

LCQ2: Eradicating substandard subdivided units

Following is a question by Hon Vincent Cheng and a reply by the Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

The Chief Executive announced in the latest Policy Address the establishment of a Task Force on Tackling the Issue of Subdivided Units to set the minimum standards of living conditions for subdivided units (SDUs) and suggest measures to eradicate substandard SDUs. The Government subsequently indicated that in the course of formulating the eradication programme, due consideration would be given to transitional and follow-up arrangements, so as to avoid rendering the affected households homeless. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) when eradicating substandard SDUs, how the Government will rehouse the affected households, and whether they will be provided with transitional housing or Light Public Housing for seamless transition; if so, of the details;

(2) as it is learnt that since the implementation of legislation in relation to tenancy control on SDUs, the situation of the submission of Notices of Tenancy by landlords to the Government has been unsatisfactory, of the number of Notices of Tenancy received by the Government since January last year, as well as the respective numbers of various types of SDUs reported therein (including room, cubicle, rooftop house, podium house, loft, bedspace, space capsule and other types of SDUs); and

(3) whether a preliminary assessment has been conducted on the specific problem areas involved in substandard SDUs, and of the expected implementation timetable for eradication?

Reply

President,

The Government has all along been paying attention to the housing needs of those who are inadequately housed. With the Government's sustained effort in land and housing production, the continued increase in land and housing supply has presented us a crucial opportunity to resolve this long-standing problem on subdivided units (SDUs). Following the announcement of the 2023 Policy Address, the Government has established the Task Force on Tackling the Issue of Subdivided Units (the Task Force), which will conduct a more in-depth study of the issue. The Task Force has just commenced its work and will need time to study in detail various aspects of the issue. We will take into account the views of different stakeholders and make recommendations to the

Chief Executive in ten months' time.

After consultation with the Rating and Valuation Department (RVD), the consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Vincent Cheng is as follows:

(1) The issue of SDUs involves the wellbeing of tens of thousands of families. Therefore, eradicating substandard SDUs is not a short-term target which can be achieved overnight, and it is imperative for the Government to plan ahead in a pragmatic and thorough manner. When formulating the relevant policies, the basic principle is not to render the affected households homeless. During this process, the Government will allow reasonable time for SDU landlords to carry out necessary rectification works for the SDUs to meet the relevant standards, as well as liaise with tenants on the move-out arrangement. Due consideration will also be given to the enforcement timeline and priorities for the eradication programme of substandard SDUs as well as follow-up arrangements.

The Government has identified sufficient land for providing about 410 000 public housing units in the coming 10-year period. With an adequate public housing supply in the medium to long term, more housing options will be available for SDU tenants and the Government may then consider some more resolute solutions to eradicating substandard SDUs. Meanwhile, the Task Force will consider whether resources, such as the transitional housing that is built and ready for use as well as the Light Public Housing that will soon commence construction, can be utilised to meet the short-term housing needs of those in need.

(2) Pursuant to Part IVA of the Landlord and Tenant (Consolidation) Ordinance, a landlord must, within 60 days after the term of a "regulated tenancy" commences, submit Form AR2 to the RVD to provide the particulars of the tenancy.

As at November 14, 2023, the RVD has processed a total of 23 522 Forms AR2. Excluding Forms AR2 with tenancies not meeting the definition of "regulated tenancy" and thus not required to be submitted to the Commissioner of Rating and Valuation, most of the SDUs (97.7 per cent) are classified as "room". The remainder (2.3 per cent) include cubicles, rooftop houses, podium houses, lofts, bedspaces and space capsules, etc.

The RVD will continue to strengthen its enforcement and promotion to remind SDU landlords of their responsibility for submitting Form AR2, with a view to collecting more Forms AR2.

(3) On the minimum standards of living environment of SDUs, the Task Force preliminarily takes the view that they should cover building safety, fire safety and hygiene requirements, living space, etc. We take note of the discussions in the community on other standards such as SDU facilities or floor to ceiling height, etc. The Task Force is open to different views and will study in detail, with a view to forging a consensus in the community on the Task Force's recommendations.

The Government will consider an array of factors when phasing out substandard SDUs. It is worth noting that SDUs have certain societal functions, and it is crucial that an appropriate balance is struck. As I mentioned just now, it is the Government's target not to render a large number of SDU tenants homeless as a result of the eradication action. Therefore, the Government may consider more resolute measures to eradicate substandard SDUs with poor living environment when adequate public housing supply is available in the medium to long term.

The issue of SDUs is highly complicated. The Government has not underestimated the difficulty in resolving the issue but is determined to take the first step in addressing this deep-seated problem. The Task Force will continue its in-depth study and gauge views from various stakeholders to formulate feasible solutions which can tackle the SDU issue in an orderly manner.