

Doc Type	HA
Paper No	65/95
Title	Minutes of the Open Meeting of the HONG KONG HOUSING AUTHORITY held on Thursday, 28 September 1995
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Prof YEUNG Yue-man, JP) (Out of Hong Kong)
Mr C N BROOKE)

IN ATTENDANCE :

Mrs Fanny LAW, JP (Deputy Director/Housing Management and Works)
Mr LEE Kai-fat (Deputy Director/Administration)
(Secretary of the Authority)
Mr R A BATES, JP (Senior Assistant Director/Maintenance &
Construction Services)
Mr Simon P H LI, JP (Senior Assistant Director/Estate Management)
Mr Stephen S C POON, JP (Senior Assistant Director/New Development)
Mr Marco M H WU, JP (Senior Assistant Director/Housing Administration)
Mr HO Wing-him (Assistant Director/Policy)
Mrs Clarie LO (Assistant Director/Information and Community Relations)
Mr R N CARPENTER (Assistant Director/Construction Services)
Mr T C YUEN (Assistant Director/Development)
Mr C M KWONG (Assistant Director/Central Services and Management Policy)
Mr C C HUI (Assistant Director/Applications & Home Ownership)
Mr Vincent TONG (Assistant Director/Maintenance)
Mr Edward LAW Wing-tak (Assistant Director/Administration)
Mr J J NG (Assistant Director/Regional Management (2))
Mr H T FUNG (Assistant Director/Regional Management (1))
Mr K H LAU (Assistant Director/Operations & Redevelopment)
Mr Simon P S LEE (Legal Adviser)
Ms Nellie CHOW (Assistant Director/Finance)(Acting)
Mr CHEUNG Woon-hang (Chief Systems Manager)
Mr LAM Yau-chung (Senior Systems Manager (2))
Mr Lawrence CHOW (Committees' Secretary) (Meeting Secretary)
Ms Chlorine WONG (Assistant Committees' Secretary/1)
Miss Sabrina LEE (Assistant Committees' Secretary/3)

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48 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

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The Chairman opened the meeting at 8:47 a.m. and informed Members that the proceedings of the meeting would be broadcast to the Lecture Hall for viewing by departmental officers. Apologies for absence were recorded from Messrs. Edward S T HO, FUNG Kin-kee, YEUNG Yue-man and C N BROOKE, who were out of Hong Kong.

CONGRATULATIONS

2. The Chairman and Members extended congratulations to Messrs. Edward S T HO, FUNG Kin-kee and LEE Wing-tat, who had recently been elected to the Legislative Council.

WELCOME

3. The Chairman welcomed Mr LEUNG Po-wing, Secretary for Planning, Environment and Lands, to his first meeting of the Housing Authority. (Mr Leung joined the meeting at 9:30 a.m.)

CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE OPEN MEETING HELD ON 29
JUNE 1995

4. The Minutes were confirmed and signed.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

5. Members noted Paper No. HA 49/95.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

(AGENDA Review of the Rent Assistance Scheme Item 3) (Paper No. HA 50/95)

6. The Chairman complimented the Department for completing the review within a short period of three months.

7. Mr HO Wing-him presented the paper.

8. The Chairman asked Members to note Mr FUNG Kin-kee's written comments tabled (Annex (with a summary translation in English)). On behalf of Mr Fung, Ms LEUNG Wai-tung highlighted his proposal that all families with an income below 60% of Waiting List Income Limits (WLIL) should be qualified for the Rent Assistance Scheme (RAS).

9. Mr HAU Shui-pui commented that the two sets of criteria proposed in paragraph 24 (b) of the paper were still too harsh for families of three persons or above. It was particularly difficult for these families to meet the criterion of rent-to-income ratio (RIR) above 20%. He proposed that only one set of eligibility criteria be adopted, namely, households with income below 60% of WLIL and RIR above 15% should be eligible for rent assistance, so that larger households could also benefit from the RAS.

10. With the exception of the across-the-board granting of one-half rent reduction to all eligible households, Ms LEUNG Wai-tung was in support of the proposals in the paper. She noted that under the revised RAS, the higher the household income and the rent, the more rent reduction would be enjoyed by the applicants. She therefore suggested that the amount of rent reduction should vary among different households according to the amount of rent paid, the household income and the non-housing expenditure. There should be a ceiling for the rent reduction as well. She was also of the view that in addition to income, tenants' savings and assets should also be taken into account in assessing their eligibility.

