LCQ12: Access control systems of public housing estates

Following is a question by the Hon Yang Wing-kit and a written reply by the Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (March 27):

Question:

It is learnt that at present, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HS) have installed metal gates and combination lock systems for the main entrances, side entrances and staircases of the blocks of their respective public housing estates (PHEs) and rental estates, while individual estates have adopted Octopus card or smart card access control systems. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in respect of (i) PHEs using combination lock systems as access control systems and (ii) PHEs adopting Octopus card or smart card access control systems, of the installation costs of such systems of HA, and their operating expenses in each of past three years; whether the Government knows the relevant figures for the rental estates under HS;

(2) of the PHEs under HA which have adopted Octopus card or smart card access control systems, and the reasons for adopting such systems (set out by PHE); whether the Government knows the relevant information of the rental estates under HS; and

(3) whether it will consider adopting Octopus card or smart card access control systems in newly completed PHEs and using such systems in place of the combination lock systems in phases for all PHEs in Hong Kong, so as to enhance the management efficiency of the access control systems; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Regarding the Hon Yang Wing-kit's questions, our reply are as follows:

The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) has always attached great importance to the security of its public housing estates. In general, comprehensive standard security systems are installed in all residential blocks of public rental housing (PRH) estates, including metal gates at main lobby entrances and staircase exits, main gate intercoms for connecting to the household telephone systems, digital combination lock systems and closed-circuit television (CCTVs) at building entrances and lifts.

Digital combination lock systems are standard provision in newly

completed residential blocks of PRH estates, and the cost of a digital combination lock system for each residential block is about $120,000. As for maintenance, the maintenance contract for the standard security systems is of a comprehensive type covering the full set of security systems and equipment, including the digital combination lock/smart card access control systems. In the past three years, the operating expenditure for maintaining the full set of standard security systems (including metal gates at main lobby entrances and staircase exits, main gate intercom for connecting to the household telephone systems, digital combination lock systems and CCTVs at building entrances and lifts) in all residential blocks of PRH estates in Hong Kong was about $33.8 million per annum.

From 2008 to 2010, the HA launched a pilot scheme on Smartcard Access Control System (SACS) for buildings in three newly completed PRH estates, namely Choi Ying Estate, Choi Tak Estate and Choi Fook Estate, under which smartcards are used in conjunction with the digital combination lock systems normally provided for access control to the buildings. A smartcard was issued to the tenant and each authorised occupant of the households concerned upon completion of the intake to activate the door lock for entry into the building in which they reside. The smartcard was free of charge when it was first issued, but the residents were required to pay a replacement fee if the card was lost or damaged thereafter. At that time, the cost of installing SACS (including the smartcards initially distributed) was about $100,000 per building. Experience of the pilot scheme showed that residents still preferred to enter their buildings by means of digital combination lock system. Having regard to the additional costs involved in the relevant SACS, the HA hence considered it not necessary to extend the scheme to other PRH residential blocks at that time.

While the HA currently has no plan to adopt Octopus cards and SACS in newly completed PRH residential blocks, the HA plans to pilot the use of a building access control system compatible with smartcards and smart phone mobile applications in one of the new estates to be completed in 2024 as a solution of contactless access control systems with a view to catering for the needs of different residents in future. We would observe the cost-effectiveness of the pilot scheme, the technical application of the system and the responses from residents to make continuous enhancement on building security management.

As for the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS), we understand that at present, most of the PRH estates under HKHS have been installed with security combination door lock systems at the ground floor lobby for access control, together with security gates at the ground floor lobby and staircase exits of the main blocks, as well as the use of gate intercoms for connecting to tenants, etc. These security measures are complemented by other security installations, such as CCTV at lobbies and lifts, to form a comprehensive standard security system. Furthermore, HKHS has, by phases since 2017, introduced the Octopus card or smart card access control systems in its PRH estates equipped with the security combination door lock systems. Currently, 19 HKHS PRH estates have been equipped with the Octopus card or smart card access control systems (for certain PRH estates which will be redeveloped in

due course, only some individual blocks are equipped with such systems). The installation cost of an Octopus card access control system for each block is approximately $55,000. In choosing between the Octopus card access control system or a smart card one, if the PRH blocks are situated within its Subsidised Sale Flats (SSF) projects, HKHS will adopt the same access control system used by the SSF projects to facilitate tenants' easy access to the common areas and facilities. As the number of blocks in each HKHS PRH estate differs, the operating expenses also vary. In the past three years, HKHS's annual operating expense on the comprehensive standard security systems is approximately $48,000 per PRH block.

The HKHS considers that the security combination door lock systems as well as the Octopus card and smart card access control systems that are currently in use are all effective security devices. From time to time, HKHS reviews the technical application, feasibility and effectiveness of the security management systems of its PRH estates with a view to continuously enhancing the estate security management.