

Housing Authority's Rent Assistance Scheme for tenants with temporary financial difficulties

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Housing Authority:

The Rent Assistance Scheme (RAS) of Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) provides relief in the form of rent reductions to public rental housing (PRH) tenants who are facing temporary financial hardship. Under this scheme, eligible elderly households will be granted 50 per cent rent reduction whereas eligible non-elderly households will be granted 50 per cent or 25 per cent rent reduction.

At present (as at end of July) about 17 680 PRH households (2 per cent of the total PRH households in Hong Kong) benefit from the scheme, meaning an increase of 870 beneficiaries as compared with the same period last year.

Among the beneficiaries, 10 920 of them are elderly receiving a 50 per cent rent reduction. As for the remaining 6 760 non-elderly households, 5 630 of them were granted 50 per cent rent reduction and 1 130 granted 25 per cent rent reduction.

"Although the existing PRH rent adjustment mechanism has ensured PRH households' ability to afford the rent, individual tenants may face temporary financial hardship due to various situations. In 2017-18, the Housing Authority's expenses in RAS reached \$152 million," a spokesman for the Housing Department (HD) said today (September 2).

In the past, the HA has relaxed the eligibility criteria for applying for RAS several times in response to the demand of tenants and the socio-economic situation. This included relaxing the eligibility criteria for elderly households, households affected by redevelopment and non-elderly households; granting rent assistance to all successful applicants with retrospective effect from the first day of the month of the application, and reducing the frequency of review of RAS eligibility from once every year to once every two years, so that tenants with short-term financial difficulties can obtain assistance in a timely manner.

After receiving rent assistance for four consecutive years, non-elderly RAS recipients living in newer blocks in need of further assistance will be required to move to appropriate cheaper accommodation. Elderly households, households with disabled members and all RAS beneficiaries living in older block types are exempted from such a requirement. RAS beneficiaries moving to cheaper accommodation will also be entitled to receive a Domestic Removal Allowance and enjoy a rent-free period of one month under the new tenancy.

Apart from intensifying publicity about the RAS, the HD also implemented

the following measures to provide assistance to applicants:

(a) estate staff to adopt a caring and proactive approach in reaching out to tenants in need, in particular the elderly and single parent families, during home visits;

(b) solicit assistance from non-government organisations, local District Council members and Estate Management Advisory Committee members to refer tenants in need to estate offices for RAS application;

(c) upon receipt of enquiries on RAS, estate staff will explain to applicants details of the policy, eligibility criteria, procedures and the types of supporting documents required for vetting; and

(d) estate staff will also explain and provide assistance to tenants, in particular the elderly, who may have difficulties in understanding the application form.

"HD staff are always prepared to assist tenants in applying for RAS, particularly households with elderly and disabled family members. We will also provide outreaching services when necessary," the spokesman said.