11. In view of the small number of applications under the existing RAS, Mr LEE Wing-tat considered the scheme a failure. He did not support the use of RIR criteria because they were disadvantageous to families living in flats of low rents. He also opposed asking beneficiaries to move to cheaper flats after they had received two years' assistance because it might result in stratification in the community with most RAS beneficiaries eventually rehoused to older estates charging lower rents. He said that families earning marginally above the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance rates (CSSA) should have 100% rent reduction.

12. In response to Members' comments, Mr HO Wing-him recapitulated that the spirit

of the RAS was to assist tenants who had temporary financial difficulty. The grace period of one year, which was proposed to be extended to two years, was to allow enough time for the beneficiaries to improve their financial condition. For those who experienced financial hardship for a period longer than the grace period, the solution to their long-term predicament was to transfer to cheaper accommodation. To do away with the requirement of transfer to cheaper flats after a reasonable period of assistance was therefore against the spirit of the RAS. Mr Ho further explained that the RIR was the most objective criterion to assess the tenants' ability to pay rent. The proposed RIR criteria were already relaxed and considered very low by international standards. By applying the proposed criteria of WLIL and RIR, more low-income households would be covered than in the existing RAS. On the extent of rent reduction raised by Ms LEUNG Wai-tung, he explained that the proposed 50% rent discount was easy to understand and administer without the need for calculating any rent reduction ceiling. As the rents charged by the Authority were inclusive of rates and management fees, 100% waiver of rent was not considered appropriate. The Director of Housing added that since the RAS was meant to provide temporary assistance for rent relief, it would be more appropriate for tenants with long-term financial difficulty or in unemployment for a very long time to seek help from other agencies. He further said that the cheaper accommodation offered to tenants who were required to transfer would be self-contained flats of good standard and cheaper rents. The transfer would have no special "stratification" effect.

13. The recommendations in the paper had the support of Messrs. HUI Yin-fat, CHAN Kam-man, YEUNG Ka-sing, Anthony WONG Luen-kin, Joseph LIAN Yi-zhang and LEUNG Chun-ying, Secretary for Housing and Ms HO On-nei. They were generally of the view that the spirit of the RAS of giving temporary assistance to hardship tenants should be upheld and that the rent reduction should not be mixed up with the welfare payment by Social Welfare Department.

14. Mr CHAN Kam-man disagreed with the suggestion to use the 60% of WLIL as an eligibility criterion for RAS because other factors such as flat size and amount of rent should also be taken into consideration. He said that with the future revision of the CSSA rates, the lower end of the RAS eligible applicants would be covered by the CSSA and thus entitled to full rent reduction.

15. Dr Joseph LIAN Yi-zheng noted that the total rental loss to be incurred by the Authority under the revised RAS as indicated in paragraph 20 of the paper would be much higher than that of the existing one, which was about \$2 million. In view of the more generous eligibility criteria and the introduction of the WLIL criteria to help target accurately at the low-income households, the revised scheme should be well received by the public.

16. Mr Anthony WONG Luen-kin commented that the requirement of transfer to cheaper flats would not have a stratification effect or punitive implications. He said that in promoting the RAS, it should be stressed that its aim was to give temporary assistance and that the solution to long-term difficulty in rent payment was to transfer to cheaper flats. In this connection, Mr LEUNG Chun-ying said that the Department should publicize that the RAS was to reduce rent to help those in need. He also considered that the requirement of transfer to cheaper flats was reasonable because the same applied to tenants of private housing who could not afford higher rents. He was

of the view that the review of the RAS was a timely step in the current economic climate.

17. In response to Mr LEE Wing-tat's earlier comment, both Messrs. YEUNG Ka-sing and LEUNG Chun-ying remarked that the success or otherwise of the RAS should not be judged according to the number of applications.

(Mr YEUNG Ka-sing left the meeting at this juncture.)

18. In response to Mr HUI Yin-fat's question, Mr Marco WU said that if the proposals in the paper were endorsed, the revised RAS would be implemented with immediate effect.

19. The Chairman concluded that the revised criteria for eligibility, which were more generous, would improve the RAS and provide temporary relief for more families going through stormy periods.

20. After further deliberations, Members approved the recommendations as set out in paragraph 24 of the paper. They also agreed that the RAS should be reviewed in one year's time.

21. Objections were recorded from -

(a) Messrs. HAU Shui-pui, FUNG Kin-kee and LEE Wing-tat to using both a percentage of the WLIL and RIR as the eligibility criteria of the RAS (paragraph 24(b) of the paper);

(b) Ms LEUNG Wai-tung to the 50% rent reduction to all eligible households (paragraph 24(d) of the paper); and

(c) Messrs. HUI Yin-fat, HAU Shui-pui, FUNG Kin-kee and LEE Wing-tat to the requirement of transfer to cheaper flats after two years (paragraph 24(e) of the paper).

