

(Translation)

Legislative Council
Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities
Meeting on 13 March 2017

Supplementary Information

Purpose

At the meeting of the Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities on 13 March 2017, the Government is requested to provide supplementary information. This paper sets out such consolidated information.

Ethnic Minorities (EM) Public Rental Housing (PRH) Applicants

2. The allocation of PRH unit is arranged through random computer batching, and is strictly in accordance with the relative priority, household size and choice of district of the applicants, as well as the availability of PRH units when the application reaches the stage of allocation. The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) adheres to the same policy in allocating PRH units for all PRH applications regardless of the applicants' ethnic origin. The progress of allocation and waiting time depends on various factors such as household size and choices of district of applicants, the supply of PRH units, etc.

3. PRH applicants are not required to indicate their ethnicity in their applications. Based on the names of applicants, it is estimated that there are about 4 000 EM PRH applicants currently. HA does not maintain statistics of the average waiting time of EM applicants. As at end-December 2016, the average waiting time¹ for general PRH applicants was 4.7 years.

¹ Waiting time refers to the time taken between registration for PRH and first flat offer, excluding any frozen period during the application period (e.g. when the applicant has not yet fulfilled the residence requirement; the applicant has requested to put his/her application on hold pending arrival of family members for family reunion; the applicant is imprisoned, etc). The average waiting time for general applicants refers to the average of the waiting time of those general applicants who were housed to PRH in the past 12 months.

Services and Information for EM PRH households

4. The Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents (CHEER) of the Hong Kong Christian Service is providing telephone interpretation service at the Tuen Mun North District Tenancy Management Office and Tin Yuet Estate Office. Web cameras are used there to link with CHEER for video conferences among staff of the Housing Department (HD), EM PRH households and interpreters to facilitate communication and to overcome any language barriers. Operational experience indicates that the current interpretation service for EM PRH household is adequate in addressing the demand, while HA will continue to keep the situation of the service provision under review.

5. To further strengthen the communication with EM households, HA distributes a leaflet in English and EM languages to EM households identified in PRH estates, with the view to publicising support services provided by non-profit making organisations funded by the Government. In addition, the Estate Newsletters distributed by HA are available in Chinese and English. They also cover messages promoting harmonious integration and the support services available to households. Estate Management Advisory Committees (EMACs) also partner with non-governmental organisations to organise functions on community building to provide opportunities for EM and local residents to build mutual understanding, and to promote a sense of belonging to the community, so as to foster a harmonious relationship in the community. When conveying important messages to EM households, HA uses photographs, maps, drawings, figures, etc., to facilitate their understanding of the messages. Furthermore, housing policies uploaded onto the HA/HD Website are generally bilingual, i.e. in Chinese and English. For the more important information about PRH applications, addition and deletion of family members, Marking Scheme for Estate Management Enforcement in Public Housing Estates and Rent Assistance Scheme, summaries are provided in Hindi, Nepali, Urdu, Thai, Bahasa Indonesia and Tagalog.

6. To facilitate the daily operation of Mutual Aid Committees (MACs) in PRH estates, the Home Affairs Department (HAD) has prepared a set of ‘Model Rules for a MAC in a Public Housing Estate’ (Model Rules)², which provides general guidance for the formation and election of MACs, including the election and appointment of floor representatives. The Model Rules are provided in both Chinese and English. As for the EMACs of HA’s PRH estates, HA issues Estate Newsletters in both Chinese and English to residents, including EM households. The Newsletters provide summary notes of EMAC meetings of individual estates and publicise relevant support services.

7. According to the information provided by HAD, up to 28 February 2017, there are 18 EMs appointed as members of MACs, which constitute about 0.2 % of the total number of MAC members in PRH estates in Hong Kong. HD does not maintain statistics on the number of EM members in EMACs.

Training for Staff of Housing Department

8. HD regularly arranges training sessions about ethnic equality, cultural sensitivity and anti-discrimination Ordinances. These training sessions aim at enhancing participants’ awareness of equal rights (including key concepts in the Race Discrimination Ordinance), cultural diversity and good practice in the provision of public services. From 2014 to 2016, HD organised 28 relevant training programmes with more than 600 trainees.

9. Besides, to enhance racial awareness of staff and strengthen their knowledge on the availability of interpretation and translation services for EM applicants, the Allocation Section of HD, which is responsible for handling PRH application and allocation, arranges experience sharing and briefing sessions with CHEER regularly. In the past four years, the Allocation Section and CHEER have jointly organised four experience sharing and ‘Interpretation and Translation Services’ briefing sessions for about 70 frontline staff. Apart from providing training, HD also arranges experienced staff to share their experience in serving EM PRH applicants with staff newly posted to the Allocation Section.

² http://www.had.gov.hk/file_manager/docs/Public_Housing_Estate_MR.pdf

Commercial Facilities under Link for Sale of Ethnic Food

10. As for Members' suggestion regarding the sale of ethnic food in commercial facilities under Link, the day-to-day operation of Link is entirely independent from the Government and HA. However, Link must comply with the relevant legislation, land lease conditions and other relevant contractual terms as with any other private property owner. As long as the relevant statutory requirements, land lease conditions and restrictive covenants with HA are being complied with, the Government and HA cannot and will not interfere with Link's day-to-day operation and commercial decisions. Regarding the case raised by Members, the relevant party can follow up with Link directly or, depending on the actual circumstances, seek advice from the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC).

Compiling a List of Estates Agents with a Track Record of Providing Estate Agency Services to EM Clients

11. The Government has consulted the Estate Agents Authority (EAA) concerning the above suggestion. It is not appropriate for the EAA, an impartial regulator, to compile a list of estate agents who have track record of providing estate agency services to EM clients lest it would be seen as promoting business for a certain group of estate agents. Besides, from the operational perspective, it is difficult for the EAA to verify the accuracy of the information and the so-called track record put forth by the relevant estate agents, or to closely monitor the quality of services provided by these agents to their EM clients. Moreover, compilation of such a list may create an incorrect impression that only those estate agents on the list are willing to or capable of providing estate agent services to EM clients. This may undesirably undermine the EAA's efforts in educating estate agents of the importance of upholding the principle of equal opportunities in providing services to their clients and is considered unsatisfactory.

12. The EAA has all along attached great importance to enhancing the professional standard of estate agents, and upheld the principle of equal opportunities in the practices of the estate agents. It will continue to work with the EOC to enhance efforts in educating both estate agents and landlords to avoid committing any discriminatory act in handling property transaction and tenancy matters.

Housing Department
Home Affairs Department
Transport and Housing Bureau
May 2017