

Ombudsman probes arrangements for recovering public rental housing flats by authorities (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Mr Jack Chan, today (September 19) announced the launch of a direct investigation operation to examine in detail the workflow of and arrangements for recovering public rental housing (PRH) flats for reallocation by the authorities.

Every year, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) recover PRH flats due to various reasons for reallocation, such as tenants passing away, moving into residential care homes, purchasing subsidised sale flats, or breaching the terms of tenancy agreement. Last year (i.e. 2023-24), the HKHA allocated about 23600 PRH flats, of which around 19700 were recovered flats. The number of recovered PRH flats is expected to increase as the authorities have recently stepped up their efforts to combat the abuse of PRH.

At present, the HKHA's key performance indicator (KPI) for refurbishing a vacant PRH flat is 44 days. The Ombudsman's Office has noticed that, over the past three years, the average time taken to refurbish a vacant PRH flat has been close to this KPI. Nevertheless, refurbishment works have occasionally taken more than 100 days to complete, with one instance lasting as long as 197 days. Whether the process of recovering and refurbishing PRH flats by the HKHA and the HKHS is proper and efficient will directly affect whether families on the waiting list for PRH can be offered flats as soon as possible.

Furthermore, as the authorities have enhanced the efforts in combating tenancy abuse, the number of appeal cases is on the rise. Under the current procedures, the recovery of a PRH flat is suspended during an appeal. The Office is, therefore, concerned about whether there is room to expedite and improve the workflow of and procedures for appeals.

On the other hand, the Office receives complaints from time to time alleging the authorities for failure to properly dispose of items left in PRH flats by outgoing tenants, particularly singleton tenants, and casually discarding items without contacting the tenants concerned or their next of kin, and without obtaining the tenants' prior consent.

Mr Chan said, "The current-term Government has been making every effort to increase PRH supply to satisfy people's housing needs, and its efforts are delivering tangible results. If PRH flats are recovered and refurbished in a timely manner for reallocation to the families on the PRH waiting list as soon as possible, it would not only shorten their waiting time but also

enhance their sense of happiness and contentment. In this connection, I have decided to launch this direct investigation operation to carefully examine the workflow of and arrangements for the Housing Department (as the HKHA's executive arm) and the HKHS to recover PRH flats, including the specific procedures for refurbishing flats for reallocation and for tenants to appeal against the Notice-to-quit, as well as the various ways to dispose of items left in PRH flats by outgoing tenants. Pertinent improvement recommendations will be made where necessary."

The Ombudsman welcomes views from members of the public on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by October 14, 2024:

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