

## **Memorandum for the Hong Kong Housing Authority**

### **The Hong Kong Housing Authority's Policies and Measures in Support of the "Ageing in Place" Policy of the Government**

#### **PURPOSE**

This paper informs Members of the Hong Kong Housing Authority's (HA) current policies and measures in support of the "ageing in place" policy of the Government.

#### **BACKGROUND**

##### **Ageing in Place**

2. With the rapidly ageing population in Hong Kong, it is the Government's policy to achieve "ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up". With adequate community care and support, many elderly persons with long-term care needs can still continue to age in their own place. To this end, the Government aims to strengthen community care services to enable elderly persons to stay in the community for as long as possible and avoid unnecessary institutionalisation. Currently, a range of centre-based and home-based community care services are already provided by the Government at the community level.

3. From the longer term planning perspective, promoting an age-friendly environment for "active ageing", "ageing in place" and "inter-generational support" are important elements of enhancing liveability as proposed under the "Hong Kong 2030+: Towards a Planning Vision and Strategy Transcending 2030". Forward planning is essential in order to cater for the need of the rapidly ageing population. In the course of planning for new developments, it is important to reserve spaces for day-care centres and residential care homes for the elderly; to ensure adequate provision of quality and accessible public spaces for their social, leisure and recreation needs; to incorporate safe crossing facilities to ensure barrier free access; and to promote universal design in public and private residential developments as well as public

spaces and communities, etc. In addition, incorporating the “active design” concept in the community, for example, by providing walking trails and cycling tracks, can serve to encourage the public to live a more active life and in turn facilitate their healthy ageing.

### **Long Term Housing Strategy**

4. The Government announced the new Long Term Housing Strategy (LTHS) in December 2014, which is the first long-term strategic document in housing since 1998. LTHS has set out several strategic directions to gradually avert the current supply-demand imbalance, including providing more public rental housing (PRH) units; providing more subsidised sale flats; and stabilising the residential property market etc.

5. During the three-month public consultation on LTHS carried out by the LTHS Steering Committee (Steering Committee) in September 2013, the housing needs of specific groups of the community, including those of the elderly, were deliberated<sup>Note 1</sup>. In particular, the Steering Committee noted that the Government’s elderly policy “*is to encourage the elderly to ‘age in place’, with the principle of supporting ‘ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up’*”. Having regard to the efforts made by HA in terms of PRH allocation, estate design and the provision of supporting facilities, the Steering Committee recommended that **HA should maintain its efforts to provide affordable rental housing with suitable facilities for eligible elderly people, and continue to refine its PRH allocation policy in line with the “ageing in place” principle**. The Steering Committee did **not** advocate the provision of purpose-built blocks for elderly PRH tenants.

6. As for purpose-built housing for middle and high income elderly (such as those under the Senior Citizen Residence Scheme (SEN) for middle-income elderly provided by the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS), or other community initiatives or market-driven schemes for middle and higher income elderly), they should only be supported subject to the availability of necessary land resources. Currently, HKHS is operating two SEN projects, namely Jolly Place in Tseung Kwan O and Cheerful Court in Jordan Valley, providing 576 SEN units, and other ancillary facilities such as Residential Care Home for the Elderly. Given the substantial shortfall of land for public housing to address the needs of low to middle-income households from all age groups, the Government will only support and facilitate SEN projects initiated by HKHS subject to availability of suitable sites only on a case-by-case basis.

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Note 1 Please see Chapter 5 of the LTHS Public Consultation Document published in September 2013 and Chapter 3 of the LTHS Report on Public Consultation published in February 2014. These documents can be found on the Transport and Housing Bureau’s website (<http://www.thb.gov.hk/eng/policy/housing/policy/lths/index.htm>).

7. Among the comments received during the public consultation, respondents generally acknowledged that Hong Kong's population was ageing and **agreed with the Government's policy of "ageing in place"** and the role assumed by HA in providing affordable rental housing with suitable facilities for eligible low-income elderly people. There were also respondents who acknowledged the role played by HKHS in the provision of housing for the elderly.

8. In view of the recommendation of the Steering Committee and the outcome of the public consultation, the LTHS has set out the vision of helping **all** households in Hong Kong gain access to adequate and affordable housing. Hence, in considering long term housing demand, the LTHS projection method aims to assess the number of new housing units required to provide adequate housing to **each and every household** over the long term. The policy directions and initiatives under LTHS are also applicable to **all** types of households, including the elderly. With reference to the LTHS, the Government's existing housing policy is to provide **"housing for all"** rather than "housing for a specific age group", such as the elderly and youths.

## **POLICIES AND MEASURES OF HA**

9. HA is a statutory body established in April 1973 under the Housing Ordinance with the duty to secure the provision of housing for specific kind of persons<sup>Note 2</sup>. 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. With the view to providing affordable quality housing to these families, HA serves to provide an age-friendly and barrier-free estate environment to address the needs of residents of different ages and physical ability.

