

**Memorandum for the Subsidised Housing Committee of
the Hong Kong Housing Authority**

**Proposed Small Bathroom Improvement in
Po Tin and Tin Yan Phase 1 Estates**

PURPOSE

This paper informs Members the findings of the Department's study on improving the bathroom size in Po Tin and Tin Yan Phase 1 Estates, and seeks Members' approval to the proposed improvement work.

BACKGROUND

2. At the Legislative Council Panel on Housing meeting held on 3 June 2013 when the issue of small bathrooms of Po Tin Estate was discussed, Members of the Panel passed a motion of requesting the Housing Authority (HA) to study ways to enlarge the bathrooms. Although not mentioned by Members, Tin Yan Phase 1 Estate actually is of the same design as Po Tin Estate and shall therefore be considered by us in conjunction with.

3. Po Tin Estate (with 9 blocks, 8,736 units) in Tuen Mun, Tin Yan Phase 1 Estate (with 4 blocks, 3,528 units) in Tin Shui Wai (thereafter as the Estates) were completed in 2000 and 2001 respectively and originally designed as Interim Housing (IH) for transient accommodation. Due to declining demand for IH, to fully utilize public resources, in 2004 the HA vide approval of SHC Paper 43/2004 started to flexibly let the vacant and surplus recovered units in Po Tin Estate as public rental housing (PRH), whilst Tin Yan Phase 1 was totally let as PRH ever since its first intake of tenants in September 2004. As today, there are about 25% IH to 75% PRH units in Po Tin Estate. PRH households are generally allocated larger units than IH households, on par with other PRH estate allocation standard although some of the 1-person households may be allocated smaller units same as IH allocation due to high demand. Residents are generally satisfied with the environment and facilities of the units and Estates that are equivalent to other PRH estates, except for the relatively small-size bathrooms.

4. Despite the facts that many PRH tenants in the Estates were admitted through the Express Flat Allocation Scheme, were offered tenancy incentives and special transfers were provided to those in need, the issue of small bathroom is still of concern. To address the problem, since 2006 the HA has implemented improvement works by relocating the wash basin from the bathroom entrance to the inner corner using “corner basin” so as to free up more maneuvering space in the bathroom. Up to today, we have completed the modification in 62% of the units in Po Tin and 57% in Tin Yan Phase 1 Estates through sitting residents’ application or vacant flats refurbishment. This modification, however, only improves the situation marginally and does not totally satisfy those concerned including some residents and Councillors.

COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF IMPROVEMENT OPTIONS

5. In response to rising aspirations and the request made at the Legislative Council Panel on Housing meeting on 3 June 2013, the Department has carried out a comprehensive study on various possible options to enlarge the bathrooms. Several factors including technical implications, nuisance, cost effectiveness and impact on housing supply associated with these options have been taken into consideration. The ensuing paragraphs set out the findings of the study.

The Recommended Option: Modifying Bathroom Wall within the Flat

6. The bathroom non-structural partition wall adjoining kitchen (applicable to Type 1, 2-Person flats) or living area (applicable to Type 3, 4 and 5-Person flats) can be modified by encroaching into the kitchen or living area. By so doing, the space of the bathroom can be enlarged (**Annex 1**). This option is the least disruptive, fastest and most cost-effective amongst the options explored. Only minor nuisance such as noise and vibration will be caused to neighbours. It is expected that the modification work for each unit can be completed in about 15 to 20 days at a works cost of around \$25,000 per unit^{Note 1}.

Note 1 Works include rebuild partition wall, relay water proofing layers and the affected wall and floor tiling, replace water closet and wash basin if necessary, alter plumbing and electrical wiring and any associated modification works.

7. Upon modification, the bathroom area will be enlarged to varying degrees depending on the flat types with an average of 30%. We have built site mock-ups which prove that maneuvering space within the bathrooms is much improved. This improvement was recognized by members of the Panel of Housing and the Subsidised Housing Committee during their respective site visits arranged.

