

## LCQ6: Waiting time for ordinary family applicants for public rental housing

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Man-kwong and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Housing, Mr Victor Tai, in the Legislative Council today (June 19):

Question:

It is learnt that the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) releases the average waiting time (AWT) for general applicants for public rental housing (PRH) and for the elderly one-person applicants among them on a regular basis, but not ordinary family applicants among the general applicants. There are views pointing out that given the shorter AWT for elderly one-person applicants, the AWT for general applicants has been reduced. As a result, the AWT for ordinary family applicants cannot be accurately reflected. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the AWT for ordinary family applicants as at the first quarter of this year;
- (2) of the latest AWT for ordinary family applicants, with a breakdown by the four districts where PRH estates are distributed (i.e. Urban, Extended Urban, New Territories, and Islands); and
- (3) whether the HA has considered releasing the AWT for ordinary family applicants on a regular basis to enhance the transparency of the relevant information; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Leung Man-kwong is as follows:

It is the objective of the Government and the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) to provide public rental housing (PRH) to low-income families who cannot afford private rental accommodation. We have been striving to ensure that PRH applicants could receive a flat offer as soon as possible. To this end, the HA has compiled the average waiting time (AWT) to reflect the waiting time of PRH general applicants who were given the first flat offer in the past 12 months. For the purpose of enhancing transparency, the HA would announce the latest number of PRH applications and AWT of general applicants at the end of each quarter. Specifically, the AWT is calculated as the average of the waiting time of general applicants who were housed to PRH in the past 12 months, and refers to the time taken between registration for PRH and first flat offer, excluding any frozen period during the application

period (e.g. when the applicant has not yet fulfilled the residence requirement; the applicant has requested to put his/her application on hold pending arrival of family members for family reunion; the applicant is imprisoned, etc). According to this calculation methodology, the AWT only reflects the situation of general applicants who were housed to PRH within the past 12 months and it does not provide any indication as to the AWT in the future. Therefore, it should not be taken to project the time required for housing PRH applicants who are currently waiting on the queue.

Against the above objective and calculation methodology of the AWT, my consolidated reply to the questions raised by Hon Leung Man-kwong is as follows:

As mentioned above, as the AWT only reflects the situation of general applicants who were housed to PRH within the past 12 months and it should not be taken to project the time required for housing PRH applicants who are on the queue. For the applicants, their waiting time is affected by a number of factors, including the number of PRH flats available for allocation, the number of PRH applicants, the applicants' district choice, whether the supply of new and refurbished PRH flats matches with the applicants' district choice, etc. If we derive a separate AWT for each district and applicant type, the number of cases involved in each category will be relatively small. As a result, the relevant AWT will fluctuate greatly due to different factors. For example, there are only around tens of general applicants that are housed to the Islands district each year, the AWT calculated based on a small number of cases is prone to large fluctuations. Therefore, it is considered that there is not much meaning in the AWT calculated based on applicant types and selected districts and it will also mislead the applicants.

For individual applicants, the latest allocation status of PRH applications of various household sizes in various districts can better enable them to estimate the waiting time required to be housed. In this regard, the Housing Department (HD) would publish in newspapers the latest allocation status of different family sizes in each district on a monthly basis, and would upload relevant information to the HA's/HD's website for applicants' reference. The information is presented by district (i.e. Urban, Extended Urban, New Territories and Islands) and family size such that applicants can refer to the latest allocation status of their selected district and family size, including the highest application number that has been allocated with PRH or is being subject to detailed vetting. The information published is clear and transparent.

Furthermore, general applicants can also make reference to the future PRH supply in different districts so as to estimate their waiting time. To this end, the Housing Bureau (HB) would update and publish the public housing production forecast for the next five years on a quarterly basis, and would upload the relevant public housing project information (including project name, location, estimated number of flats completion year, etc.) on HB's website. At the same time, the Development Bureau would also update the public housing project information for the next six to ten years on an annual

basis for public reference.

We would publish the analysis of AWT movements annually. The annual analysis of the AWT in 2023 indicates that the waiting time of PRH applicants for flats in the New Territories is generally shorter than those for flats in Urban district or Extended Urban district by a year. Looking ahead, as there will be more new PRH flats supply in the New Territories, it is envisaged that applicants for PRH flats in the New Territories will be allocated with PRH flats earlier.

We have been striving to provide information that is relevant and of reference value to PRH applicants. On this, HB has published the "Composite Waiting Time for Subsidised Rental Housing" on a quarterly basis after the Chief Executive announced in 2022 Policy Address the construction of Light Public Housing (LPH). By making reference to the figure, the public could tell the average waiting time of the general applicants for receiving the first offer of PRH or LPH units in the past 12 months, so that they can evaluate the Government's effectiveness in improving the living conditions of the public through the provision of different types of subsidised rental housing in a more comprehensive manner.