Application (Transformation) Award in 2008.

Quality Management

Quality Management for Outsourced Contracts

18. Attaching equal importance to the management quality of outsourced services, HD designed the “e-face” system to enhance the efficiency of outsourced cleansing / security control services. Its facial recognition technology, which was implemented in PRH estates in early 2008, helps confirm the identity of workers, and therefore prevent the attendance records from being tampered with, and ensure that contractors provide sufficient manpower to perform the specified duties. E-face enables data exchange with the systems of the contractors, thereby facilitating data updating and monitoring. As for the contract workers, accurate attendance records help prove their performance of their duties.

19. HD will continue to strengthen its management of outsourced services by taking the advantage of information technology with a view to enhancing the transparency of outsourced work process, tightening supervision of frontline operations, and improving the quality of tenant services.

Conclusion

20. Over the years, HD has been making a lot of efforts in introducing information technology for the provision of tenant services with the ultimate aim of improving the living environment for its tenants. Such efforts have been widely recognised and welcomed. HD will strive hard to enhance its development strategies for providing better services for the tenants.

21. Members are invited to note the employment of information technology to enhance services for tenants of PRH.

Transport and Housing Bureau
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