Other Options Explored: More Extensive Conversions or to Rebuild the Blocks

8. The Department has also explored other options to enlarge the bathrooms. These include -

- (a) Pair-up Flats Conversion: to repartition the two flats confined within the structural walls;
- (b) Comprehensive Block Conversion: to repartition flats with some structural and facade modifications allowed;
- (c) Demolish and re-build the Estate.

9. We have carefully examined these options but have concluded that there are several technical constraints to conversions given the existing building configuration, including windows and water heater flue apertures, the building regulation requirements of prescribed window for the bathroom, kitchen and living area, the structural walls and the flat entrances. Also, the conversions will result in exposed building service installations. **Annex 2** shows the standard floor plan of the blocks with these technical constraints highlighted.

10. We considered that these options are not practical in the current situation due to -

- (a) their complexity, the time required to carry out the works and the extensive nuisance caused;
- (b) the necessary and complicated decanting and rehousing arrangements which will significantly impact on the already stretched housing supply;
- (c) conversion works have to be carried out block-by-block to sustain continuous IH supply, which implies that the small bathrooms could not be improved within a reasonable period; and

- (d) the works will be neither environmental-friendly^{Note 2} nor cost-effective.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

11. For the occupied units in the Estates, modification of the bathroom walls will be carried out on application of the residents. But the HA would modify all vacant or recurrently recovered flats during refurbishment. Having considered that the applied residents might be affected by the modification work, we will start the improvement programme by first modifying existing vacant flats such that a suitable number of these flats can be reserved as designated temporary accommodations. We will then invite residents to apply for the modification. Visits to the mock-up flats will be arranged prior to their application.

12. It is expected that not all residents will apply for the modification. However, given the limited number of vacant flats available for temporary accommodation without significantly affecting normal recurrent flats supply, the limited manpower resources, as well as the possible disturbance that might cause to the neighbourhood, modification work has to be carried out in batches. We will establish administrative criteria to determine the applicants' priority^{Note 3} for carrying out the modification.

13. During the work, the contractor will be required to install protective screens to separate the works area and the rest of the flat, and also cover residents' furnitures and belongings to mitigate disturbance. Residents concerned may, during the course of modification, apply for temporary accommodation^{Note 4} or choose to stay in their flat despite the latter is strongly discouraged for obvious reasons. Nonetheless, residents who choose to stay would not be able to access the bathroom and kitchen of the units when modification work is underway.

Note 2 Po Tin and Tin Yan are only of about 13-year old.

Note 3 Order of priority under consideration is - PRH applicants (in Po Tin case), larger family size, longer residence history, IH applicants (in Po Tin case). But special consideration will be given to households with social or medical or special reasons.

Note 4 Free temporary accommodation will be provided if requested which is furnished with furnitures and heavy electrical, water-heating and cooking appliances that the applicants are difficult to move their own.

14. The tentative programme, estimated to span across 3 to 4 years under the said limitations, is –

Estimated Maximum Production	Po Tin Estate ^{Note 5} (total 8,736 units)	Tin Yan Phase 1 Estate ^{Note 5} (total 3,528 units)
2014/15	2,500 units (29%)	660 units (19%)
2015/16	2,800 units (32%)	1,200 units (34%)
2016/17 and thereafter	Remaining 3,436 units (39%)	Remaining 1,668 units (47%)

15. To enable quick start of the programme, scheduled in second quarter of 2014/15 for Po Tin and followed by Tin Yan a few months behind after smooth running of the process, the works will be carried out by the District Term Contractor of the respective districts during the initial period. But we will consider tendering separate dedicated contract(s) at the appropriate time thereafter.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

16. The estimated modification work cost is around \$25,000^{Note 6} per flat plus other related cost of \$1,600^{Note 7} per flat. Total cost, if all units are modified, for Po Tin and Tin Yan Phase 1 Estates are \$232.4M and \$93.8M respectively. The estimated expenditure in 2014/15 for Po Tin is \$66.5M and for Tin Yan is \$17.6M. The expenditure in 2015/16 for Po Tin is \$74.5M and for Tin Yan is \$31.9M. The expenditures in 2014/15 will be absorbed in the 2014/15 Approved Budget. For the expenditures from 2015/16 onwards, appropriate funding will be sought in the future budget exercises.

