

# Housing Department's response to Ombudsman's direct investigation report

Regarding a report released by the Office of the Ombudsman today (January 22) on its direct investigation into "Government's Work in Combating Abuse of Public Housing Resources", the Housing Department (HD) thanked the Ombudsman for appreciating the initiative of the Housing Authority (HA)/HD in the work of combating tenancy abuse and especially mentioning in the report that the HA has achieved remarkable results through the sequential launching of various intensified measures and enhanced Well-off Tenants Policies from mid-2023.

Since the current-term Government assumed office, the HA/HD has commenced a series of reviews to explore enhancements to the measures combating tenancy abuse. These enhanced measures have been successively implemented since mid-2023, including requiring all public rental housing (PRH) tenants to declare in batches starting from October 2023 their occupancy status and whether they own domestic property in Hong Kong every two years since admission to PRH; establishing a data matching and verification mechanism with the Land Registry to conveniently check the property ownership of PRH tenants; setting up a task force composed of retired disciplinary force officers to assist in the investigation of rather serious and hidden suspected cases and the provision of training on detection and investigation techniques to frontline staff; and implementing an award system for property management companies and security services contractors to encourage them to assist in detecting tenancy abuse. These showed the HA/HD's determination to combat the abuse of public housing resources.

In 2022/23 and 2024/25 (up to November 2024), the HA recovered over 7 000 PRH flats due to tenancy abuse and breaches of tenancy agreements or housing policies, equivalent to a large housing estate. The HA/HD will continue to work hard and proactively explore more feasible measures to enhance the accuracy, effectiveness and comprehensiveness of detection and investigation efforts.

"We just launched the Report Public Housing Abuse Award on January 15, hoping to gather more accurate intelligence on tenancy abuse for taking action. To strengthen the deterrent effect and gradually reduce the abuse of public housing resources, we are also actively exploring amendments to the Housing Ordinance to criminalise the act of serious tenancy abuse, targeting to have the Bills passed in the Legislative Council in mid-2025. We hope that capable tenants will surrender their PRH flats so that precious public housing resources can be allocated to those in genuine need, optimising the use of public housing resources," a spokesman for the HD said.

"Regarding the direct investigation report initiated by the Ombudsman, we thank the Ombudsman for the affirmation and recognition of our work in

combating tenancy abuse, and we appreciate its valuable views on our current mechanisms and measures. We will review and study the relevant recommendations in detail and continue to enhance the existing measures to combat tenancy abuse and actively explore various new methods to ensure the optimal use of public housing resources," the spokesman said.