

LCQ13: Support for elderly residents of public rental housing estates

Following is a question by the Hon Wilson Or and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (July 21):

Question:

It is learnt that the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) implemented, from 1990s to 2003, an Estate Social Services for the Elderly Scheme (commonly known as the Estate Liaison Officer Scheme) to provide appropriate support for elderly residents of public housing estates (PHEs) with special needs. Regarding the provision of support for elderly residents (i.e. residents aged 60 or above) of PHEs, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current population of elderly residents of PHEs, with a breakdown by the number of elderly persons in the household and the District Council district to which the PHEs belong; if such figures are not available, whether it will compile the statistics;

(2) whether HA provided appropriate support for elderly residents of PHEs in the past three years; if so, of the details, and the percentage that the expenditure incurred on such services in the 2020-2021 financial year represented in the Government's total expenditure on elderly services in that year;

(3) of the details and the implementation effectiveness of the Estate Liaison Officer Scheme; the reasons why HA discontinued the Scheme; as there are views that with an increasingly ageing population in Hong Kong in recent years, there are more and more elderly singletons residing in PHEs, whether HA will resume the Scheme to support the elderly residents on all fronts; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) of other practicable measures in place to address the special needs of the elderly residents of PHEs?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Wilson Or is as follows:

(1) As at May 31, 2021, the elderly population in the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA)'s Public Rental Housing (PRH) by number of elderly people per household and District Council district is set out at Annex.

(2) and (4) HA has taken an active role in coping with the issue of ageing

population by encouraging "ageing in place" and striving to create an age-friendly living environment in the community for the elderly residents in PRH. To address the needs of elderly residents in their daily life, HA has put in place a series of supporting measures in the aspects of housing arrangements, financial assistance, social networking, and more.

In respect of housing arrangements, HA launched the "Housing Schemes for Fostering Harmonious Families (HF) in Public Housing", which includes the HF Transfer Scheme, HF Addition Scheme and HF Amalgamation Scheme to foster a family-based support network and to encourage the younger generation to take care of elderly parents or relatives.

Currently, HA has adopted universal design in its newly-built PRH estates which includes barrier-free facilities for the elderly and wheelchair users. In respect of aged estates, HA has all along been carrying out the required adaptation or modification works for the elderly tenants free of charge. The improvement works include, where practicable and feasible, widening entrances and setting up ramps, laying non-slip floor tiles at suitable locations, converting bathtubs into shower compartments, installing grab rails in bathrooms and raising the floor slab of the balconies to make them level with the floors of living room.

Having considered that it is more difficult for the elderly to adapt to new environment, HA allows under-occupation (UO) households (Note 1) with elderly persons aged 70 or above be exempted from transfer. Nonetheless, UO households whose family members are all aged 70 or above can enjoy lifetime full rent exemption upon their transfer to smaller PRH units of suitable sizes. In December 2020, HA extended the coverage of this rent exemption arrangement to households with members all aged 70 or above living in the Housing for Senior Citizens of Type I Design and non-self-contained Converted-one-person units who are willing to transfer.

In terms of financial assistance, eligible households (Note 2) with members all aged 60 or above and without receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance can be granted a 50 per cent rent reduction under the Rent Assistance Scheme as relief of their financial hardship. At the time of signing up of Tenancy Agreement, they may apply to HA for exemption or refund of rental deposit. Besides, they can obtain a special grant up to \$2,500 on a reimbursement basis for a one-off payment of installation cost and/or service charge to acquire any traditional or mobile devices for emergency alarm system (commonly known as EAS) in the market.

As regards social networking, a wide range of social welfare facilities are provided in PRH estates, including day care centres for the elderly and residential care services for the elderly to meet the needs of elderly residents. HA gives due attention to the physical and mental health of the elderly and supports charitable organisations to provide "Mobile Chinese Medical Van" service in PRH estates, which offers free body check and health education/promotion services to the elderly residents. In light of Hong Kong's ageing population, HA has increased the provision of recreational facilities for the elderly in PRH estates with a higher proportion of elderly

households.

Each year HA will provide funding for PRH estates to partner with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to organise activities and to provide outreaching services for the elderly in order to identify elderly singletons and hidden elders, and offers them support services such as meal delivery, home repair, home cleaning services and escort service for medical consultation.

Expenses of the above measures are borne by HA and are not part of the Government expenditure on elderly services.

(3) In 1990s, HA launched the "Scheme on Estate Social Service for the Elderly", which is commonly referred to as the Estate Liaison Officer (ELO) Scheme, in over 20 PRH estates in Hong Kong. The scheme aimed to provide care and assistance to the elderly tenants, particularly those living alone, and refer cases to relevant government departments or NGOs as appropriate. Subsequently, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) implemented and expanded the Support Teams for the Elderly (STE) with a view to strengthening social networking service and enhancing community support for the single and needy elderly persons living in PRH. The STE provides a more comprehensive and direct service in addressing the needs of the elderly in PRH estates.

Since SWD has already put in place the STE, HA started phasing out the ELO Scheme in 2002 to avoid the duplication of work, and to concentrate its resources in providing public housing and enhancing the efficiency and quality of estate management. HA will continue to maintain close contact and collaboration with SWD and NGOs to provide the required services to PRH residents who are in need.

Note 1: After tenants taking up the PRH flats, if there is deletion of family members due to reasons such as moving-out, death, marriage, emigration, such that the remaining family members enjoy living space exceeding the established allocation standards, they become an under-occupation (UO) household. HA adopts a phased approach to tackle the UO cases. Households with disabled or elderly member aged 70 or above would be excluded from the UO list. UO households with elderly aged 60 or above but below 70 would be placed at the end of UO list and accorded a lower priority for transfer.

Note 2: Household income below 70 per cent of the PRH income limit or rent-to-income ratio exceeding 18.5 per cent.