

LCQ5: Building maintenance of TPS estates

Following is a question by the Hon Wilson Or and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (June 6):

Question:

Chuk Yuen North Estate is one of the housing estates under the Tenants Purchase Scheme (TPS). Some owners of the estate have relayed to me that earlier on, many cracks appeared on the external walls of the buildings in the estate. A structural engineer found after inspection that the design of eight buildings in terms of the thickness of the concrete slabs of canopies, the number and spacing of steel bars, etc. were different from the working drawings for construction approved by the Housing Department (HD), and there were extensive spalling of mosaic tiles from the external walls of the buildings due to the use of improper materials. The Owners' Corporation of the estate wrote repeatedly to HD, requesting it to take follow-up actions on the problem, but was refused. Regarding the building maintenance of TPS estates, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number and contents of complaints and requests for assistance received by the authorities in the past five years concerning the structural safety of the buildings in TPS estates, with a breakdown by name of estate;

(2) whether the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) carried out major or estate-wide maintenance works for TPS estates in the past five years; if so, of the items of the works carried out, the number of households benefited and the criteria based on which HA decided to carry out such works; and

(3) of the current percentage of HA's ownership shares in the aggregate ownership shares of each TPS estate; the role currently played by HA, being one of the owners of TPS estates, in the maintenance of those estates; whether HA will take on more responsibility for maintenance and step up its monitoring on the structural safety of the buildings in those estates; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the various parts of Hon Wilson Or's question is as follows.

The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) launched the Tenants Purchase Scheme (TPS) in 1998 to enable public rental housing (PRH) tenants to buy the flats they lived in at a discounted price, thereby helping to achieve the

then policy objective of attaining a home ownership rate of 70 per cent in Hong Kong in ten years' time. The Government subsequently re-positioned the housing policies in 2002. In keeping with the overall strategy of withdrawing from direct provision of subsidised sale flats, HA decided to cease the scheme after launching Phase 6B of TPS in August 2005. However, sitting tenants of the 39 TPS estates can opt to buy the flats they are living in.

HA has carried out comprehensive investigation and completed all necessary maintenance and repair works prior to the sale of individual TPS estates. HA also provides a seven-year Structural Safety Guarantee for TPS estates. During the guarantee period, HA is responsible for all structural repair and maintenance works relating to structural components such as columns, beams, walls and floor slabs, including repair works for spalling and cracking, in order to ensure the overall structural safety of the buildings. Besides, HA has also made a one-off injection equivalent to \$14,000 per residential unit to the Maintenance Fund for each TPS estate to meet the expenses of post-sale repairment works. Also, if a tenant reports that any installation in his/her flat is defective before purchasing the flat, HA will carry out the final one-off repair for that flat so that flats in TPS estates are sold in good condition.

As at May 1, 2018, the percentage of ownership shares of TPS estates held by HA against the total amount of ownership shares was about 26 per cent (see Annex I for details of individual estates). Regardless of the percentage of ownership shares held by HA, there is no difference between TPS estates and other private properties in terms of property management. As with private housing estates, TPS estates are subject to regulation under the Building Management Ordinance (BMO), relevant land leases and Deeds of Mutual Covenant (DMCs). Day-to-day estate management matters are discussed and resolved at meetings of management committees or general meetings convened by Owners' Corporations (OCs) pursuant to the provisions of BMO and DMCs. At present, all TPS estates have already formed their OCs, which have appointed property management companies to undertake the management and maintenance work of the common areas and facilities in the estates.

As one of the owners, apart from paying the management fee according to its ownership shares, HA also appoints representatives to take part in OC's work and liaises with other government departments in order to provide assistance when necessary. HA also gives advice to OCs on matters including the day-to-day management of the estates and requirements of DMCs and relevant legislation, etc. from time to time, as well as encourages other owners to put emphasis on the overall interests of the estates so as to safeguard the interests of all owners (including HA) and to ensure the quality and the effectiveness of estate management work. Moreover, HA will also convey the views of its tenants to OCs and encourage OCs and the property management companies to maintain communication with the tenants.

As mentioned above, TPS estates are no different from private properties. The day-to-day management and maintenance of common areas and facilities are undertaken by OCs. As one of the owners of TPS estates, HA has not, on its own, carried out any major or estate-wide maintenance works for

TPS estates in the past five years.

Currently, the Independent Checking Unit (ICU) under the Permanent Secretary for Transport and Housing (Housing) has been carrying out building control pursuant to the Buildings Ordinance over properties developed and sold by HA, including TPS buildings, in accordance with the delegated authority from the Director of Buildings and the prevailing policies and guidelines of the Buildings Department. In the past five years, ICU received about 5.5 cases of complaints and requests for assistance concerning the structural safety of the buildings in each TPS estate per year on average (see Annex II for details). ICU does not maintain any statistics on the breakdown of these cases by category.

Regarding Chuk Yuen North Estate as mentioned in the Member's question, its then construction works were undertaken by the works contractor according to the working drawings endorsed by HA, and the construction process and engineering quality control were under the direct supervision of a professional project team. HA has in place stringent regulatory procedures on the construction of reinforced concrete. Only steel reinforcing bars that have passed the relevant tests are permitted for use. In case any irregularity is identified during HA's inspection of formworks and steel fixing, the contractor will be immediately notified for rectification. HA will also conduct inspections and acceptance tests upon completion of steel fixing at the appropriate locations by the contractor. If any steel reinforcing bars are found to be non-compliant with the requirements in the working drawings, the contractor will be instructed to conduct modification works immediately. At the same time, in the course of the construction period, the contractor may occasionally put forward requests for alteration of steel reinforcing bar arrangements in the light of the actual circumstances on site, such as for addressing the position and spacing problems that may arise from pipe installation. HA would consider accepting the alteration proposals if the measures involved would not compromise structural safety. The contractor will not be permitted to commence concrete pour works until HA is satisfied with the re-examination results.

As regards the safety of the canopies at Chuk Yuen North Estate, representatives of the ICU have conducted site inspections on April 9 and April 30, 2018. Only some minor cracks and concrete spalling were observed on the top and at the bottom of the slabs of the canopies, which may probably be due to ageing of the buildings and issues relating to repair and maintenance. In respect of the opening at the canopy at Mui Yuen House, it was observed on site that the concrete was in sound condition and without signs of segregation. The steel bars were at a healthy condition, except some minor rusting. In any case, just like what I have just said, the HA has appointed representatives from the Housing Department at all TPS estates. We will offer assistance to the OC of Chuk Yuen North Estate with a view to easing the concern of the public by clarifying the facts.

Thank you, President.