

**For discussion
on 30 March 2020**

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

**Measures to Facilitate the Mobility Needs of Elderly Residents
by the Hong Kong Housing Authority**

PURPOSE

This paper aims to brief Members on the measures of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) in assisting elderly residents in public rental housing (PRH).

BACKGROUND

Ageing in place

2. The Government's elderly care policy is "ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up". In fact, "ageing in place" is the cherished wish of most elderly persons. With appropriate community care and support, many elderly persons with long-term care needs can still continue to age in their own homes. To enable elderly persons to age in a familiar environment, the Government has all along been providing them with various types of support and care services at the community level, including a range of centre-based and home-based services.

3. In line with the Government's policy of "ageing in place", HA has put in place a series of measures to cater for the needs of elderly residents. Further to HA's briefing its Members on its measures and enhancement programmes in existing PRH estates¹ in February last year, this paper reports HA's various policies and latest measures for the elderly in PRH estates.

¹ LC Paper No. CB(1) 532/18-19(03)

POLICIES OF HA

4. It is HA's corporate vision to provide affordable rental housing to low-income families with housing needs, and help low- to middle-income families gain access to subsidised home ownership. The relevant PRH and subsidised sale flat (SSF) policies of HA allow priority to applications with elderly persons aged 60 or above.

PRH application

5. For many low-income households in need, PRH is the most stable and affordable place for ageing. Hence, HA has implemented a number of housing schemes that grant priority to elderly PRH applicants. The details are at **Annex**.

SSF application

6. As for SSFs, applicants with elderly members are given priority for flat selection over other family applicants. Between 2014 and 2018, about 40% of the flats under the Home Ownership Scheme and Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme were sold to SSF applicants under the Priority Elderly Scheme.

Harmonious Families Scheme for sitting tenants

7. In support of the Government's harmonious families policies and encouraging the younger generation to take care of and live together with their elderly parents, HA launched a series of Harmonious Families Schemes between 2007 and 2008, to facilitate the establishment of a family-based support network and further establish the concept of "ageing in place". The schemes are detailed at **Annex**. As at end-December 2019, about 60 200 households have benefitted from these arrangements.

Under-occupation policy

8. Under the existing tenancy agreement, an under-occupation household² has to move to a PRH unit the size of which is suitable for the family. Whilst relocating under-occupation households to smaller units of suitable size can release larger units for allocation to households in need, HA, having considered

² After tenants' taking up a PRH unit, they may become under-occupation households when there are deletions of family members due to moving-out, death, marriage, emigration, etc., which leaves the remaining family members with more living space than the prescribed allocation standard.

the difficulties of the elderly and disabled persons in adapting to a new environment, allows elderly persons to age in the PRH units they have been living in, without asking them to transfer. Furthermore, with effect from mid-December 2019, under-occupation households whose family members are all aged 70 or above can enjoy full rent exemption upon their transfer to smaller PRH units of suitable sizes. Details are listed in **Annex**.

Financial assistance

9. HA offers the Rent Assistance Scheme (RAS) to provide relief through rent reductions to PRH tenants who are facing temporary financial hardship. Eligible applicants will be granted either 25% or 50% rent reduction so that appropriate assistance would be provided for elderly households and other tenants in need. Furthermore, HA has special arrangement for the payment of rental deposit in place for elderly households³ when the households sign the tenancy agreement. Details are at **Annex**.

BUILDING DESIGN AND FACILITIES

10. Owing to functional declines or even impaired mobility, the elderly may need a fitting physical environment, such as having barrier-free access within the estate and suitable home layout and facilities, to carry out daily activities safely and independently. In response to these needs, HA has put in place a series of measures.

Universal Design

11. Since 2002, HA has adopted the major elements of Universal Design concept on various types of barrier-free features at common areas of the estates and inside the flats in the design of domestic flats and common areas of new public housing developments, such as non-slip floor tiles on suitable floor surfaces, lever type mixers and door handles, and larger switches and doorbell buttons which installed at a height easier to access.

12. For existing PRH estates, HA has completed many Universal Design facilities in external and common areas through the following programmes -

(i) **Barrier-Free Access Improvement Programme**

Since the launch of the programme in 2002, a number of improvement works have been carried out, examples include enhancing the design of

³ Households whose family members are all aged 60 or above

control buttons on lift panels; installing detection devices at lift doors; adding handrails, illuminated visual indicators and audible signals in lift cars; improving pedestrian walkways; and adding handrails and tactile warning strips. These works, which cost up to \$330 million, have already been completed.

(ii) Lift Modernisation Programme

Since the start of the programme in the 1990s, HA has completed the modernisation works of more than 1 200 aged lifts. In the first three quarters (i.e. April to December 2019) of the fiscal year 2019/20, HA has finished replacing 41 aged lifts. HA also plans to upgrade about 450 lifts in around 25 PRH estates in the next five years.

(iii) Lift Addition Programme

Since the implementation of the programme in 2008, HA has added 85 lifts in 33 PRH estates. The overall construction and installation cost is over \$1 billion.

