

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Policy on Display of Publicity Materials in Public Rental Housing Estates

Purpose

This paper is to brief Members on the arrangements for the display of publicity materials (PMs) in public rental housing (PRH) estates under the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA).

Background

2. The Housing Department (HD) is firmly committed to providing a safe, clean and tranquil environment for all PRH estate residents. The welfare and well-being of residents are always our top priority. The HD has set up notice boards in common areas in PRH estates to allow a convenient channel through which Members of the Legislative Council (LegCo) and the District Councils (DCs), non-government organizations (NGOs) and residents associations (RAs) may display PMs including publicity posters so that residents can receive message on the services and activities as well as other information of general public interest.

3. With limited space on the notice boards in PRH estates, there are often more applications that space will allow. Indeed, on average, some 10,000 applications are handled by estate offices across the territory every month. It is necessary for the HD to have a system to ensure the fair allocation of the space available on the notice boards such that all eligible parties will enjoy equal opportunity to disseminate their information. The relevant requirements are clearly stated in the notice given to all applicants by the HD.

Principles for Display of PMs

4. The arrangements for the display of PMs have been implemented since 1999 and have been operating smoothly. According to the existing arrangements, PMs should be informative, service or welfare-providing in principle and non-profit-making in nature. They should not carry any messages that are unlawful, obscene, defamatory or insinuating.

5. The HD adopts the principles of neutrality, transparency, fairness and impartiality in processing the applications for the display of PMs. As long as the PMs comply with the established arrangements, they will be approved.

6. In 2011, the HD received a complaint from an individual that about a malicious criticism in a PM which was in breach of the long established principles on the display of PMs. With a view to upholding the basic principle that PMs shall not be used to criticize individuals, the HD clarified its guidelines in July 2011, making it clear that PMs should not carry negative or derogative remarks against individual persons or parties. This is in line with HD's aim of setting up such notice boards to provide a simple and convenient information platform. These notice boards are not meant to be a platform for criticizing individual persons or parties; or for individual persons or parties to criticize each other.

Guidelines and Procedures on Display of PMs

7. Notice boards are provided in the ground floor lift lobbies of domestic blocks as well as adjacent common areas within PRH estates. Applicants approach the relevant estate office to apply for display of posters on the notice boards which will be on a 'first-come-first-served' basis'. Upon approval by the HD, applicants may display posters on HD's designated notice boards. Owing to the limited available space on the notice boards, only around ten posters can be displayed on a typical notice board at any one time. In order to ensure the space of notice boards is allocated fairly and effectively, such that all eligible parties enjoy equal opportunities to disseminate their information, all posters will be cleared on the first, eleventh and twenty-first of each month. The number of posters to be allowed for display by each applicant will be suitably adjusted subject to the space available on the individual notice board and the demand for such display location at that time.

8. Should there be an over-subscription for display of PMs in an estate, the following established order of priority in allocation shall apply. Priority will be given to elected DC Members of the constituency concerned, followed by appointed DC Members of the constituency concerned, elected LegCo Members of the constituency concerned, other LegCo and DC Members, Mutual Aid Committees / RAs of the estate concerned or local NGOs, and other approved charitable / non-profit-making organizations. A ballot will be held if more than one application is received from the same priority category.

Enhanced Monitoring Measures

9. In recent weeks, there have been a number of inconsistencies in the processing of applications for display of PMs by individual PRH estates, resulting in some recent applications not being handled properly. The HD has introduced an additional measure, to require estate offices to refer applications for display of PMs with potentially controversial content to Housing Managers in the HD headquarters for scrutiny. In addition, should applicants be dissatisfied with the vetting outcome, they can apply for a review by the Chief Housing Manager of the HD headquarters. For routine cases, the applications will continue to be processed by estate offices.

10. The HD will continue to monitor the system for approving PMs to ensure that this system to provide information to PRH estate residents continues to be an effective communication tool for eligible parties.

**Transport and Housing Bureau
May 2012**