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Panel on Housing

Meeting on 3 November 2008

**Background brief on the progress of the housing schemes for
fostering harmonious families in public housing**

Purpose

This paper sets out the progress of housing schemes for fostering harmonious families in public housing, and gives a brief account of the views and concerns expressed by the Panel on Housing (the Panel).

Background

2. To promote ‘ageing in place’ for the elderly and encourage mutual support among family members, so as to establish a family-based support network, the Subsidized Housing Committee of the Housing Authority (HA) endorsed five enhanced public housing allocation policies in May 2007, namely, the Families with Elderly Persons Priority Scheme (FEP), Special Scheme for Families with Elderly Persons (NFEP), Addition Policy for Harmonious Families, Enhanced Transfer Scheme for Harmonious Families, and Amalgamation of Tenancies for Harmonious Families. To ensure that the public housing resources will be allocated in an equitable manner, HA has to make sure that the enhanced measures are consistent with the prevailing management and allocation policy, and would not result in abuse or queue-jumping nor have the impact on other Waiting List (WL) applicants.

Strengthening the family-based support network

3. To strengthen the family-based support network, HA has decided to further relax the public housing allocation policy as follows -

- (a) Families with Elderly Persons Priority Scheme – the minimum waiting time for applicants will be reduced from two years to 18 months. Applicants may also choose any district (including the Urban District);

- (b) Special Scheme for Families with Elderly Persons – the minimum waiting time for applications will be reduced from two years to 18 months. Applicants are offered two separate flats in the same estate in any district except the Urban District;
- (c) Addition Policy for Harmonious Families – one adult offspring and his/her family members are permitted to be added to the tenancy so that the elderly tenants would be better taken care of. The whole household has to pass the Comprehensive Means Test (CMT) and Domestic Property Test (DPT) in accordance with the current policy;
- (d) Enhanced Transfer Scheme for Harmonious Families – younger families may apply to move to the same estate where their elderly parents live or to a nearby estate, regardless of the district where their parents live. CMT and DPT will also be waived; and
- (e) Amalgamation of Tenancies for Harmonious Families – the amalgamated household may opt to move to any district and will be offered a new public rental housing (PRH) flat, subject to availability of resources. The younger household has to undertake to take care of and live with the elderly tenants, but CMT and DPT will be waived.

Deliberations of the Panel

4. The review of public housing allocation policy to strengthen family-based support network was discussed by the Panel at its meeting on 4 June 2007.

5. Members in general welcomed the enhanced measures which would promote "ageing in place" and foster harmonious families in public housing. They also pointed out that the enhanced measures could achieve savings in housing resources rather than result in additional costs. For instance, under the revised Amalgamation Policy, two households which originally took up two PRH flats would be rehoused to one larger flat, thereby optimizing the use of larger flats which at present were under-utilized.

6. Noting that applicants under the Enhanced Transfer Scheme might apply to move to the same estate where their elderly parents lived or to a nearby estate regardless of the district where their parents lived, while applicants under the enhanced NFEP were not able to choose flats in the Urban District, some members questioned the different criteria adopted. Given that HA would set aside up to 1 000 flats per year, mainly in the Urban District, for the Enhanced Transfer Scheme (the Quota), they enquired if the Quota could be increased where necessary to cater for the need of eligible applicants, including those under NFEP. Consideration should be given to increasing the supply of PRH flats in the Urban District to ensure that the enhanced measures would not affect the allocation or transfer opportunities of families

without elderly persons. The Administration was urged to review the Quota and the feasibility of allocating flats in the Urban District to applicants under NFEP and report the outcome to the Panel after the enhanced measures had been implemented for a period of time, say six months.

7. While welcoming the enhanced Addition Policy, members held the view that the requirement for the whole household to undergo CMT and DPT (the Requirement) should be waived as in the case of the other enhanced measures, such as the Enhanced Transfer Scheme and the revised Amalgamation Policy. Members also considered that the younger households should be required to undertake in writing that they would take care of and live with elderly tenants under the revised Amalgamation Policy, and that HA staff should conduct home visits to prevent abuse. If contravention was substantiated, HA should consider terminating the tenancy of the younger households concerned.

Relevant Papers

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Housing Panel meeting on 4 June 2007

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/hg/papers/hg0604cb1-1736-3-e.pdf>

Minutes of the Housing Panel meeting on 4 June 2007

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/hg/minutes/hg070604.pdf>

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