Adaptation/home modification works in PRH units

13. HA undertakes necessary adaptation works/home modification for sitting/prospective elderly tenants and families with elderly person, and bears the full relevant cost. HA will seek advice from physiotherapists or medical officers on the appropriate conversion work as required. Improvement works include widening of the doorway with provision of a ramp whenever practicable; laying non-slip floor tiles on suitable floor surfaces; conversion of the bath tub into a shower area; installation of grab rails in the bathroom; raising the floor slab of the balcony to make it level with that of the living room and so forth. Once an application for such works has been submitted before/during intake, HA will take prompt actions to enable the families to move into their PRH units in good time. HA will also consider postponing the commencement date of the tenancy after work completion if necessary. In case such works cannot be carried out in the flat due to other constraints, or the health condition of the tenants warrants a flat with a larger living space, HA will arrange to transfer the tenants to other suitable PRH units.

14. For cases where home modification works are not feasible due to site constraints, the elderly tenants may apply for internal transfer within the estate, or special transfer to a flat in another estate together with their family. HA will consider such applications on individual merits and make appropriate arrangements.

Elderly fitness facilities/equipment

15. The programme for the provision of elderly recreational facilities at 102 PRH estates with a higher proportion of elderly residents was completed in March 2019. At present, there are about 1 800 sets of elderly fitness facilities/equipment installed in PRH estates. Tailor-made facilities, including Tai Chi Wheels, Peddle Pusher, Health Walker and Foot Massage Path, are designed for elderly residents to stretch their muscles and improve body strength.

OTHER SUPPORTING SERVICES

16. Where possible, HA partners with service providers to promote awareness of health care, strengthen mutual care, and foster a harmonious living environment for elderly tenants in the public housing communities.

17. For example, HA has been collaborating with the School of Nursing of the University of Hong Kong and the Oral Health Education Unit of the Department of Health, in providing elderly tenants with free health checking and health education/promotion services with an objective to promote active ageing and disease prevention. HA also supports charitable organisations to provide “Mobile Chinese Medical Van” service in PRH estates. Such Chinese medical services have first been provided by Yan Oi Tong and Pok Oi Hospital since 2006 and since 2011, the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and other charitable organisations have also joined to provide the services. Another example is that, eligible elderly households who are not currently receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance can obtain a special grant on a reimbursement basis for a one-off installation cost up to \$2,500, to acquire any emergency alarm service in the market that meet their needs.

18. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Transport and Housing Bureau
March 2020**

Measures Implemented by the Hong Kong Housing Authority for the Elderly

1. Public rental housing (PRH) application

(i) Single Elderly Persons Priority Scheme

Single elderly persons aged 58 or above can apply for PRH under this priority scheme but they must be at least 60 years old at the time of PRH allocation. The target waiting time for elderly one-person applicants is around two years on average, which is shorter than HA's target of providing the first offer to general applicants at around three years on average⁴.

(ii) Elderly Persons Priority Scheme

Two or more elderly persons of age 58 or above who undertake to live together upon flat allocation are eligible to apply for PRH under this priority scheme. For unrelated members, they are required to sign or stamp their seals on the application form together. By the time of flat allocation, all members must have attained the age of 60. Eligible application enjoys priority processing over the application by ordinary families.

(iii) Harmonious Families Priority Scheme

Under this scheme, eligible PRH applicants with elderly parents/dependent relatives⁵ enjoy a six-month period of priority processing over the application by ordinary families. Eligible PRH applicants with elderly parents/dependent relatives are allowed to opt for living together in the same unit in any district or separately in two nearby units in a non-urban district for mutual care.

⁴ Waiting time refers to the time taken between registration for PRH and the 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 (i.e. family and elderly one-person applicants) refers to the average of the waiting time of those general applicants who were housed to PRH in the past 12 months.

⁵ The elderly parent(s)/dependent relative(s) must have reached the age of 60.

2. Scheme for elderly sitting tenants

(i) Harmonious Families Transfer Scheme

PRH tenants residing in different District Council (DC) districts from their offspring/elderly parents⁶ may apply for transfer to the same or nearby estate for mutual care. In the absence of suitable resources, a flat of appropriate size in the nearest available estate in the same DC district or nearby DC district will be allocated.

(ii) Harmonious Families Addition Scheme

An elderly PRH tenant may add an adult offspring and his/her family members into the tenancy, subject to the rule of ‘one-line continuation’ of family (i.e., the elderly tenant⁷ may live with only one married adult offspring’s family), as well as the passing of the Comprehensive Means Test and Domestic Property Test.

(iii) Harmonious Families Amalgamation Scheme

Younger families living in different PRH units may apply for amalgamation of tenancies with their elderly parents or elderly dependent relatives aged 60 or above. Subject to the availability of resources, the amalgamated family can choose to move to a PRH unit in any district.

3. Under-occupation (UO) households

Households with disabled members or elderly members aged 70 or above are excluded from the UO list. Those with elderly members aged between 60 and 69 are placed at the end of the UO list for transfer. With effect from 16 December 2019, HA launched a trial scheme whereby UO households whose family members are all aged 70 or above can enjoy full rent exemption upon their transfer to smaller PRH units of suitable sizes.

4. Financial assistance

All-elderly households (i.e., all household members aged 60 or above) without receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance may apply for exemption or refund of rental deposit when such households sign the tenancy agreements. Moreover, all-elderly households with income below 70% of the PRH income limit or with rent-to-income

⁶ The elderly parent(s) must be at least 60 years old on the closing date of application.

⁷ The elderly tenant refers to the tenant or his/her spouse aged 60 or above.

ratio exceeding 18.5% can be granted a 50% rent reduction under the Rent Assistance Scheme.

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