

The Audit Commission (“Audit”) conducted a review to examine the provision of barrier-free access and facilities in public rental housing (“PRH”) estates.

2. Hon SHIU Ka-fai and Hon Carmen KAN Wai-mun declared that they were members of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (“HA”). Hon Louis LOONG Hon-biu declared that he was a Legislative Council Member representing the Real Estate and Construction Functional Constituency, and contractors in the sector might have carried out the projects concerned.

3. HA pledges to provide an age-friendly and barrier-free estate environment to address the needs of residents of different ages and physical ability. Since 2008, HA has implemented the Lift Addition Programme (“LAP”) in existing PRH estates as lifts constitute a major part of barrier-free facilities. As at 30 June 2023, the Housing Department (“HD”), as the executive arm of HA, managed 818 468 PRH flats located in 237 housing estates for 2.1 million residents. In addition, the Highways Department (“HyD”) implements projects to retrofit lifts to walkways in estates under the Tenants Purchase Scheme and Buy or Rent Option Scheme, as well as PRH estates with properties divested under HA in the Special Scheme of the Universal Accessibility Programme (“UAP”).¹ As at 31 August 2023, 191 lift retrofitting items had been completed under various phases of UAP and 33 items in the Special Scheme were under planning or included in works contracts for implementation.

4. The Committee noted the following findings from the Director of Audit’s Report No. 81:

Barrier-free access and facility improvement programmes

- from April 2022 to March 2023, for 97 (41%) of the 237 housing estates, not all of the required quarterly results of regular checks of barrier-free facilities conducted by the Access Officers² had been submitted. In particular, no results had been submitted for 25 (11%) estates;

¹ In 2012, the Government launched UAP to retrofit barrier-free access facilities to public walkways. In the 2019 Policy Address, the Government announced that the ambit of UAP would be further expanded to retrofit lifts to walkways in estates under the Special Scheme. Lift retrofitting items under the Special Scheme can only be taken forward with the agreement from the relevant owners or parties responsible for the management of the concerned land/walkways.

² The Access Officers are nominated by HA on individual site basis and required to conduct regular checks of the facilities available to persons with disabilities on each premises.

Provision of barrier-free facilities in public rental housing estates

- from June to August 2023, Audit conducted site inspections to four PRH estates with improvement works which were subject to the guidelines on barrier-free access laid down by the Buildings Department, and found deviations from the guidelines and defects in all the four estates;
- from June to August 2023, Audit conducted two site inspections on 36 multi-sensory maps³ in ten PRH estates and found that 27 (75%) maps (in eight estates) were defective in both site inspections;
- in 15 applications for in-flat adaptation works received from elderly and disabled tenants in five estates from 1 January 2022 to 30 June 2023, long time had been taken from receiving applications to issuing works orders (76 days on average, ranging from 26 to 140 days);
- Audit's sample checking of complaint cases received from 1 January 2020 to 30 June 2023 about adaptation works not being processed/being declined found that tenants in three cases had not sought referrals or recommendations from professionals as required when making requests to conduct adaptation works to their flats;
- as of 30 June 2023, there were 1 558 PRH flats with hearing-impaired tenants, and of which only 89 (6%) had been installed with the Visual Fire Alarm systems;
- 6 out of 237 housing estates had not appointed Access Officers for a long period since the implementation of the Access Co-ordinator and Access Officer Scheme in April 2011. In one of the above six estates, no Access Officer had been appointed as at 30 June 2023;

Lift Addition Programme

- as at 31 March 2023, there were 24 proposals on the list of potential future lift addition projects. The list was circulated to the Maintenance

³ In 2006, HD developed a multi-sensory map with a group of persons with disabilities to provide directions by visual, tactile and voice messages for all people, regardless of their age and quality of vision. As at 30 June 2023, multi-sensory maps were installed in 72 (37%) of the 193 PRH estates.

Planning and Review Committee⁴ of HD quarterly from December 2015 to March 2023, but none of the proposals on the list had been shortlisted for implementation;

- while HD had sought agreement with the co-owners on the project details and cost sharing on six lift addition proposals shortlisted in LAP 2015-2016 and LAP 2016-2017, the co-owners in four proposals subsequently disagreed to proceed with the projects. For the remaining two proposals, the detailed feasibility studies were still in progress as of June 2023;
- as of June 2023, no lift services were provided in 30 blocks located in Cheung Kwai Estate in Cheung Chau, Lung Tin Estate in Tai O and Model Housing Estate in North Point, where about 30% of tenants were elderly;

Retrofitting lifts at walkways relating to housing estates under Universal Accessibility Programme

- after receiving replies of not granting agreement from the relevant parties on lift retrofitting items selected by the District Councils, HyD took an average of 17.5 months to report the status to the relevant District Councils;
- in November 2021 and January 2022, HyD entered into agreements with two consultants for the retrofitting of 14 lifts at 10 walkways in four districts (at a sum of about \$9.76 million) and 33 lifts at 21 walkways in nine districts (at a sum of about \$17.2 million) respectively. In June 2022, with a view to enhancing the overall effectiveness of contract management, HyD and the two consultants agreed to adjust the services between their agreements by transferring the services to be provided at the construction phase for five walkways from one agreement to another;
- there were extensions of time by HyD for completing the construction works of two lifts, which were mainly caused by long time taken in handling underground utilities by the works contractor. For one lift, an

⁴ The Maintenance Planning and Review Committee is co-chaired by the three Assistant Directors of the Estate Management Division of HD. Meetings are held regularly to, among others, review individual maintenance and improvement proposals and progress of maintenance and improvement programmes.

overall extension of time of 1 084 days was granted, including 715 days for handling underground utilities; and

- while the relevant works contract commenced in October 2019, as at 31 August 2023, the construction of three lifts had not yet been completed with delays forecasted by HyD ranging from 406 to 620 days. Such delays were mainly attributable to the slow progress of the works contractor and site idling.

5. The Committee did not hold any public hearing on this subject. Instead, it asked for written responses regarding inspections on barrier-free access and facilities in PRH estates, handling of applications for in-flat adaptation works from elderly or disabled tenants, installation of Visual Fire Alarm systems for hearing-impaired tenants, appointment of Access Officers, implementation of shortlisted projects under LAP, PRH domestic blocks not provided with lifts, communication between HyD and District Councils on lift retrofitting items, as well as contract and project management by HyD on lift retrofitting works. The replies from the **Secretary for Housing** and the **Director of Highways** are in *Appendices 18* and *19* respectively.

6. The Committee wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by Audit.