

**For discussion
on 3 October 2022**

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

The Hong Kong Housing Authority's Measures in Facilitating Tenants with Special Needs

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the measures implemented by the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) in facilitating public rental housing (PRH) tenants with special mobility needs.

BACKGROUND

2. HA has all along attached importance to the housing and mobility needs of people with special mobility needs (including persons with disabilities and the elderly). In line with Government's policies of building and making improvements towards a barrier-free environment, HA has put in place a series of supporting measures in terms of housing arrangements, building design and facilities, social network, etc. These measures not only enable people with special mobility needs to have comfortable homes, but also enable them to access premises and make use of the facilities and services therein as all others, such that they can live independently, participate in full in various social activities and integrate into the community.

HOUSING ARRANGEMENT

3. To adhere to the "caring" and "customer-focused" principles, HA will provide appropriate housing arrangements for people with special mobility needs, including prospective tenants or sitting tenants.

Housing Allocation

4. For PRH applicants or their family members who have special housing needs (e.g. requiring renal dialysis at home, suffering from hyperactivity disorder, having non-temporary indoor dependence on wheelchair for mobility or tetraplegia), HA will count them as having an additional family member by the time of allocation and will allocate a PRH unit with extra space to them. For people who have non-temporary indoor dependence on wheelchair for mobility

or tetraplegia, HA will arrange pre-offer of flats prior to the issue of offer letters so that they and their occupational therapist/ physiotherapist may conduct flat visit to advise on whether the flats are suitable for their living and suggest home modification works. This allows the flats to be modified to cater for their needs in respect of their health condition and use of different types of wheelchairs. Subject to occupational therapist/ physiotherapist's advice that the flat is fit for the prospective tenants' living, and that the home modifications works can be carried out according to their suggestions, HA will issue offer letter formally.

Under-occupation policy

5. HA adopts a less stringent approach to under-occupation (UO) households with special housing needs. According to the prevailing policy, tenants will become UO households if the size of the flats currently occupied exceeds the established allocation standard. UO households have to move to PRH units corresponding to the standard of respective family size. Having considered the difficulties of disabled persons and elderly in adapting to a new environment, HA will exclude households with disabled or elderly members aged 70 or above from the UO list and will not require them to transfer.

Letter of Assurance

6. To assure future accommodation of tenants who vacate their PRH flats due to admission to hospital, sheltered workshop hostels or residential care homes for the elderly, or joining the "Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme for Elderly Persons Retiring to Guangdong & Fujian Province", "Guangdong Scheme" or "Fujian Scheme", HA will, upon request, issue Letter of Assurance (LA) to the tenants concerned who voluntarily surrender the PRH unit without breaching the Tenancy Agreement in the course of flat recovery. 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.

BUILDING DESIGN AND FACILITIES

7. HA is committed to improving the living qualities of residents in public housing developments (PHDs). HA also takes into account the needs of the elderly and other residents with limited mobility in the design of PHDs, with a view to providing a safe and convenient living environment.

Estate Facilities

8. When planning for new PHDs, HA will follow relevant government policies and planning requirements and liaise with relevant departments to reserve space for the provision of appropriate welfare, community and medical facilities to serve the residents and the neighboring community. Among them, some facilities are more common, such as child care centre, integrated children and youth services centre, integrated family service centre, neighborhood elderly centre, day care centre for the elderly and residential care home for the elderly. For example, the Social Welfare Facilities Block in Hoi Tat Estate in Sham Shui Po completed in 2021 provides services such as Residential Care Home for the Elderly, Special Child Care Centre, Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Service Centre and Day Activity Centre. Moreover, at the Community Complex in Queens Hill Estate in Fanling completed in March 2022, welfare facilities including Integrated Children and Youth Services Centre, Residential Care Home for the Elderly, Neighbourhood Elderly Centre and Child Care Centre etc. will be put into service soon.

