

Government launches three-year Cash Allowance Trial Scheme (with photos/video)

The Government announced today (June 17) that the three-year Cash Allowance Trial Scheme (CATS) will be launched in late June to alleviate the difficulties in livelihood faced by grass-roots families who have been waiting for public rental housing (PRH) for a long period of time. CATS is an initiative announced by the Chief Executive in early 2020 and will be implemented by the Housing Department (HD).

The amount of cash allowance is determined by the number of persons in a PRH application who meet all eligibility criteria. The levels of cash allowance are about half of the current Maximum Rent Allowance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA): \$1,300 for a one-person household, \$2,250 for a two-person household, \$2,700 for a three-person household, \$3,050 for a four-person household, \$3,350 for a five-person household, and \$3,900 for a household with six or more persons. The cash allowance is not a "rental subsidy". The HD will not request the applicant households to provide documents such as tenancy agreements or receipts on rent payment.

The main eligibility criteria of CATS include the following:

- (a) must be PRH General Applicant (GA) households (meaning applicant households with two or more persons, and applicants under the Single Elderly Persons Priority Scheme);
- (b) have been waiting for PRH for more than three years; have not yet been provided the first PRH flat offer; and the eligibility for PRH allocation must remain valid;
- (c) living in Hong Kong but not living in public housing; and
- (d) not receiving CSSA.

About 90 000 PRH GA households will have waited for PRH for more than three years by end July this year and may meet other eligibility criteria for applying for the cash allowance. The HD will issue letters to these households to notify them of the arrangements in relation to CATS and will also attach an Application Form of CATS. After issuing the letters, the HD will send Short Message Services (SMSs) to the households concerned.

Households who are eligible to apply for the cash allowance should complete the Application Form as early as possible upon receipt and submit it together with the required document(s). Means of submission are as follows:

- send by post to the Cash Allowance Office, Housing Department, P.O. Box 209, Tsuen Wan Post Office; or
- drop within office hours to the drop-in box of the HD at the Cash Allowance Office, Housing Department at 5/F, 1 Kwai On Road, Kwai Chung, New

Territories, or the Hong Kong Housing Authority Customer Service Centre at 3 Wang Tau Hom South Road, Kowloon.

The start month for calculating the cash allowance of each approved application is determined by the date on which the applicant household meets all eligibility criteria, or by the submission date of the completed Application Form, whichever is later, with July 1, 2021, being the earliest start date.

The HD will send an SMS to the applicant within one month after receiving the completed Application Form to acknowledge receipt. Since there will be a large number of applications upon the launch of CATS, it is estimated that it will take about one to three months to process straightforward cases during the first few months. The lead time of processing will hopefully be reduced afterwards. After vetting, the HD will issue a Notification of Application Result to the applicant as soon as possible. Successful households will receive the cash allowance on a monthly basis via bank transfer. Even if the HD cannot complete vetting of an application within the month in which it is submitted, any outstanding amount yet to be received by the households previously will be included in the cash allowance when it is disbursed for the first time.

Those applying for the cash allowance should note that the information provided in the Application Form must be true and correct. The household must notify the HD immediately if there are any changes in family circumstances during the period of receiving the cash allowance. It is a criminal offence for anyone to wilfully provide false information or omit certain information in order to obtain the cash allowance by deception. Apart from refunding the overpaid amount of the cash allowance, he or she may also be liable to imprisonment. To guard against abuse, the HD will conduct random checks of households receiving the cash allowance.

CATS will run for three years until mid-2024. The Government will conduct a review after the implementation of CATS at an appropriate juncture.

Please refer to the designated website (www.cashallowance.gov.hk) for details of CATS. For enquiries, please email to enquiry@cashallowance.gov.hk or call the hotline on 3105 3333.