(AGENDA Code on Access to Information Item 4) (Paper No. HA 51/95)

22. The Chairman welcomed Mr D J WEEKS, Deputy Head (Special Duties) of the Efficiency Unit, to the meeting.

23. Mr LEE Kai-fat introduced the paper.

24. Mr LEE Wing-tat was of the view that clear guidelines on the length of the period during which Housing Authority/Committee papers would be classified as confidential and restricted should be established. He also suggested that consideration be given to setting up a library containing the Authority's information to facilitate research by academics, the media and interest groups, and the use of telephone answering systems to disseminate basic housing information. The Chairman asked the Department to

consider Mr Lee's views in drawing up its detailed proposal for application of the code on access to the Authority's information.

25. Mr LEUNG Chun-ying remarked that the slogan " " on the cover of the Code on Access to Information was not a precise translation of its English version "Serving the Community" as "Community" meant the community as a whole rather than individual citizens. Mr D J WEEKS suggested that Mr Leung's view be reflected to the Commissioner for Official Languages.

26. With the above comments, Members endorsed the Housing Department's adoption of the Code on Access to Information in January 1996.

(AGENDA Multi-media Information Kiosk Item 5) (Paper No. HA 52/95)

27. Mr LAM Yau-chung presented the paper and demonstrated the functions of the multi-media information kiosk.

(Mr D J WEEKS left the meeting at this juncture.)

28. Ms LEUNG Wai-tung suggested that apart from the Home Ownership Centre, the information kiosk should also be installed at other convenient locations such as MTR and KCR stations to facilitate use by Home Ownership Scheme (HOS) applicants. Mr LAM Yau-chung said that subject to the public's feedback on the pilot scheme, consideration would be given to installing additional kiosks at estates and railway stations. Ms Leung also suggested that the Department consider including messages on its telephone answering system on the application forms of HOS Phase 17B. In response to Ms Leung's comment on the name of the system, Members agreed that it should be renamed "Housing Authority Information Kiosk".

29. In response to Mr LEUNG Chun-ying's question, Mr LAM Yau-chung said that only the priority of HOS applications could be retrieved at the terminals with the use of applicants' Hong Kong Identity Card numbers.

30. Mr Daniel LAM Chun asked the Department to use more realistic scenes in the Information Kiosk to avoid misleading the users.

31. With the above comments, Members noted the paper.

(AGENDA Progress Report on the Implementation of the Item 6) Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Housing for the Elderly
(Paper No. HA 53/95)

32. Mr Marco WU introduced the paper.

33. Mr HUI Yin-fat was in support of the suggestions to assist the elderly as mentioned in paragraphs 21 to 24 of the paper and hoped that they could be implemented early. On Mr Hui's query about installation of emergency alarm system in existing estates, Mr Marco WU said that such an installation had to be complemented by a mutual help

neighbourhood. The problem of false alarm had also to be addressed. The Department was considering whether a more effective system which would be controlled centrally could be introduced having regard to the experience in the U.K. and the USA.

34. Mr HUI Yin-fat and Ms HO On-nei asked whether the proposal to contract out management of Housing for Senior Citizens to non-government organizations (NGOs) was aimed at reducing management expenses. In response, Mr Marco WU said that the aim of the proposal was to improve the quality of such services, not cost cutting. Instead of open tendering, the Department had invited some NGOs with good track record of managing such services to submit their proposals. The proposals would then be considered by the Management and Operations Committee.

35. In response to Mr Hui Yin-fat's question about the three-month roving exhibition commenced in November 1994 in shopping centres of public and private sector to promote the rehousing priority schemes for the elderly, Mr C C HUI commented that it was very successful. 50,000 application forms had been distributed to the elderly, resulting in a large increase in number of such applications received in the past six to seven months. He added that the Department would continue to organize such exhibitions two to three times a year to publicize the schemes.

36. Mr LEE Wing-tat requested the Department to review the policy of accommodating the single elderly in shared flats in the light of a double homicide and suicide case which took place in Fu Heng Estate a few months ago. Mr Marco WU said that the tragedy occurred in Fu Heng Estate was an isolated incident and that in most cases, the single elderly were happy to live with others. Nevertheless, the Department would review the situation and take appropriate measures to assist those in need. Mr Simon P H LI added that the Department would continue to provide special services on estates with large number of elderly tenants living alone by referring cases requiring help to the appropriate social service agencies. There were plans to extend such services to 10 estates a year in the next five years with a view to improving services to the elderly living alone.

(Mr Eddy FONG Ching left the meeting at this juncture.)

