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Panel on Housing

Meeting on 6 September 2021

Updated background brief on measures to facilitate the mobility needs of elderly residents taken by the Hong Kong Housing Authority

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the measures taken by the Hong Kong Housing Authority ("HA") to facilitate the mobility needs of elderly residents, and gives a summary of the views and concerns expressed by members of the Panel on Housing ("the Panel") on the subject during relevant discussions in recent years.

Background

2. In line with the Government's policy of "Ageing in Place", HA takes into account the needs of the elderly and other residents with impaired mobility in the design, management and maintenance of public rental housing ("PRH") estates, with a view to providing a safe and convenient living environment. 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.

3. For existing PRH estates, HA has carried out a number of improvement works since the launch of the Barrier-Free Access Improvement Programme in 2002, such as 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; and adding handrails and tactile warning strips.

4. For sitting/prospective elderly tenants and families with elderly person, HA undertakes necessary adaptation/home modification works in their units to cater for their needs. In 102 PRH estates with a higher proportion of elderly residents, HA has completed the programme for the provision of elderly recreational facilities in March 2019. There are also 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.

Lift Addition Programme and Lift Modernisation Programme

5. To support the Universal Accessibility policy of the Administration, and to enhance pedestrian access within PRH estates, HA has been implementing the Lift Addition Programme ("LAP") since 2008. Lifts are added in external common areas, in PRH blocks without lift services and next to existing footbridges within boundaries of PRH estates. LAP also provides barrier-free access, particularly for the elderly and disabled persons who are living in PRH estates built in hilly areas. According to the Administration, LAP involves the addition of 85 lifts, six escalators and 28 footbridges in 33 existing PRH estates. In addition, HA has put in place the Lift Modernisation Programme ("LMP") for PRH estates. Under LMP, annual condition assessment and checking are conducted by HA for all lifts that have been in operation for 25 years or more. Taking into account factors including the overall operating conditions of lifts, deployment of resources, etc., HA will formulate a timetable for renewing the lifts concerned.¹

Members' views and concerns

6. The major views and concerns expressed by members during relevant Panel discussions in recent years are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Provision of lifts in estates

7. Regarding elderly PRH tenants living in the top floor units which were not provided with lifts, members opined that the HA's present practice of helping

¹ According to the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. [CB\(1\)491/19-20\(03\)](#)), HA had completed the modernization works of more than 1 200 aged lifts since the start of LMP in the 1990s and planned to upgrade about 450 lifts in around 25 PRH estates in the next five years.

the tenants to transfer to other PRH estates provided with lift services might not meet these tenants' aspirations for remaining in their familiar neighbourhood. On the question of whether HA would add lift openings for these top floors, the Administration advised that HA would add lift openings in PRH buildings for floors currently without one, where the building structure permitted. Tenants living on floors without lift services could apply for transfer to other units in the same estate or other estates and HA would make appropriate arrangements as far as practicable.

8. Members opined that elderly HA's tenants in Tenants Purchase Scheme ("TPS") estates could not benefit from LAP or LMP, and asked whether HA would take forward projects to retrofit lifts in TPS estates to cater for residents' needs. The Administration advised that under the Universal Accessibility Programme, the Government would launch a special scheme for retrofitting lifts at the walkways in or connecting to the common areas of three types of housing estates, including the TPS estates, estates under the Buy or Rent Option Scheme and PRH estates with non-residential properties divested. The relevant studies were conducted by the Highways Department.

Progress of Lift Modernisation Programme

9. Regarding the HA's plan to upgrade about 450 lifts in around 25 PRH estates in the five years from 2020/2021 under LMP, members asked whether HA would speed up the programme so that more aged lifts would be modernized in a timely manner. The Administration advised that under LMP, HA conducted annual condition assessment and checking for all lifts that had been in operation for 25 years or more. Taking into account the overall operating conditions of lifts and other relevant factors, HA would formulate a timetable for renewing the lifts concerned. The frequency of maintenance inspections conducted by HA on the lifts in PRH estates was generally higher than that required under the relevant legislation, and these lifts in general operated well. In considering whether it was practicable to speed up LMP, HA would take into account the limited supply of lift practitioners in the industry.