9. In line with the government's initiative, HA will where practicable also reserve about 5% of the total domestic gross floor area (GFA) for welfare uses in PHDs to be completed in 2026-27 or beyond to provide more welfare facilities. Depending on site conditions, HA will accommodate some of the ancillary facilities and other government facilities, as appropriate, in the earlier development phases as far as possible. For example, HA has increased the area for welfare facilities to about 5% of the total domestic GFA as a whole in the five PHDs at Pokfulam South. The additional facilities include residential care home for the elderly cum day care unit for the elderly and home care services (frail elderly persons), etc.

Universal Design

10. Since 2002, HA has been adopting major elements of Universal Design concept on various types of barrier-free facilities at common areas and inside flats of new PHDs, such as providing non-slip floor tiles on suitable floor surfaces, lever type mixers for water basin/shower and door handles, larger switches and doorbell buttons at a height easier to access, ramp access for wheelchair users, and tactile guide path and multi-sensory map to assist visually impaired persons going to domestic blocks and major estate facilities. To facilitate the needs of the elderly and residents with limited mobility in shower areas, starting from 2020, HA has installed grab bars in shower areas of flat units in some newly completed PHDs. Since 2021, grab bars have been installed in the shower areas of flat units in all newly completed PHDs.

11. Since 2008, HA has been adopting a two-level lighting control system at common areas of domestic blocks. Under the triggered mode, the illumination level can meet the requirement of the Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 2008 for the need of visually impaired persons. When there is no user in need, the illumination level will switch to saving mode to reduce unnecessary energy consumption. In accordance with the 2014 amendments to the Code of Practice for Fire Safety in Buildings 2011, HA has provided temporary refuge spaces for wheelchair users at lift lobby of every floor of domestic blocks in approved PHDs since 2014.

12. Furthermore, existing public housing estates of HA have been provided with barrier-free access and facilities such as handrails in staircases, ramps in major footpath and entrances, dropped kerbs in major carriageway intersections and tactile guide paths connecting domestic blocks and major facilities within estates.

Lift Modernisation Programme and Lift Addition Programme

13. Lifts are essential mobility items for PRH residents. HA is committed to ensuring that the lifts are safe for use and in good working condition. Lift Modernisation Programme is a measure to achieve this goal. Under this programme, HA will first assess the performance of all lifts which have been operating over 25 years in PRH estates and then prioritise various modernisation works. Since the start of the programme in the 1990s, HA has completed modernisation works of more than 1 400 aged lifts. In 2021-22, HA has replaced 61 aged lifts and plans to modernise about 470 lifts in 24 PRH estates in the next five years. Furthermore, HA has carried out Lift Addition Programme and has added 85 lifts, 6 escalators and 28 footbridges in 33 PRH estates.

Adaptation/Home modification works in PRH units and Transfer

14. To provide a suitable environment for PRH residents with special needs to carry out basic daily activities safely and independently, HA undertakes free adaptation/home modification works in the PRH unit upon tenant's application, including, where practicable, provision of a ramp at the entrance of flat, widening the doorway of bathroom, laying non-slip floor tiles on suitable floor surfaces, conversion of the bath tub into a shower area, installation of grab bars in the bathroom, raising the floor slab of the balcony to make it level with that of the living room. If a tenant only requests the provision of grab bars or installation of shower area in the bathroom, HA will directly arrange the related works free of charge without obtaining advice from a medical officer or a physiotherapist. For other adaptation/home modification works, in order to ensure that the works can meet the actual needs of individual tenants, HA will seek advice from professionals, such as medical officers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists or medical social workers with the tenant's consent.

15. If home modification works for tenants with special needs are not feasible due to physical constraints of the flats, they may apply for transfer together with their families. HA will consider such applications on individual merits and make appropriate arrangements.

Installation of Visual Fire Alarm System

16. Although visual fire alarm (VFA) system is not statutorily required, to address the need of the hearing-impaired persons residing in PRH estates, HA has notified eligible PRH residents the application arrangement for VFA since March 2020. When a communal fire alarm in a block is triggered, the VFA system inside the flat will flash simultaneously to promptly alert the hearing-impaired residents of the emergency. The scheme is entirely voluntary and free of charge. Up to 30 June 2022, HA has completed the installation of VFA systems inside 75 flats.

