

**For discussion  
on 6 September 2021**

**Legislative Council Panel on Housing**

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

**PURPOSE**

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

**BACKGROUND**

2. The Government's elderly care policy is "ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up". With appropriate community care and support, many elderly persons with long-term care needs can still continue to live in their own homes. To enable elderly persons to live 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. Complementing the Government's policy of "ageing in place", HA has put in place a series of measures to cater for the needs of its elderly residents. Further to HA's briefing to Members on related measures and enhancement programmes in its existing PRH estates<sup>1</sup> in April last year, this paper reports the progress of various policies and latest measures for the elderly in PRH estates.

**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 achieve home ownership through subsidised sale flats (SSFs). The relevant PRH and SSF policies of HA accord priority to applications involving elderly persons aged 60 or above.

---

<sup>1</sup> LC Paper No. CB(1) 491/19-20(03).

## **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. Details are set out at **Annex**.

## **SSF application**

6. As for SSFs, applicants with elderly members are given priority for flat selection over applicants of other family types. Between 2014 and 2019<sup>2</sup>, about 35% of the flats under the Home Ownership Scheme and Green Form Subsidised Home Ownership Scheme were sold to applicants under the Priority Elderly Scheme.

## **Harmonious Families Scheme for sitting tenants**

7. In support of the Government's harmonious families policies and to encourage 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. Details of the schemes are detailed set out at **Annex**. As at end- June 2021, about 66 050 households have benefitted from these arrangements.

## **Under-occupation policy**

8. Under the existing tenancy agreement, an under-occupation household<sup>3</sup> has to move to a PRH unit with suitable size in accordance with the family size. Whilst relocating under-occupation households to smaller units of suitable size can release larger units for allocation to households in need, having considered the difficulties of the elderly and disabled persons in adapting to a new environment, HA allows elderly persons to age in the PRH units which 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 lifetime full rent exemption upon their transfer to smaller PRH units of suitable sizes.

---

<sup>2</sup> Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the application for Sale of Home Ownership Scheme Flats 2020 was deferred to commence in September 2020. Flat selection commenced from late May 2021.

<sup>3</sup> After tenants taking up the PRH units, if there are deletions of family members due to reasons such as moving-out, death, marriage, emigration such that the remaining family members enjoy living space exceeding the established allocation standards, they become an under-occupation household.

## **Letter of Assurance**

9. Under the existing arrangements, elderly tenants joining the “Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (PCSSA) Scheme”, “Guangdong Scheme” or “Fujian Scheme” to reside in the Mainland are required to surrender their PRH units. If a PRH unit is returned voluntarily without the breach of Tenancy Agreement, HA will issue Letter of Assurance (LA) to the elderly tenants concerned upon request in the course of flat recovery. If the elderly tenants need to return to Hong Kong due to changes in circumstances, they can be offered a refurbished PRH unit upon fulfillment of the eligibility criteria for PRH application at the time of redemption and other conditions set out in the LA. This arrangement not only provides an alternative option for the elderly to age, but also maximizes the utilization of housing resources. As at end-June 2021, HA has issued a total of 317 LAs to elderly tenants joining the abovementioned schemes.

## **Financial assistance**

10. HA offers the Rent Assistance Scheme (RAS) to provide relief to PRH tenants who are facing temporary financial hardship through rent concession. In order to provide appropriate assistance to elderly households and other tenants in need, eligible applicants will be granted either 25% or 50% rent concession. Furthermore, HA has special arrangement in place regarding the payment of rental deposit for elderly households<sup>4</sup> when the households sign the tenancy agreement. Details are set out at **Annex**.

## **BUILDING DESIGN AND FACILITIES**

11. Owing to functional declines or even impaired mobility, some 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 as detailed below.

### **Universal Design**

12. Since 2002, HA has adopted the major elements of Universal Design concept on various types of barrier-free facilities at common areas and inside the flats of new PRH estates, such as providing non-slip floor tiles on suitable floor surfaces, lever type water taps for washing basin/shower and door handles, and larger switches and doorbell buttons which are installed at a height easier to access.

---

<sup>4</sup> Households whose family members are all aged 60 or above.

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

(i) Barrier-Free Access Improvement Programme

Since the start of the programme in 2002, HA has carried out a number of improvement works. Examples include enhancing the design of 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; adding handrails and tactile warning strips, etc.

(ii) Lift Modernisation Programme

Since the start of the programme in the 1990s, HA has completed the modernisation works of more than 1 300 aged lifts. In the first quarter (i.e. April to June 2021) of the fiscal year 2021/22, HA has finished replacing 12 aged lifts. HA also plans to upgrade about 470 lifts in 26 PRH estates in the next five years.

