

**For discussion
on 26 June 2017**

**Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene
Subcommittee to Study Issues Relating to Animal Rights**

**Issues relating to the promotion of animal-friendly measures
(including public rental housing,
public transport and public open space)**

INTRODUCTION

This paper briefs members on the Government's policy of implementing animal-friendly measures related to public rental housing, public transport and public open space.

BACKGROUND

2. Our policy objective is to ensure that animals and people co-exist in a harmonious way in Hong Kong. In achieving this, we need to strike a balance between the well-being of people and the welfare of animals in a pragmatic way. Hong Kong is a densely populated metropolis. Members of the public have diverse views on keeping of animals in public rental housing, travelling on public transport with animals, and allowing pets to access public open spaces. In implementing these policies, we should strike a balance between public interest and views as well as protection of animal welfare. The policies of the relevant bureaux and departments are set out below.

KEEPING OF ANIMALS IN PUBLIC RENTAL HOUSING

3. In formulating the policy of animal keeping in Public Rental Housing (PRH) estates, the ultimate consideration of the Housing Authority (HA) is to achieve a harmonious community whereby different interests of all PRH residents are being respected at large. Under the prevailing policy, PRH residents are allowed to keep small household pets (except dog¹)

¹ As PRH estates are multi-storey buildings design with very limited space in domestic blocks and public areas, keeping of dogs may create impacts to the environmental hygiene. Therefore, according to the clauses of the Tenancy Agreement signed between HA and tenants, dog keeping by PRH tenants is not allowed unless with prior written consent from the Landlord.

which do not pose any health hazard and nuisance. “Small household pets” include pets that are generally kept in cages, display cases, aquaria or other containers so designed. Examples are de-sexed cats, birds (except pigeons), hamsters, chinchillas, guinea-pigs, rabbits, tortoises, aquatic life, etc. Prior registration with the Housing Department (HD) is not required. However, the small household pets must be properly taken care of by the tenants to avoid causing nuisance to the public. Otherwise, the permission will be withdrawn. Other than dogs approved under Temporary Permission Rule (TPR) (see paragraph 6 below), guide dogs serving the visually/ and hearing impaired, companion dogs serving those in need of mental support and “small household pets” as mentioned above, keeping of other animals including wild lives/ exotic species, domesticated farm animals such as snakes, pigs, chickens, ducks and monkeys are strictly prohibited.

4. In view of residents’ concern on environmental hygiene in PRH estates, HA agreed to implement the Marking Scheme (MS) in PRH estates in May 2003. As dog-biting incidents were reported from time to time, HA included “Keeping animal, bird or livestock inside lease premises without prior written consent of the Landlord” as one of the misdeeds under the MS, in concert with the tenancy management. The term “animal” covers dogs. Later on, taking account of the aspiration of PRH tenants on pet keeping, an opinion survey was conducted in August 2003. Majority of interviewees opined that pets keeping should not be allowed in PRH estates. Nevertheless, to avoid the possible abandonment of large number of dogs by tenants, HA subsequently implemented TPR in November 2003 to allow PRH tenants to continue keeping small dogs that had been kept in PRH flats before 1 August 2003 until the dogs’ natural death. This arrangement is a one-off measure.

5. At present, special permission will be granted where appropriate for keeping of guide dogs for visually/ and hearing impaired tenant or individual tenant who is proved to be in need of keeping companion dog for mental support. As at April 2017, the total number of dogs kept in PRH estates under TPR and special permission (service dogs including guide dogs and companion dogs) is around 2,300.

6. HA understands that there are voices requesting relaxation of the restriction on the prevailing dog keeping policy. Considering that from time to time, even in some spacious high-end private residential estates where dog keeping is allowed, there is news about conflicts among neighbours arising from issues of dog-keeping and about physical injury caused by interaction between human beings and dogs. In contrast to these

estates, the flat size and common area in PRH estates are comparatively smaller and more densely populated. As such, there will be more chances of nuisance created by dogs. Since the implementation of MS in 2003, the misdeed item of “Keeping animal, bird or livestock inside lease premises without prior written consent of the Landlord” has been accepted by our tenants. In the 2011 and 2016 Public Housing Recurrent Survey, the result revealed that about 60% and 70% interviewed PRH residents supported the implementation of this measure respectively.

7. HA’s dog keeping policy has already struck a balance between tenants’ aspiration on hygienic, quiet and safe living environment in general and those with special medical needs of keeping dogs. As both parties’ rights and interests have been respected under the premise of community inclusion, HA currently has no plan to relax the policy of dog keeping in PRH.

TRAVELLING ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT WITH ANIMALS

8. According to the information provided by the Transport and Housing Bureau, public transport services have heavy usage in Hong Kong, which make up around 90% of all passenger journeys and carry over 12 million passenger trips per day on average. There are at present no restrictions under our legislation for regulating different modes of public transport in respect of boarding by guide dogs accompanying the visually impaired for their journeys on public transport. Our legislation also let operators of public light buses, taxis, non-franchised bus and ferries decide themselves on whether passengers are permitted to board with their pets. The Transport Department (TD) will continue to make use of the established liaison channels to encourage these operators to provide appropriate assistance to those who need to travel with pets.

9. As regards railway and franchised buses, the by-laws and regulations concerned prohibit passengers from boarding trains and buses with pets (other than guide dogs accompanying the visually impaired). As MTR and buses are respectively our underground and road-based mass carriers, their patronage is high and the space in their compartments is limited. They can be rather congested at times. In considering whether passengers are to be permitted to board public transport with their pets, TD has to balance the needs of different stakeholders, including considering the reaction of pets in a crowded and confined environment as well as the impact on other passengers. TD will continue to keep in view the public views on this issue so as to consider whether there should be any changes to the existing arrangements.

ALLOWING PETS TO ACCESS PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

10. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has all along adopted a proactive approach to address the demand of dog owners for more pet gardens by designating specific areas in parks as pet gardens after obtaining the support of the respective district councils and the local community. The number of pet gardens managed by LCSD has increased from 19 to 44 between 2010-11 and end April 2017, covering 18 districts. The pet gardens are equipped with facilities specially designed for pets such as pet latrine and pet dropping collection boxes. Some pet gardens are also provided with play equipment for pets. Pet accesses are also provided in seven parks (including five venues provided with pet gardens) to meet the needs of the public.

11. LCSD plans to provide four new pet gardens in 2017, and will continue to identify suitable venues in existing or planned parks for the provision of additional pet gardens to cater for the demand of dog owners.

ADVICE SOUGHT

12. Members are invited to note the content of the Government's policy of implementing the three animal-friendly measures above.

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