Carrying out adaptation/home modification works for meeting elderly tenants' needs

10. Members opined that HA should proactively communicate with elderly tenants on the appropriate works in their PRH units that would help cater for their mobility needs. In view that for some types of adaptation/home modification works, HA would undertake them only upon the elderly tenants' requests and as recommended by physiotherapists or medical officers, members enquired how HA would handle the situation where the elderly tenant concerned could not engage a physiotherapist or medical officer to follow up his/her case.

11. The Administration advised that for simple works such as installing grab rails in bathrooms, referrals from medical officers, occupational therapists/physiotherapists or social workers were not necessary and HA would carry out the works for elderly and disabled tenants free of charge. For other modification works, HA would decide whether it was necessary to consult medical officers or occupational therapists/physiotherapists subject to the actual need of a case. With tenants' consent, HA might also refer cases to the Social Welfare Department or medical social workers for professional advice before carrying out specific modification works. HA believed that such arrangement would better meet the tenants' needs.

Provision of elderly fitness facilities/equipment

12. Members enquired about the criteria adopted by HA for deciding the distribution of elderly fitness facilities/equipment among individual PRH estates. The Administration advised that when designing individual public housing development projects, HA would refer to the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines and provide a variety of facilities for use by residents, including elderly fitness facilities/equipment. In considering suggestions for installation of additional elderly fitness facilities/equipment in an existing estate, HA would take into account factors such as changes in the demographic structure of the estate, actual needs of residents, usage of facilities, space availability, etc. The Housing Department ("HD") would invite contractors on its List of Contractors to submit proposals for its consideration, and consult the Estate Management Advisory Committee concerned on the suggestion.

13. Members asked whether HA would assist Incorporated Owners of TPS estates to provide elderly fitness facilities/equipment in TPS estates. The Administration advised that as in the case of private properties, the costs of providing and maintaining facilities at common areas of TPS estates were shared by all owners. HA, as the owner of unsold TPS units, would contribute to the payment of management and maintenance expenses of a TPS estate in proportion to its share of ownership in the estate.

Adding facilities in existing estates

14. Members were concerned how HA would address the limited space in existing public housing estates for providing additional facilities for elderly residents. Some members enquired about the Administration/HA's considerations for raising the plot ratios in an estate co-owned by HA and other owners, such as Link Real Estate Investment Trust, in order to take forward certain works projects such as those for providing covered facilities or retrofitting

a cover for existing facilities. They also enquired how the Administration/HA would deal with cases where other owners were unwilling to share the cost of such works.

15. The Administration advised that plot ratios of an estate co-owned by HA and other owners were stipulated under the land lease conditions and the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123). To provide covered facilities or cover to existing facilities in the estate, HA needed to secure other owners' consent for the project, study the feasibility of providing the facilities, and submit the plans for the project to relevant authorities for approvals. HA and other owners who had given consent to implementation of a works project in an estate should have the obligations to share the project cost in proportion to their respective share of ownership defined in the Deed of Mutual Covenant for the estate.

16. Members opined that HA should consider introducing new measures to assist elderly residents, such as through the application of gerontechnology, and asked about the implementation plan of Visual Fire Alarm ("VFA") system inside PRH units. The Administration advised that HA would install a VFA system for hearing-impaired persons inside their PRH units free of charge to assist them to notice fire alarms promptly. To notify residents about this new provision, HD staff would proactively communicate with PRH households with hearing-impaired members and display notices at the ground floor lift lobby of PRH blocks. Hearing-impaired tenants who intended to apply for the installation of the VFA system might approach their respective estate offices.

Latest development

17. The Administration will brief the Panel on the measures taken by HA to facilitate the mobility needs of elderly residents at the Panel meeting on 6 September 2021.

Relevant papers

18. A list of relevant papers is set out in the **Appendix**.

**Measures to facilitate the mobility needs of
elderly residents taken by the Hong Kong Housing Authority**

List of relevant papers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Housing	12 February 2019	Administration's paper(LC Paper No. CB(1)532/18-19(03)) Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(1)971/18-19) Administration's supplementary paper (LC Paper No. CB(1)358/19-20(01))
Panel on Housing	28 April 2020	Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(1)491/19-20(03)) Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(1)910/19-20)