SOCIAL NETWORK

Guide dogs

17. Pursuant to the Tenancy Agreement, keeping of dogs inside leased premises without the prior written consent of HA is prohibited. To cater for tenants with special needs, such as those keeping guide dogs due to visual/audio disabilities, HA may consider granting approval to such application. In addition, guide dogs are welcomed in all shopping centres of HA.

Emergency Alarm System

18. Having regard to the mobility needs of the elderly, HA has extended the coverage of the subsidy for Emergency Alarm System (EAS) (also known as “Safety Bell”) since February 2021. In addition to the installation of traditional EAS products, the subsidy also covers mobile EAS devices, such as EAS mobile phones and watches, mobile app for smart phones and other products, and related service charges. This enables eligible singleton elderly and all elderly households who are not currently receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance to purchase EAS products to meet their needs. A one-off subsidy of not more than \$2,500 for the installation cost/service charge (excluding telephone charge) on a reimbursement basis will be offered to the applicants.

50% Concessionary Discount on Monthly and Hourly Parking Fees

19. To cater for the parking needs of the disabled, private car or motorcycle drivers who are living or working in PRH estate where the carpark is located, and are holding an approval letter from the Commissioner for Transport or a valid Disabled Person's Parking Permit (DPPP) issued by the Transport Department may enjoy 50% concessionary discount on monthly parking fees of the carparks under HA and be assigned priority in allocation of monthly parking spaces. In addition, private car or motorcycle drivers holding the approval letter or DPPP can enjoy 50% concessionary discount on hourly parking fees of HA's carparks.

Other Supporting Services

20. To promote community building, strengthen mutual care, foster a harmonious living environment and promote awareness of health care, HA has partnered with other government departments and non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to provide supporting services to tenants with special needs in PRH estates.

21. HA has all along been supporting charitable organisations to provide mobile Chinese medicine or physiotherapy services in public housing estates. Since 2006, Yan Oi Tong and Pok Oi Hospital have been providing Chinese medical service through their "Mobile Chinese Medical Vans". Similar medical services have been provided by Tung Wah Group of Hospitals and other charitable organisations since 2011. The Hong Kong PHAB Association has also provided "Mobile Physiotherapy Vehicle" service since 2012. These mobile services are provided in public housing estates without Chinese medical clinics or physiotherapy services. The vehicles are equipped with various medical equipment such as lifting platform to serve the disabled and provide a wide range of medical services including acupuncture.

22. Households having family members in need of special care such as having hearing impairment, visual impairment, limited mobility (wheelchair-bound), tetraplegia, or those who are required to undergo renal dialysis at home or having chronic diseases may opt for the special notification service provided by HA. Tenants may authorise staff of the estate offices to notify their contact person(s) in case of suspension of fresh water/electricity supply/lift service, in emergency case (e.g. fire), as well as transfer their emergency telephone contacts and such information to other departments (such as the Police, Fire Services Department) for liaison purpose.

23. During the COVID-19 pandemic, HA has proactively contacted all-elderly families and needy households in the estates, especially those under home isolation after the “restriction-testing declaration” (RTD) operations, to provide caring and appropriate support (e.g. providing information on "StayHomeSafe" and treatment arrangement, making referrals to other government departments or NGOs). Since late March 2022, we also assisted in liaising with relevant department to arrange direct Home Vaccination Service for the elderly during RTD operations. In April 2022, while we distributed “anti-epidemic service bags” to all households, we visited all-elderly families and households with special needs for direct delivery of the service bags. To facilitate the elderly to get vaccinated early, apart from offering assistance to PRH residents aged 60 or above and needy households to make online booking of vaccination, we also coordinated with relevant departments to assist in setting up mobile vaccination stations (MVS) and arranging shuttle bus services to take the elderly to nearby vaccination centres for the jabs. Up to August 2022, we had arranged to set up MVSs in 27 PRH estates, providing 58 times of service.

24. In addition to the series of measures mentioned above, if people with special mobility needs require other support services such as home help, rehabilitation and counselling services, HA would assist to refer them to Social Welfare Department direct or to relevant NGOs.

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

Housing Bureau
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