

(Translation)

HONG KONG PEOPLE'S COUNCIL ON HOUSING POLICY

Response to the Housing Authority's Consultative Document on Housing Quality

40 recommendations for improvement have been made in the consultative document on housing quality just issued by the Housing Authority (HA). We are highly appreciative of HA's efforts and commitment to implement reform on housing quality, which are much different from the way it did in the past. We also welcome the implementation of these improvement initiatives.

HA should assume responsibilities

Since the outbreak of the short pile scandal of Tin Chung Court, Tin Shui Wai, this Council has held the view that HA, as an important monitoring authority, should assume full responsibilities for and bear all the consequences of this incident. Apart from making reasonable compensations to those prospective HOS owners affected by the short piles, HA should also be held accountable to the public for its negligence in monitoring. The highest policymaker of the Department should therefore tender his resignation.

Efforts should be made to improve the monitoring mechanism

The significant increase of housing production in recent years should not be used as an excuse for the problems found in the existing monitoring mechanism. It only brings out the weaknesses of the unsound monitoring mechanism of the Housing Department. We believe that the 40 recommendations just announced by HA were formulated after in-depth and extensive review and the public will not query HA's contribution in this respect. However, most of these initiatives, which aim to change the malpractice of the construction industry, will not be implemented as easily as it is perceived. It is also impossible and beyond the Department's ability to rectify these deeply rooted problems in the industry overnight. The Department should therefore make an effort to reform its monitoring mechanism. This is the only practical and effective way to go.

Recommendations

HA's improvement initiatives only emphasis a technical and 'hardware' reform of housing construction. There are not adequate measures to safeguard the interests of HOS buyers. Only two out of these recommendations offer protection to the home buyers: 1) 10-year structural guarantee for all HOS flats; and 2) extension of defect liability period to 2 years for new flats. We consider that such initiatives cannot fully regain the confidence of the community. This is well demonstrated by the record low of HOS over-subscription rate in 14 years. While we will not comment on the effectiveness of the initiatives for the time being, we would like to point out that HA should propose a solution to the following: What protection and compensation can be offered to HOS buyers or owners in case problems are still found in HOS flats? The confidence of the community can only be regained if HA is willing to bear buyers' interests in mind.