

LCQ16: Records and materials on housing policy

Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Wan and a written reply by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in the Legislative Council today (March 27):

Question:

Regarding the records/materials on housing policy from 1953 (the devastating fire in the Shek Kip Mei squatter area) to April 1973 (the establishment of the Hong Kong Housing Authority) (the early stage), and from May 1973 to last year (the latter stage), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of a breakdown of the quantity of records/materials on housing policy by time period of their creation and classification (i.e. (i) confidential at present, (ii) confidential when created but declassified at present, (iii) restricted at present, (iv) restricted when created but declassified at present, and (v) open/general documents since creation) (set out in the table below);

	Time period	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)	Total
The early stage	1953 to 1960						
	1961 to 1970						
	1971 to April 1973						
	Total:						
The latter stage	May 1973 to 1980						
	1981 to 1990						
	1991 to 2000						
	2001 to 2010						
	2011 to 2018						
	Total:						

(2) of a breakdown of the quantity of records/materials on housing policy currently kept by the Government Records Service (GRS) by time period of their creation and classification (i.e. (i) confidential when created but declassified at present, (ii) restricted when created but declassified at present, and (iii) open/general documents since creation) (set out in the table below); and

	Time period	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	Total
The early stage	1953 to 1960				
	1961 to 1970				
	1971 to April 1973				
	Total:				
The latter stage	May 1973 to 1980				
	1981 to 1990				
	1991 to 2000				
	2001 to 2010				
	2011 to 2018				
	Total:				

(3) whether it has issued a code of practice and guidelines on records management to housing-related statutory bodies, and required them to transfer to GRS for preservation their records/materials on housing policy and of historical value, so that such records/materials may, after arrangement, be made available for public access?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Hon Andrew Wan's question is as follows:

(1) The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) is the statutory body tasked to develop and implement a public housing programme to achieve the policy objective of the Government. Its executive arm is the Housing Department (HD), which also supports the Transport and Housing Bureau in dealing with all housing-related policies and matters.

HD has all along been handling records management work in compliance with the Records Management Manual and guidelines issued by the Government Records Service (GRS). A breakdown of the quantity of records by the time period of their creation and the classification as requested in the question is not readily available. The compilation of such statistics would require considerable amount of time in data collection and collation in light of the vast amount of records of various HD divisions, sub-divisions and regional offices involved. We are hence unable to provide the requested information. According to GRS' requirement, HD regularly reports the quantity of their records to GRS. In early 2019, HD reported as at December 31, 2018 a total of 92 897 linear metres of records as classified below:

Nature	Quantity (in linear metre)
Administrative records	18 304
Programme records	74 593

Total	92 897
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(2) According to the General Administrative Records Disposal Schedules developed by GRS and the records retention and disposal schedules approved by GRS, bureaux/departments (B/Ds) are required to transfer time-expired records having archival value or potential archival value to GRS for permanent retention or appraisal.

There are two types of archival records: classified archival records and unclassified archival records. Records that are classified as confidential and restricted at the time of their creation fall under the category of classified archival records, and records that are not listed as classified when they are created go under the category of unclassified archival records. Access to archival records kept by GRS is subject to the Public Records (Access) Rules 1996. In general, archival records which have been in existence for not less than 30 years or whose contents have at any time been published are open for public access. Public access to archival records closed for less than 30 years requires prior application to GRS. Classified archival records containing sensitive information are handled or reviewed on a case-by-case basis to determine whether a longer closure period is required. Every year, GRS requests all B/Ds to review classified archival records approaching the end of the 30-year closure period so as to ascertain whether these records can be made available for public inspection upon the expiry of the 30-year closure period.

At present, there are a total of 2 980 archival records transferred by the former Housing Branch and HD and retained by GRS. A total of 2 071 of these archival records are unclassified, while four classified ones have been made open to public access. A breakdown of these records by the time period of their creation and classification is as follows:

Time period	Unclassified records	Classified records open to public access	Total
1945 to 1952	8	0	8
1953 to 1960	355	0	355
1961 to 1970	207	2	209
1971 to April 1973	165	1	166
Total	735	3	738
May 1973 to 1980	286	1	287
1981 to 1990	466	0	466
1991 to 2000	504	0	504
2001 to 2010	80	0	80
2011 to 2018	0	0	0
Total	1 336	1	1 337

Grand total	2 071	4	2 075
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For the remaining 905 records, they are not yet open to public access because personal data are involved or they have been closed for less than 30 years, etc.

(3) GRS formulates and implements government records management policies and programmes, offers advice and support to B/Ds on matters and solutions related to records management, and provides storage and disposal services for inactive records. In addition, GRS identifies and preserves records of archival value, valuable government publications and printed materials, enhances public awareness of Hong Kong's documentary heritage, and provides research and reference services. GRS' purview covers all B/Ds, but its duties do not include issuing codes of practice or guidelines on records management to statutory/public organisations or monitoring their records management practices.

That said, GRS published a booklet entitled "Good Records Management Practices" in 2011 to share good practices in records management with these organisations and encourage them to donate records of archival value to GRS. Since 2013, GRS has also been holding annual records management seminars for these organisations. Six seminars have been held thus far, attended by over 1 500 participants from 64 statutory/public bodies. Besides, GRS has been providing records management briefings and advice to individual organisations upon request.

As mentioned in item (1) above, HD is the executive arm of HA (one of the housing-related statutory bodies) and responsible for the management of all HA records. HD manages all such records in accordance with the Records Management Manual and guidelines issued by GRS, which includes transferring records of archival value to GRS for appraisal and permanent retention.