(iii) Lift Addition Programme

Since the implementation of the programme in 2008, HA has added 85 lifts, six escalators and 28 footbridges in 33 PRH estates.

### **Adaptation/home modification works in PRH units**

14. HA undertakes necessary adaptation/home modification works for sitting/prospective elderly tenants and families with elderly person, and bears the relevant cost in full. HA will seek advice from physiotherapists or medical officers on the appropriate conversion work when necessary. Improvement works include widening 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, etc. If an application for such works is submitted before/during intake, HA will take prompt actions to enable the family to move into the PRH unit 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.

15. 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.

### **Installation of Visual Fire Alarm System**

16. Besides, to address the need of the hearing-impaired persons, HA has introduced a voluntary scheme to install the visual fire alarm (VFA) system inside the PRH units with hearing-impaired persons, where feasible, for free since March 2020. When a communal fire alarm in a block is triggered, the VFA inside the flat will flash simultaneously to allow the HI residents to be alert of the emergency at once. Eligible PRH residents (including elderly residents with hearing impairment) may approach their respective estate management office for application. As at end-June 2021, HA has completed the installation of VFA systems inside 59 flats in 43 PRH estates.

### **Elderly fitness facilities/equipment**

17. HA completed the programme for the provision of elderly recreational facilities in 102 PRH estates with a higher proportion of elderly residents in March 2019. At present, there are about 1 900 sets of elderly fitness facilities/equipment installed in PRH estates. Tailor-made facilities, including Tai Chi wheels, peddle pushers, health walkers and foot massage paths, etc. are designed for elderly residents to stretch their muscles and improve body strength. HA will continue to consider providing appropriate recreational facilities for the elderly at the suitable location in the estates, where technically feasible and in compliance with the relevant legislations, to meet their needs.

## **OTHER SERVICES**

18. Where feasible, 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.

19. For example, to encourage elderly tenants to do more exercises and stay healthy amid the pandemic, HA has specially produced a set of videos "Fitness Exercise for the Elderly" last year. The videos were broadcast on HA's Housing Channel through TVs installed at lift lobbies of all public housing domestic blocks and uploaded to the HA's social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram

and YouTube. Elderly tenants, their family members and care-givers can watch, download and practise the exercises conveniently. Partnering with the Oral Health Education Division of the Department of Health, HA distributed packs with epidemic protective materials and oral health products to elderly tenants to remind them to stay healthy. 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. The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and other charitable organisations have also joined to provide the services since 2011. Furthermore, eligible all-elderly households who are not currently receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance can obtain a one-off special grant up to \$2,500 on a reimbursement basis for installation cost and/or service charge to acquire any traditional or mobile devices for emergency alarm system in the market that meet their needs.

20. HD has been actively complementing Government’s anti-epidemic work. Staff of estate management offices (EMOs) assisted around 1 200 PRH residents aged 60 or above and those need help to make online appointments for the COVID-19 Universal Community Testing Programme during the period from 31 August to 14 September 2020. Besides, starting from 23 February 2021, HA has also offered assistance to these needy residents for online booking of COVID- 19 vaccination. They may approach their respective EMOs and submit the completed “Online Booking Consent Form” to estate staff for assistance of online booking.

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

**Transport and Housing Bureau**  
**September 2021**

## Measures and Schemes 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 waiting time target for elderly one-person applicants is around two years on average, which is shorter than HA's target of providing the first flat offer to general applicants at around three years on average<sup>5</sup>.

#### (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 relatives<sup>6</sup> enjoy a six-month period of priority processing over the application from ordinary families. Eligible PRH applicants and their 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.

---

<sup>5</sup> Waiting time basically 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.

<sup>6</sup> The elderly parent(s)/dependent relative(s) must have reached the age of 60.

## **2. Scheme for PRH elderly sitting tenants**

### **(i) Harmonious Families Transfer Scheme**

PRH tenants residing in different District Council (DC) districts from their offspring/elderly parents<sup>7</sup> 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 tenant<sup>8</sup> 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. Financial assistance**

All-elderly households (i.e. all household members are 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 ratio exceeding 18.5% can be granted a 50% rent reduction under the Rent Assistance Scheme.

- END -

---

<sup>7</sup> The elderly parent(s) must be at least 60 years old on the closing date of application.

<sup>8</sup> The elderly tenant refers to the tenant or his/her spouse aged 60 or above.