

LCQ15: Carrying out alteration works for public rental housing flats

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (May 15):

Question:

It is learnt that at present, upon receipt of the recommendations from subvented social welfare organisations or healthcare workers (e.g. occupational therapists) of the Hospital Authority, the Housing Department (HD) will carry out alteration works for the facilities in the public rental housing (PRH) units in which the elderly and persons with disabilities reside, so as to facilitate their daily living. In addition, at a recent meeting of the Panel on Housing of this Council, HD officials indicated that upon receipt of the applications from elderly PRH tenants for installation of grab rails or alteration of shower facilities in the toilets of their units, HD would schedule a date for carrying out such works. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current number of elderly PRH tenants awaiting HD to alter the facilities in their units (with a breakdown by PRH estate), and the estimated time, manpower and costs needed for completing the works;

(2) of the average time taken by HD in the past three years from the receipt of the aforesaid recommendations to the completion of the works concerned, and the procedure involved;

(3) of the number of applications for alteration of facilities in PRH units that were referred by the Total Maintenance Scheme personnel under HD in the past five years to healthcare workers or occupational therapists for assessment; and

(4) whether HD will install, free of charge, facilities other than grab rails in the toilets in the units in which elderly PRH tenants reside only upon receipt of the recommendations from occupational therapists; if so, whether HD will relax this requirement by stipulating that as long as the tenant is a "singleton elderly person" or an "all elderly household", or a referral has been made by a social worker, HD will carry out such installation works on the tenant's request, so as to shorten the tenant's waiting time?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the Hon Andrew Wan's question is set out below:

With the rapidly increasing elderly population in Hong Kong, the Government's policy is to achieve "ageing in place as the core, institutional

care as back-up". The Government is of the view that, with adequate community care and support, many elderly persons with long-term care needs can still continue to age in their own place. To this end, the Government aims to strengthen community care services to enable elderly persons to stay in the community as far as possible so as to lessen their need for institutionalisation.

In view of the above objectives, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) has put in place a set of established policies to provide home modification/adaptation works in public rental housing (PRH) units for elderly and disabled tenants, so as to afford them a suitable environment to carry out daily activities safely and independently. Elderly PRH tenants and other tenants in need (such as wheelchair users) may make relevant applications through their corresponding Estate Management Office (EMO). The duration of home modification/adaptation works depends on their complexity. In general, works can be completed within two to five weeks. HA has not maintained statistics on the home modification/adaptation works carried out in PRH units of elderly tenants.

HA currently installs grab rails in bathrooms and converts the bath tub into a shower area for elderly and disabled tenants free of charge. These works do not require referrals from medical officers, occupational therapists/physiotherapists or social workers. For other modification works, HA will decide whether it is necessary to consult medical officers or occupational therapists/physiotherapists subject to the actual need of a case. With tenants' consent, HA may also refer cases to the Social Welfare Department or medical social workers for professional advice before carrying out specific modification works. HA believes that such arrangement will better meet the tenants' needs. If there is a need for home modification/adaptation works arising from health conditions, tenants may submit applications to EMOs at any time.

Furthermore, under the Total Maintenance Scheme (TMS), HA proactively inspects the in-flat conditions and provides necessary repair services for PRH units aged 10 years or above. HA inspects units in buildings aged between 10 and 30 years every 10 years. For buildings aged over 30 years old, the frequency is increased to every five years. The objective of TMS is to provide preventive repair and maintenance services to tenants. In-flat Inspection Ambassadors and maintenance workers will arrange minor repairs on the spot upon inspection; and will arrange contractors to make appointments with the tenants to follow up on more complicated works.