### **Housing for Senior Citizen and Sheltered Housing**

10. In the past, HA introduced schemes such as Housing for Senior Citizen (HSC) and Sheltered Housing dedicated to the elderly but turned out to be not successful. HSC<sup>Note 3</sup> is a hostel type specially designed PRH housing

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Note 2 Section 4(1) of the Housing Ordinance says, "The Authority shall exercise its powers and discharge its duties under this Ordinance so as to secure the provision of housing and such amenities ancillary thereto as the Authority thinks fit for such kinds or classes of persons as the Authority may, subject to the approval of the Chief Executive, determine."

Note 3 There are three HSC design types, namely Type 1 Design (HS1), Type 2 Design (HS2) and Type 3 Design (HS3). HS1 is the earliest design through internal partitioning of a normal domestic flat into two to four smaller units with shared toilet and kitchen facilities. HS2 is designed with shared common kitchen and toilet facilities. HS3 is with shared common kitchen facilities but independent toilet provided inside the flat.

with shared facilities, but it is not popular and has a high vacancy rate. A phasing out programme has been launched whereby HS1 blocks with a vacancy rate over 30% and HS2/HS3 blocks with a vacancy rate over 50% would be identified for conversion into normal PRH. Sheltered Housing was launched in the eighties when singleton flats were not available in PRH estates. Under the scheme, suitable premises in some PRH blocks were allocated to some voluntary organisations to provide flats with shared facilities to three or four elderly persons living together in a flat. Similar to HSC, it has not been popular as elderly persons would not prefer living together with shared facilities.

### **Support for elderly PRH applicants and elderly tenants**

11. With the view to addressing the needs of elderly PRH applicants and sitting elderly tenants, HA has currently in place a series of policies and measures.

### **PRH Application**

12. For many households in need, PRH is the most hassle-free, stable, and affordable place for ageing. HA has several housing schemes that grant priority to elderly PRH applicants, including –

(a) Single Elderly Persons Priority Scheme

Single elderly persons aged 58 or above can apply for PRH under this priority scheme. They must have attained the age of 60 at the time of flat allocation.

(b) 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. Flat allocation would be arranged upon all of them attaining the age of 60.

(c) Harmonious Families Priority Scheme

Under this scheme, eligible PRH applicants with elderly family members may enjoy a credit waiting time of six months. Young families and their elderly parents/elderly 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 subject to their choice and availability of resources.

13. The latest average waiting time <sup>Note 4</sup> for elderly one-person applicants was 2.6 years, as compared with 4.6 years for general applicants (i.e. family and elderly one-person applicants).

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

14. 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 the following schemes between 2007 and 2008, to facilitate the establishment of a family-based support network and further establish the concept of 'ageing in place'. As at end-December 2017, about 48 540 households have benefitted from these arrangements.

(a) **Harmonious Families Transfer Scheme**

It allows PRH tenants to apply for transfer to the same or nearby estates of their offspring/elderly parents residing in different District Council districts for mutual care. An annual quota of 1 000 flats is set aside for the transfer exercise under this scheme.

(b) **Harmonious Families Addition Scheme**

The scheme allows an elderly PRH tenant to add an adult offspring together with his/her family member(s) into his/her tenancy, subject to the rule of "one-line continuation" of family (i.e. the elderly tenant(s) may live with only one married adult offspring's family) as well as passing of Comprehensive Means Test and Domestic Property Test.

(c) **Harmonious Families Amalgamation Scheme**

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

### **Building Design and Facilities**

15. Owing to functional declines or even impaired mobility, the elderly may need a suitable physical environment to carry out basic activities associated with daily living safely and independently, including barrier-free access within

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Note 4 Waiting time refers to the time taken between registration for PRH and 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 refers to the average of the waiting time of those general applicants who were housed to PRH in the past 12 months.

the estate and suitable home layout and facilities. In response to these needs, HA has put in place a host of measures.

### Universal design

16. HA has adopted the concept of Universal Design in residential units and common areas gradually of newly built PRH estates since 2002. Major elements of Universal Design include various types of barrier-free features in common areas in the estates and in the flats, such as non-slip floor tiles on suitable floor surfaces, space for future grab bar installations, lever type sink/shower mixers and door handles, and larger buttons and switches installed at a height within easy reach.

17. For existing PRH estates, HA has completed many Universal Design facilities in external and common areas through the Barrier-free Access Improvement Programme, Lift Modernisation Programme and Lift Addition Programme. For individual PRH units, HA has put in place home modification efforts to provide tailor-made alterations to meet the needs of elderly or disabled tenants.

18. The Barrier-free Access Improvement Programme, costing \$330 million, was launched in 2002 to carry out improvement works 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. All the above improvement works have been completed.

19. HA has also been replacing all the aged lifts, and, whenever practicable, providing lift service for floors without lift access. Since the start of the lift modernisation programme in the 1990's, modernisation works for more than 1 000 aged lifts were completed. In the past year, 107 aged lifts have been replaced. HA's plan is to upgrade about 500 lifts in around 30 PRH estates in the coming six to seven years at an estimated cost of \$1 billion. In addition, HA has been implementing a lift addition programme since 2008, the installation of 83 lifts in 32 PRH estates have been completed.

