

LCQ17: Transfer of under-occupation public rental housing households

Following is a question by the Hon Tony TSE and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (June 9):

Question:

At present, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) allocates public rental housing (PRH) units based on the standard of an internal floor area (living floor area) of not less than 7 square metres per person on average. It is learnt that in recent years, the numbers of occupants in quite a number of PRH units have decreased continuously due to the family members of the households concerned moving out or passing away, resulting in a continued increase in the average per-person living floor area of PRH units (which has risen to 13.4 sq m as at the end of March this year). Furthermore, the HA classifies those PRH households with a living floor area exceeding a specified level (depending on the household size) as "Under-occupation households" (UO households) and those PRH households with a living floor area exceeding an even higher level (excluding those households with family members who are disabled or have reached the age of 60) as "Prioritized under-occupation households" (PUO households). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following statistics on (a) UO households and (b) PUO households respectively in each of the past five years:

- (i) the number of households (with a breakdown by household size),
- (ii) the total living floor area beyond the standard and the number of persons that can be accommodated in such an area, calculated on the basis of 7 sq m per person,
- (iii) the living floor area beyond the standard per household on average, and
- (iv) the average number of years for which such households have been classified as UO/PUO households;

(2) of the details of the existing policies on the transfer of UO and PUO households, including:

- (i) the specific transfer arrangements,
- (ii) the incentives for transfer provided,
- (iii) the consequences for the households' refusal to transfer (if any),
- (iv) the implementation situation of the policies in the past five years, and
- (v) the main reasons for some households' refusal to transfer;

(3) given that the HA launched a trial scheme in 2019 to allow UO households whose members are all aged 70 or above (U070+ households) to enjoy lifetime full rent exemption upon their transfer, as well as regularized the scheme and relaxed the application restrictions at the end of last year, of the latest implementation situation and effectiveness of the scheme; and

(4) whether, in order to optimize the use of the existing PRH resources and hence expedite the allocation of PRH units to PRH applicants, the Government will consider enhancing the existing policies on and measures for the transfer of U0, PU0 and U070+ households; if so, whether the measures under consideration will include:

- (i) adjusting the definitions of the three types of households, so that more households may enjoy priority or preferential arrangements when they transfer,
- (ii) boosting the incentives for transfer, such as providing a removal allowance of a higher amount and rental concessions to eligible households,
- (iii) raising the penalties that can be imposed on PU0 households for refusal to transfer without reasonable grounds, and
- (iv) removing the locality restrictions on transfer, etc. so that more households will accept transfer offers and will accept transfer offers earlier?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Tony TSE is as follows:

(1) and (2) Under the prevailing policy of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA), public rental housing (PRH) units will be allocated based on household size according to the established allocation standards. As a result of some family members moving out of the flat or have passed away, the living space of the remaining members of a PRH household may exceed the established allocation standards. Under the existing tenancy agreement, these under-occupation (U0) households have to move to a PRH unit of an appropriate size as determined by the HA.

The HA has adopted a phased approach to handle U0 cases in PRH with priorities given to Prioritised Under-occupation (PU0) households, i.e. households living in units with an internal floor area (IFA) exceeding the prescribed thresholds and without disabled members or elderly members aged 60 or above. Non-PU0 households (Note) are placed at the end of the U0 list and accorded with lower handling priority. U0 households with elderly members aged 70 or above or disabled members are excluded from the U0 list and are not required to move out of their flats. The current U0 standards and PU0 thresholds are set out at Table 1 in Annex.

In the past five years, the statistics of HA's PRH U0 households and PU0 households are set out at Table 2 and Table 3 in Annex respectively. The HA does not maintain a central record of other statistical data requested in the question.

In respect of transfer arrangements, in general a maximum of three housing offers will be made to all HA's PRH U0 households and they will be offered Domestic Removal Allowance (DRA). Subject to the availability of resources, they may be offered the opportunity to transfer to units in newly-

completed estates. In respect of PU0 households, the HA will allow a standard stayput period of one year on grounds of decease of family member. The HA will adopt a reasonable and considerate approach based on individual situation when considering the stayput request of PU0 households who are waiting for family reunion. Additional incentive in the form of rent waiver up to three months will also be provided to PU0 households.

There were cases in the past where PU0 households refused to move out. The reasons which they put forward included requesting the allocation of larger units and specific estates, reluctance to move out due to familiarity with the present living environment, traffic inconvenience in the allocated estates, etc. Notices-to-Quit will be issued by the HA to terminate the tenancies of PU0 households who refuse all housing offers without justified reasons.

In the past five years, the HA resolved an average of about 2 200 PU0 cases each year, while the number of new cases accorded with priority was about 2 100 each year.

(3) In December 2019, the HA launched the Trial Scheme on Full Rent Exemption for Elderly Under-occupation Households (the Scheme), whereby U0 households with all family members aged 70 or above are allowed to enjoy full rent exemption for life upon their transfer to suitably-sized units. Eligible households will be given a maximum of three housing offers of new or refurbished units in the residing estate or an estate in the same District Council (DC) district. They will also be provided with DRA.

The Scheme can effectively make use of existing public housing resources to increase the supply of larger units for households of larger family size who are awaiting PRH allocation. In view of the favourable response, the HA regularised the Scheme in December 2020; extended its coverage to elderly households with family members all aged 70 or above living in Housing for Senior Citizens of Type I Design and non-self-contained Converted-One-Person units; and widened the district choice from the same DC district to the same PRH Application District (i.e. Urban, Extended Urban (including Tung Chung), New Territories and Islands (excluding Tung Chung)).

Up to end-April 2021, the HA has approved about 340 applications under the Scheme. Among them, 72 households have accepted allocation.

(4) In December 2020, the HA conducted a review of the U0 Policy. Considering the increasing demand for PRH and the limited supply of units to be allocated to U0 households, the HA decided to continue the existing classification and standards of U0 households, as well as the arrangements of priority for action and other incentives. The HA will conduct a review of the U0 Policy and the Scheme in 2023 in one go.

Note: Non-PU0 households include U0 households with living space not exceeding the PU0 thresholds and U0 households with elderly members aged 60 or above but below 70.