

**For information on
13 March 2017**

**Legislative Council
Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities**

Housing issues of Ethnic Minorities

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the measures adopted by the Housing Department (HD) and the Estate Agents Authority (EAA) in relation to housing issues of ethnic minorities (EM).

Language support service for EM in application for public housing

2. To promote racial harmony and help EM integrate into the community, the Government has funded non-profit-making organisations to provide EM with language support, language classes, integration and associated programmes, general enquiry, counseling and family support services etc.

3. Apart from the above, HD offers the following additional support services for EM in applying for public rental housing (PRH) -

- (a) HD has uploaded onto the website of the Housing Authority (HA) / HD key information pertaining to PRH application, as well as the telephone interpretation service hotline offered by the Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents (CHEER) in six EM languages (i.e. Urdu, Hindi, Bahasa Indonesia, Nepali, Tagalog and Thai). Hard copies of the said information are also available at the HA Customer Service Centre (HACSC) in Lok Fu for EM applicants who have no access to computer;
- (b) HD has displayed posters to alert EM applicants of the free telephone interpretation service offered by CHEER at the HACSC and Housing Information Centre;
- (c) since 2009, HD has printed and distributed Information Brief on the EM support service centres funded by the Home Affairs Department to EM applicants for PRH and sitting tenants for their reference. The Information Brief is updated regularly and is also distributed at the HACSC to EM applicants;

- (d) every time when HD send notification letters to PRH applicants regarding their application status, or invitation letters for detailed vetting or flat selection, if we believe the applicants are likely to be EM, we will attach an information note written in six EM languages, informing them of the language support services provided by the support service centres (including the interpretation service provided by CHEER upon reservation);
- (e) when an EM applicant requests for interpretation service from CHEER for the detailed vetting interview or flat selection, CHEER will notify HD to arrange for interpretation service on-site or through webcam. In case the applicant has not made prior request but wishes to have such service at the time of interview, HD will contact CHEER to see if interpretation service can be arranged on spot through webcam;
- (f) when implementing various housing schemes (such as Express Flat Allocation Scheme, Living Space Improvement Transfer Scheme, Territory-wide Overcrowding Relief Transfer Exercise), HD will send the relevant application forms, application guides, relevant documents, etc. to the EM support service centres, including CHEER, in advance to facilitate their services provision to EM applicants;
- (g) when EM applicants turn up for flat selection for the above housing schemes, HD will provide the key information and workflow pertaining to the housing schemes in six EM languages to facilitate their flat selection process;
- (h) EM Hall Attendants in the HACSC will, among other things, offer assistance to EM PRH applicants; and
- (i) a video promoting "Living in Harmony" is broadcasted in the Waiting Hall of the Applications Sub-section at the HACSC to promote racial harmony and support services to EM.

4. Our observation is that with the provision of the above support services, EM PRH applicants' awareness of the availability of interpretation service has been enhanced and the number of requests for such service has also increased.

5. Furthermore, to facilitate EM to purchase flats under the "Home Ownership Scheme" and the "Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Pilot Scheme", HD has, since 2016, sent the Application Guide and Application Form

to EM support service centres, including CHEER, before each round of sale exercise is launched to facilitate the provision of interpreter service by CHEER for EM applicants.

Staff Training

6. Training has been provided to HA's staff to enhance their understanding of the Racial Discrimination Ordinance and related guidelines, and to promote their sensitivity towards racial issues so as to facilitate the provision of services to EM. Training materials and guidelines have been uploaded to HD's intranet for staff's reference.

7. HD also invited CHEER to conduct briefing sessions and experience sharing sessions for staff members to strengthen their understanding on the availability of interpretation and translation services for EM and on the issue of racial equality. To enhance the sensitivity of our frontline staff on racial equality, HD will continue to arrange training and experience sharing sessions for them.

Others

8. English and Chinese are the official languages of Hong Kong for communication between the Government / public officer and members of the public. For this reason, notification letters and documents related to PRH application has been written in Chinese or English as the official languages. In addition, since EM languages include Urdu, Bahasa Indonesia, Hindi, Nepali, Tagalog, Thai, etc., there are practical difficulties in processing applications if the whole set of application forms and associated documents are provided in all EM languages.

9. HD will closely monitor the implementation of existing measures and will keep close contact with the support service centres to obtain feedback from EM in order to facilitate non-Chinese / English speaking EM in applying for PRH.

Private residential rental market

10. The EAA attaches great importance to enhancing the professional conduct and standard of estate agent licensees and upholding the principle of equal opportunities in their practices. With a view to promoting anti-discrimination, the EAA has issued Practice Circulars on this subject matter,

including Practice Circular No. 03-01(CR) on Equal Opportunities, and Practice Circular No. 09-07(CR) on Race Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 602). The EAA has also issued a letter to licensees on Hong Kong's anti-discrimination ordinances in September 2013. The relevant Practice Circulars and letter remind estate agent practitioners to observe and to comply with the requirements of the Race Discrimination Ordinance when providing estate agency services (including the handling of property transactions and tenancy matters); treat all clients equally; avoid committing any discriminatory act or conducting themselves in ways that prejudice others' right to accommodation in handling tenancy matters; and at the same time remind the landlord to avoid conduct which may involve discrimination. Estate agent licensees who fail to comply with the said Practice Circulars are liable to disciplinary actions by the EAA.

11. To enhance estate agent licensees' understanding of equal opportunities, the EAA organises relevant Continuing Professional Development programmes from time to time, with speakers from the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC). The EAA also encourages licensees to read the booklet entitled "What You Should Know as a Real Estate Agent, Landlord, Tenant, or Home Buyer Under Hong Kong's Anti-Discrimination Ordinances" published by the EOC, and publishes articles in the EAA's publication "Horizons", with a view to enhancing licensees' sensitivity on racial equality and understanding of anti-discrimination ordinances in Hong Kong.

12. The EAA also attaches great importance to public education. To promote and encourage good tenancy practices (which, amongst others, include the need to uphold the principle of equal opportunities), the EAA has published a booklet entitled "A Guide to Tenancy" in 2015 in Chinese and English. This booklet reminds landlords that they should not specify that the flat is only or is not for rent to any person based on factors such as race. Otherwise, it may constitute a discriminatory act and violate Hong Kong's anti-discrimination ordinances. The EAA has also published a number of articles in the press to remind landlords and estate agents of the need to uphold the principle of equal opportunities in handling tenancy matters.

13. The Government will continue to work with the EAA and other relevant organisations to enhance the efforts in educating both estate agent licensees and the public about good tenancy practices through various channels.

**Transport and Housing Bureau
March 2017**