

LCQ17: Barrier-free facilities in public rental housing estates

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by Secretary for Housing, Ms Winnie Ho, in the Legislative Council today (November 27):

Question:

It is learnt that the Government had not published the Design Manual: Barrier Free Access ("the Design Manual") when some aged public rental housing ("PRH") estates were constructed, resulting in the design of these estates failing to meet the current requirements on barrier-free facilities. Some residents of these estates have relayed that the surfaces of the footpaths in the estates are mostly uneven and there is a lack of covered access connecting the buildings. Moreover, some buildings do not provide lift services for all floors, causing inconvenience to the daily lives of people such as the elderly and wheelchair users. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number and names of PRH estates that have not been designed in accordance with the requirements stipulated in the Design Manual;
- (2) whether it has plans to enhance the barrier-free facilities in aged PRH estates in the light of the "Well-being design" guide introduced for PRH, using the Design Manual as the standard; if so, of the estates involved and the details of the enhancement work; if not, the reasons for that;
- (3) whether it will construct barrier-free access in aged PRH estates that comply with the requirements stipulated in the Design Manual, provide level access exclusively for wheelchair users to alleviate their plight of difficulty in travelling, and retrofit covers for access between buildings; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (4) as the Design Manual specifies that "[w]here it is impractical to provide a passenger lift or a ramp, a self-operated vertical lifting platform should be considered as a reasonable alternative for vertical circulation for wheelchair users", and it is learnt that the lifts at Oi Shun House, Yau Oi Estate, Tuen Mun can only reach the 23rd floor, and residents have to use the stairs to reach the 24th floor, and that there are no barrier-free facilities between floors, whether the authorities have compiled statistics on the current number of aged PRH estates in Hong Kong with such a situation; if so, set out in a table the names of such estates, and whether the authorities will retrofit inclined or vertical lifting platforms in the buildings of such estates; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) endeavours to enhance barrier-free access and facilities in public rental housing (PRH) estates to meet the needs of PRH residents, especially the elderly and persons with disabilities. HA has adopted the concept of "Universal Design" in new estates to provide an inclusive and harmonious living environment for people with different physical abilities.

In addition to the provision of barrier-free facilities in common areas, the elderly or persons with disabilities can apply to HA for adaptation works on facilities in PRH flats if they have special needs in terms of movement. To better address the special needs of individual elderly persons and tenants in need, with reference to the advice from doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists or medical social workers, etc., HA carries out adaptation works free of charge for the tenants concerned. These works include provision of a ramp at the entrance of the flat where feasible, widening the doorway of bathrooms, laying anti-skid floor tiles on suitable floor surface, etc. If a tenant requests only for the installation of grab bars or conversion of a bath tub into a shower area in the bathroom, HA will directly arrange the relevant works for the tenant free of charge, without the need for tenants to seek advice from doctors or physiotherapists.

Moreover, in order to enhance the co-ordination work on barrier-free issues and to provide timely provision of assistance to residents, HA has launched the Access Co-ordinator and Access Officer Scheme since 2011. Access Officers station in various PRH estates to assist persons with disabilities in using the barrier-free access and facilities in PRH estates.

My reply to the respective parts of the question raised by the Hon Holden Chow is as follows:

(1) The "Design Manual: Barrier Free Access" (DM) stipulates the Mandatory Section and the Best Practice Section. It is the established policy of HA to comply with the prevailing requirements as set out in the DM on the provision of barrier-free access and facilities, wherever practicable. In view of the introduction of the "DM 1997" and "DM 2008", HA implemented improvement works in 2001 and 2010 respectively on its premises which were completed before the launch of the DM to provide necessary barrier-free facilities. The improvement works included providing ramps, installing suitable handrails at access routes, providing and adding tactile guide paths connecting main estate entrances to major facilities within estate area and entrances of residential blocks, etc. In some individual HA buildings, subject to different constraints such as building design, there may not be complete provision of the relevant facilities. Since DM covers an array of requirements and guidelines, HA did not keep comprehensive statistics related to all the requirements. All new HA buildings with construction commenced after December 1, 2008 as well as alterations and additions works to existing HA buildings shall meet the mandatory requirements as stipulated in "DM 2008" as far as practicable.