Note 5 The production includes both sitting resident applications, as well as vacant flat refurbishment of about 1,500 and 120 units per year for Po Tin Estate and Tin Yan Estate respectively.

Note 6 Cost of the modification work as described in Note 1.

Note 7 Cost of furnishing the temporary accommodation after spreading out for repeated use, its free rent, free electricity and water provided and the additional property management, security and cleansing services required to be provided by service providers in supporting the programme.

STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

17. Additional one Assistant Clerk of Works and 4 Works Supervisors will be required to support the programme. They will be met by internal redeployment of experienced staff with their replacement through recruitment of body-shop staff at an estimated cost of \$4.4M for the programme.

PUBLIC REACTION AND PUBLICITY

18. We consider the recommended modifying bathroom wall within the flat is the best option after considering all the factors. The proposal was endorsed by Panel on Housing at its meeting of 10 February 2014 but the Department had stressed that it would need the approval of the HA Subsidised Housing Committee before implementation. We expect that it would be welcomed by PRH tenants/IH licencees as a better option in improving the small bathroom, as compared both to the original and the corner-basin design, due to its enhanced maneuvering space and the additional storage shelves that we would provide as a package. If the recommendation is approved by the Committee, promulgation of the programme to residents will be made via estate newsletters, EMAC, notices and application invitation letters.

RECOMMENDATION

19. Members are requested to approve the recommended option of modifying the bathroom wall within the flat (paragraphs 6 and 7) for improving the small bathrooms, and its implementation plan (paragraphs 11 to 15) for Po Tin and Tin Yan Phase 1 Estates.

DECLASSIFICATION

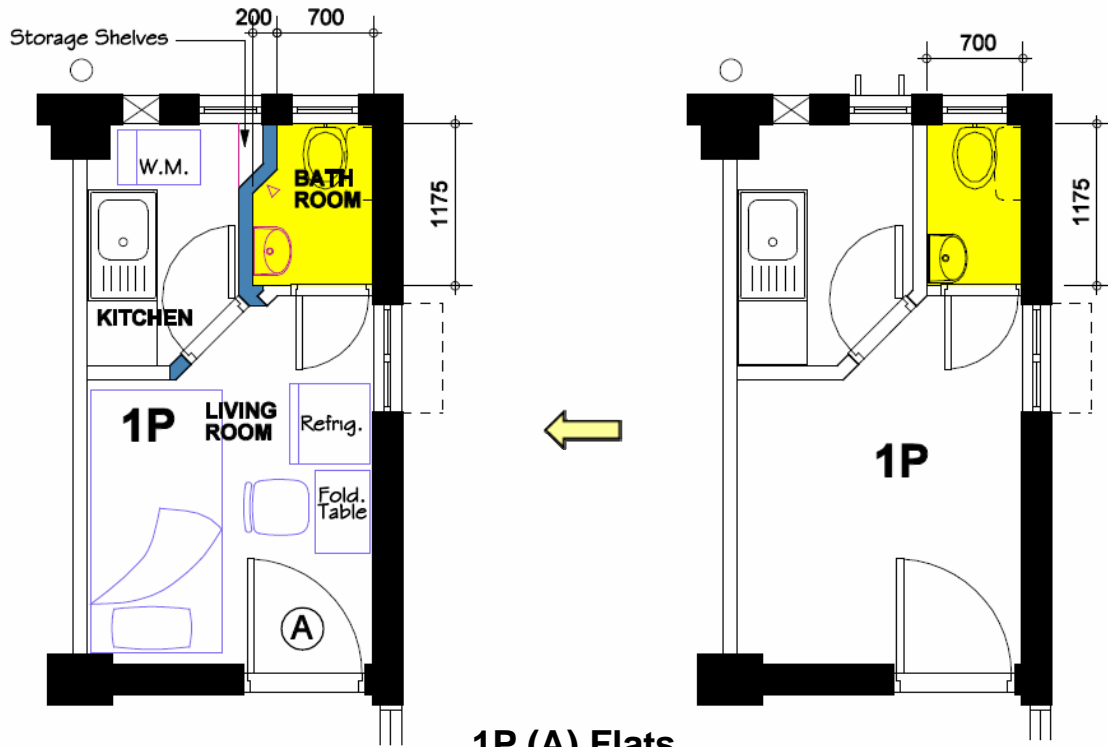
20. We recommend that this paper be declassified upon Members' approval of the recommendations in paragraph 19. This paper will be made available to the public at the HA website, the Department's library and through the Departmental Access to Information Officer if it is declassified.