### Adaptation works/home modification in PRH units

20. HA undertakes adaptation works/home modification as necessary and bears the full cost incurred for the sitting/prospective elderly tenants as well as families with members over 60. If required, advice from physiotherapists or medical officers will be sought for the appropriate conversion work. The 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. If an application for such works is submitted before/during intake, prompt actions would be taken to help the concerned families to move into the PRH units. Postponing the commencement date of the tenancy until work completion would be considered as necessary. In case such works cannot be carried out in the unit due to other constraints, or the health condition of the tenants warrants a unit with a larger living space, arrangements will be made to transfer the tenants to other suitable PRH units

21. For cases where home modification works are not feasible due to site constraints, the elderly tenant may apply for internal transfer within the estate or special transfer to a flat in another estate together with his/her family. Eligibility vetting via the Comprehensive Means Test and the Domestic Property Test is not required. Such applications will be considered on individual merits and appropriate arrangements will be made.

22. For refurbishment of recovered PRH units, given the constraints in terms of size and layout of the older block types, extensive alterations to incorporate most Universal Design elements may not be welcomed by individual PRH applicants. They may have to forfeit a housing offer if they find it not suitable and refuse the offer. From practical experience, elderly applicants and those with physical disabilities have special needs may require tailor-made alterations upon the advice of their physiotherapists. Normally the home modification works can be completed in two to five weeks. Those Universal Design elements that are mostly favoured by tenants, viz. lever type mixer, adjustable shower head and conversion of bath tub into shower area will be incorporated. At the same time, HA will endeavour to adhere to the target turnaround time of 44 days for refurbishing recovered units to meet the need.

#### Elderly fitness facilities/equipment

23. At present, there are about 1 800 sets of elderly fitness facilities/equipment installed in PRH estates. The tailor-made facilities, including Tai Chi Wheels, Peddle Pusher, Health Walker and Foot Massage Path, are for elderly tenants to stretch their muscles and improve body strength. Besides, HA plans to gradually increase the provision of diversified recreational facilities at 102 PRH estates which have a higher proportion of elderly tenants. As at December 2017, installation works of such facilities have commenced in 94 PRH estates and all the relevant works are expected to be completed by March 2019.

## **Under-Occupation Policy**

24. Under the existing tenancy agreement, an under-occupation (UO) household<sup>Note 5</sup> has to move to a PRH unit of suitable size which HA considers appropriate for the family. Whilst relocating UO households to smaller units of suitable size can release larger units for allocation to households in need, HA has been taking into account the difficulties of the elderly and disabled persons in adapting to a new environment, and allows the elderly to age in the flat they have been living in, without being asked to transfer. Households with disabled members or elderly members aged 70 or above are therefore excluded from the UO list, and those with elderly members aged between 60 and 69 are placed at the end of the UO list for transfer. As at end-September 2017, PRH households with at least a member aged 70 or above enjoy an average of 14.4 m<sup>2</sup> per person; apart from those households, households with at least a member aged between 60 and 69 enjoy an average of 13.4 m<sup>2</sup> per person. The figure for all PRH households is 13.2 m<sup>2</sup> per person.

## **Financial assistance**

25. Tenants of all elderly households (i.e. all household members aged 60 or above) can apply for exemption from paying rental deposit at the time of signing up of the tenancy agreement or apply for refund of rental deposit. Moreover, elderly households with income falling below 70% of the Income Limit for PRH or with Rent-to-Income Ratio exceeding 18.5% can be granted 50% rent reduction under the Rent Assistance Scheme.

## **Non-Housing Services**

26. 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.

27. For example, HA has been supporting the work of non-governmental organisations such as the Poly-U Henry G. Leong Mobile Integrated Health Centre 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, such as Yan Oi Tong, Pok Oi Hospital, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, in providing “Mobile Chinese Medical Van” service in PRH estates. A further example is that, elderly households who are not currently receiving Comprehensive Social

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Note 5 After tenants taking up PRH units, there may be deletion of family members due to moving-out, death, marriage, emigration, etc. rendering the remaining family members to enjoy far more living space than is allowed under the established allocation standards and become an under-occupation household.



Security Assistance can obtain a special grant on a reimbursement basis for a one-off installation cost up to a maximum of \$2,500, to acquire any emergency alarm service on the market to meet their needs.

## **CONCLUSION**

28. It remains the target of the Government and HA to provide the first flat offer to general applicants for PRH at around three years on average. The Government and HA will spare no efforts in reducing the waiting time for PRH for elderly and family applicants. To this end, it is crucial to increase the supply of PRH units. HA's priority remains in expediting and increasing the supply of public housing through better utilisation of identified and existing public housing sites.

29. At the same time, HA will continue with policies and measures as described above to cater for needs of elderly PRH applicants and tenants. Taking into consideration the ageing PRH tenant profile, HA will continue to explore new initiatives to improve the living environment for the elderly tenants and consult stakeholders to ensure the initiatives are effective in meeting the needs of elderly tenants.

## **INFORMATION**

30. This paper is issued for Members' information.

Polly KWOK  
Secretary, Housing Authority  
Tel No.: 2761 5003  
Fax No.: 2762 1110

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(Estate Management Division)

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