(2) In September this year, HA has published the "Well-being Design Guide"

which includes well-being concepts such as "Age-friendliness" and "Urban Integration" covering design suggestions for enhancing barrier-free access facilities. Besides application in new projects, HA would also take into account the situation of individual PRH estates and apply the relevant design concepts in existing estates. HA would enhance public spaces, facilities and environment of estates through two pilot projects namely "Let's Go Well-being" and "Well-being Design Pretest" and "HAPPY Family" and "Colourful and Fun Estate Project". Throughout the projects, the design team would invite residents and stakeholders to participate in discussions and workshops on design to collect suggestions for the improvement works, with a view to applying the well-being design ideas in suitable spaces in the estates. Should the pilot projects be well received, HA would take the projects as a basis to gradually extend the improvement works to other suitable PRH estates.

Currently, the pilot projects cover Kai Yip Estate, Fu Shan Estate, Chak On Estate, Shui Pin Wai Estate, Mei Lam Estate, Butterfly Estate, On Ting Estate, Kwai Fong Estate, Wan Hon Estate, Shun Tin Estate, Kai Tin Estate, Hing Man Estate, Yue Wan Estate, Sun Chui Estate, Lee On Estate, Ping Shek Estate, Lung Tin Estate, Shek Wai Kok Estate, Hung Hom Estate, Fu Cheong Estate, Tsz Lok Estate, Choi Yuen Estate, Tai Yuen Estate, Sam Shing Estate and Yau Oi Estate. The first phase of works for some estates (such as Wan Hon Estate, On Ting Estate and Yue Wan Estate) had been completed, providing social seatings and service counters that were convenient for the elderly and persons with disabilities in the estates. The improvement works for the remaining estates will also be completed by phase from 2025 to 2027.

(3) An Access Officer has been appointed in all individual premises under HA to provide assistance to persons with disabilities in accessing premises and using services and facilities therein, as well as handle enquiries regarding accessibility issues of the venue. In addition to the regular checks conducted by Access Officers, when estate staff identify defects and deficiencies in barrier-free access and facilities during daily patrols, they will take immediate follow-up actions including repairs to uneven footpaths. Regarding provision of access route exclusively for wheelchair users and addition of covered walkway in aged PRH estates, HA has to first conduct feasibility study and consider a number of factors, including constraints of Universal Design, management, and technical concerns about constructions, views of various stakeholders, statutory and leasing constraints, permitted plot ratio, etc., before commencing construction works where practicable. HA has previously taken forward the addition of covered walkways in aged PRH estates such as On Ting Estate, Cheung Hong Estate, and Kwai Shing West Estate, connecting major facilities within estates area and facilitate residents' access.

With regard to various facilities in PRH estates, HA will continue to actively communicate with district communities/individuals as well as residents in PRH estates and conduct studies to explore the alterations or additions of facilities in estates to cater for the need of various persons in estates, including the elderly, persons with disabilities etc.

(4) HA strives to retrofit lift entrances on floors without lift access,

where practicable. In addition, HA launched the "Lift Addition Programme" in 2008, retrofitting lifts within PRH estates, including in PRH blocks without lifts, to enhance pedestrian access and to provide barrier-free access for residents with a view to facilitating their use. HA has completed the works of retrofitting lifts to its PRH blocks where technically feasible and cost-effective. Currently, nearly 99 per cent of HA's PRH flats were provided with lift services.

For instance, Yau Oi Estate in Tuen Mun, which was built in the late 1970s, was designed in accordance with the public housing standards at that time, and hence the DM published in 1997 was not adapted. That said, due to building design constraints, it was not feasible to install lift entrances on the top floor of Oi Shun House. HA has also studied the installation of vertical lifting platforms between the 23rd and 24th floors of Oi Shun House, but it was proven the installation would be unsuitable due to the limitations of existing spaces and building design. Furthermore, according to current building fire safety requirements, non-fire services installations, such as inclined lifting platforms (also known as stair lifts), cannot be installed in fire escape staircases. Since all staircases in Oi Shun House are fire escape staircases, it is unsuitable to install inclined lifting platforms in Oi Shun House. In view of these circumstances, currently it is difficult for HA to install the aforementioned two devices in Oi Shun House. That said, HA will continue to keep in view the development of new technologies and review the feasibility of improvement works as necessary.

To facilitate the access of elderly residents or tenants with disabilities who live on floors without lift services, the current policy allows them to apply for transfer to other flats in the same estate or other estates. HA will make suitable arrangements as far as practicable. Over the past three years, HA has approved about 180 cases of such special transfer.