

LCQ18: Rehousing blocks under Urban Renewal Authority

Following is a question by the Hon Edward Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (May 11):

At present, eligible domestic tenants who are affected by the redevelopment projects carried out by the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) may be allocated flats in the four rehousing blocks (i.e. Bedford Tower at Bedford Road in Tai Kok Tsui, Rich Building at Lai Chi Kok Road in Sham Shui Po, 12 Soy Street in Mong Kok, and Shun Sing Mansion at Des Voeux Road West in Western District) under the URA (rehousing flats). The URA also sets aside some of the rehousing flats for allocation to social welfare organisations for their provision of transitional housing. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council if it knows:

- (1) when the URA started implementing the policy of leasing rehousing flats to or earmarking such flats for social welfare organisations, as well as the criteria and rents/fees (if applicable) concerned;
- (2) the number and percentage of flats in the aforesaid four rehousing blocks that are currently leased to social welfare organisations, and the names of the social welfare organisations concerned;
- (3) whether the URA will consider increasing the number of flats for leasing to social welfare organisations, so as to increase the supply of transitional housing; and
- (4) whether the URA has explored the implementation of a more flexible policy on the use of rehousing flats, so as to strike a better balance between leasing flats for use as transitional housing and reserving flats for rehousing use in respect of its development projects, thereby making good use of its housing resources?

Reply:

President,

According to the prevailing policy of the Urban Renewal Authority (URA), domestic tenants affected by the URA redevelopment projects (including domestic tenants evicted by property owners between the time of the freezing survey and the time of the successful acquisition of the relevant properties by the URA) who are eligible for public rental housing (PRH) will be rehoused to PRH units in urban districts. Domestic tenants who, due to various reasons, have not been rehoused to PRH units will be granted an ex-gratia allowance or rehoused to the URA rehousing block temporarily subject to fulfilling the eligibility criteria of the URA.

To ensure the turnover of the rehousing block units, tenants whose monthly total incomes or total net asset value have exceeded the limits of the eligibility criteria, being allocated a PRH flat or having secured a long-term accommodation, are required to vacate their units of the rehousing blocks.

Based on the information provided by the URA, the reply to the four parts of the question is as follows:

(1) In "The Chief Executive's 2017 Policy Address", the Government supported the Community Housing Movement (CHM) initiated by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) on a pilot basis and encouraged the URA to participate in the CHM. Since December 2017, the URA has leased under different phases a total of 119 vacant units of its three rehousing blocks in Sham Shui Po, Mong Kok and Sai Wan to the HKCSS for use as transitional housing units under the CHM operated by the HKCSS. The leasing period of the units is generally three years. As the rehousing blocks have their original use, in determining the leasing period for the aforesaid units as transitional housing, the URA has to consider whether the units could be recovered in a timely manner to rehouse residents affected by redevelopment projects.

The above arrangement aims to provide short-term housing to individuals or families in need through transitional housing and support services to relieve their congested living condition. The rents of the units provided by the URA to the HKCSS are charged at 50 per cent of the rateable values of the properties. The URA also provides extra rent free period to the HKCSS. The target service recipients of the CHM include people:

- (i) proven to be in need of transitional housing (queued for PRH for no less than three years, or with other long-term housing arrangement);
- (ii) living in dismal and inadequate housing conditions;
- (iii) with low-income and in urgent need of community support.

(2) The latest situation as at May 4, 2022 of the units in the three URA rehousing blocks leased for use under the CHM is set out below:

	12 Soy Street, Mong Kok	Rich Building, Sham Shui Po	Shun Sing Mansion, Sai Wan
Number of units leased	49	9	8
Percentage of units leased compared to the total units of the block	17.6%	30.0%	5.3%

Remarks	-	-	<p>The above figures reflect the position as at May 4, 2022. Another 65 newly renovated units have been set aside for leasing to the operator in August 2022, by then the percentage of units used under the CHM will be increased to 48.7%.</p>
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Units in another URA rehousing block located on Bedford Road in Tai Kok Tsui have not been used for the CHM as most of the units therein have been used to rehouse the domestic tenants affected by the URA redevelopment projects.

(3) and (4) The URA will lease another 65 units in the Shun Sing Mansion to the HKCSS for use under the CHM in August 2022.

As the URA will continue undertaking redevelopment projects with large-scale planning in future, the URA anticipates an increasing demand for rehousing block units and there is not much room to allocate units in large scale for transitional housing. The URA will review the demand for the rehousing block units from time to time to ensure optimal use of housing resources.