37. The Director of Housing also expressed concern about suicide committed by the elderly. He urged welfare agencies to assist in solving the problem by promoting their outreaching services to the elderly living in single person flats. Mr HUI Yin-fat shared his views.

38. Mr LEE Wing-tat said that he had recently received some complaints about the prolonged waiting time of two to six years for offer of housing under the rehousing priority schemes. Mr Marco WU said that the normal waiting time for allocation of housing under the schemes was two years. The applicants might have to wait longer if they had specific locational preferences. He asked Mr Lee to provide him with details of the cases mentioned so that he could investigate further.

39. In answering Mr HUI Yin-fat's enquiry about the Ad Hoc Committee's proposal to construct elderly housing in about 10 sites, Mr Stephen S C POON drew Members' attention to paragraph 5 of Annex I to the paper, which showed that five different types

of unit were available for small households including the elderly. As a whole, the number of these units was adequate to rehouse some 30,600 elderly persons referred to in paragraph 5 of the paper. But he further pointed out that the five different types of unit were not solely for rehousing the elderly and their supply would be kept flexible to meet the need of the elderly according to the demand for each year and from individual districts.

40. Referring to paragraph 8 of Annex I to the paper, Dr Joseph LIAN Yi-zheng pointed out that it was not necessary to develop elderly housing primarily in the urban area. Sites for elderly housing could be in sub-urban and less heavily trafficked areas taking into account the needs of the elderly, e.g. areas near to hospitals and with more open space. Development of urban sites into housing for the younger people who were required to move around in the urban area might promote better utilization of resources. The Chairman noted Dr Lian's opinion but remarked that some people were in favour of the urban sites for they were more convenient to the elderly. In any event, the Department should consider views from both sides when selecting sites for development of elderly housing.

41. In reply to Mr HUI Yin-fat's further question, Mrs Fanny LAW informed Members that enquiries about the implementation of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee should be addressed to Mr C M KWONG or Mr Marco WU.

42. With the above comments, Members noted the paper.

(AGENDA Secretary's Report - Committee Work Item 7) (June - August 1995)
(Paper No. HA 54/95)

43. Members noted the paper.

44. Mr LEE Wing-tat doubted whether the monthly charge for private car spaces had been increased from \$100 to \$400 as stated in the first sentence of paragraph 28 of the Chinese version of the paper. Mr Marco WU clarified that the said amounts were the monthly increases, not the monthly charges.

45. Referring to paragraph 30(a) of the report, Mr LEE Wing-tat wondered why the increase of rent for graded shops in Group B estates were relatively higher than that of shops in private shopping arcades. Mr Marco WU explained that though the increase percentage seemed to be high, the actual amount of increase was small because the existing rent of such shops was very low. He further remarked that the occupancy rate of the shops in public housing estates was relatively high because the goods and services provided by these shops were daily necessities. The tenants thus enjoyed a stable business turnover. Nevertheless, the Department did take into account the business potential of the shops in assessing their rents.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

New Home Ownership Scheme Block (Concord Block)

46. At the request of the Chairman, Mr Stephen S C POON briefed Members on the Concord Block. He reported that the detailed design of the Concord Block had been approved by the Building Committee (BC) on 21 September 1995. On the same day, a visit was arranged for Home Ownership Committee (HOC) and BC Members to see the mock-up flats of the Concord Block. The feedback from the HOC and BC Members was positive. From October to December this year, the mock-up flats would be open to the public. A questionnaire had been prepared to collect comments from the public. Depending on the outcome of the public consultation, the detailed design might have to be modified. The mock-up flats would then be open to the public again in early 1996. He welcomed Members' views on the design of the Concord Block.

47. Mr HUI Yin-fat was pleased to see improvements to the design of HOS blocks but disagreed to increasing their selling prices. Mr Victor SO Hing-woh remarked that internal fittings and fixtures should only be provided in the flats in line with buyers' expectation to reduce the possibility of their being discarded and to reduce the prices of the flats. Ms LEUNG Wai-tung informed Members that the HOC would conduct a review on the HOS blocks and submit its report to the Authority. She was, however, satisfied with the design of the Concord Block and the provision of the fittings and fixtures in the mock-up flats. The Chairman appreciated the Department's efforts in consulting the public on improvements to the HOS blocks. She hoped Members could pay a visit to the mock-up flats and give the Department their views.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

48. The Chairman announced that the next meeting would be held on Thursday, 4 January 1996.

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49. There being no other business, the meeting closed at 11:07 a.m.
CONFIRMED on

Hon Rosanna WONG Yick-ming, CBE, JP
(Chairman)

Lawrence CHOW
(Meeting Secretary)

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