PRESUMPTION

21. It is not thought that Members will object to the recommendation at paragraph 19 and declassification of this paper in paragraph 20. If no objection or request for discussion is received by the Committees' Secretary by **noon on 24 March 2014**, approval from SHC will be presumed and appropriate actions will be taken.

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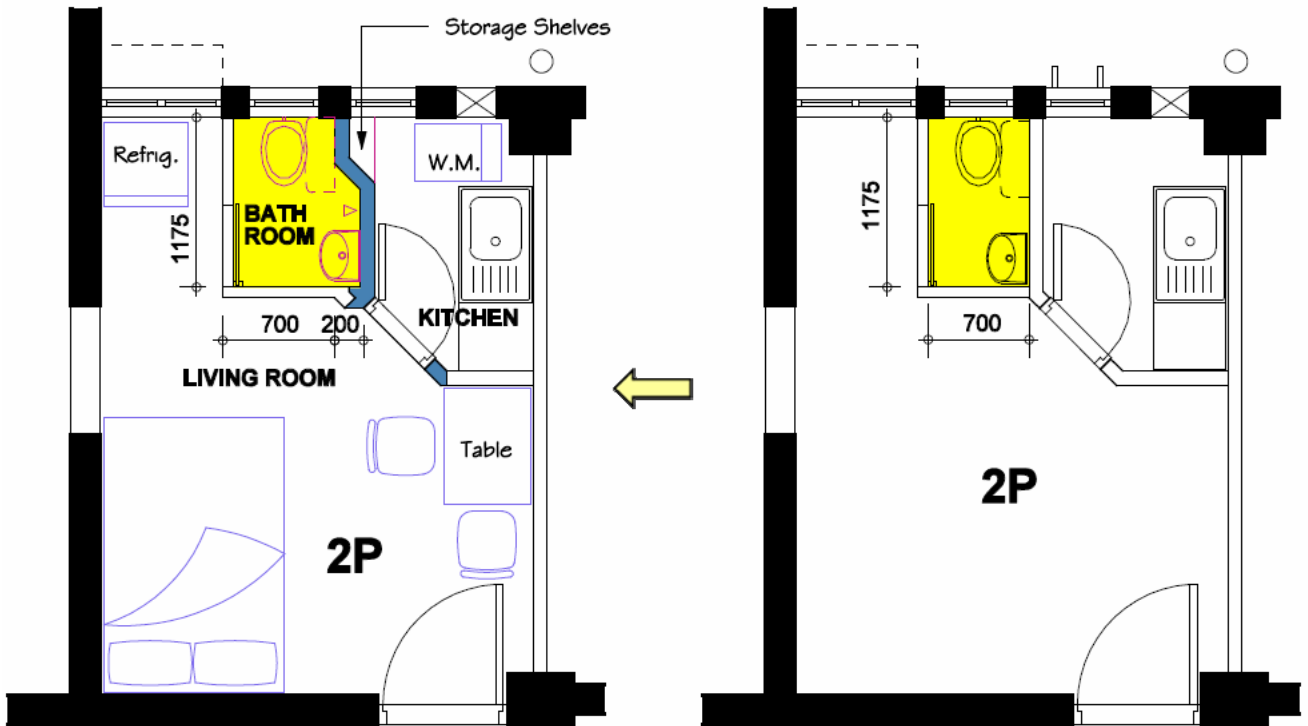
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1P (A) Flats
(22% of total flats)



1P (B) Flats
(11% of total flats)



2P Flats
(22% of total flats)



**3/4/5P Flats
(45% of total flats)**

Existing Floor Plan and Conversion Technical Constraints

