

Press in March 1996

<i>Press March 28, 1996</i>	
Headline :	<i>Greater Openness and Accountability for Housing Authority</i>
Content :	<p>The following is issued on behalf of the Housing Authority:</p> <p>The Housing Authority (HA) today (Thursday) approved a number of measures to enhance its openness and accountability.</p> <p>"The Authority is committed to the principles of transparency and accountability and has put these into practice. The new measures will provide additional channels for members to communicate directly with the public," a HA spokesman said.</p> <p>"These measures will also enable members to have a better grasp of the public sentiment and facilitate the policy formulation process," he added.</p> <p>The measures include stepped-up direct contact with the Legislative Council (Legco) , the Municipal Councils and the District Boards (DBs).</p> <p>"Meetings with Legco, in particular the Housing Panel, will be arranged to facilitate the exchange of views on the direction of public housing development and major policy issues ," the spokesman said.</p> <p>As a start, an annual get-together between members of the Legco and HA will be arranged.</p> <p>Regular contact with Municipal Councillors and DB members will also be established to promote communication and understanding.</p> <p>"As the Authority's policies and decisions have a bearing on millions of public housing tenants, there is the need to forge closer ties with them," the spokesman said.</p> <p>"Members of the Authority will attend meetings with Mutual Aid Committees or Estate Management Advisory Committees on a regular basis to obtain direct feedback from tenants on housing matters," he added.</p> <p>"Visit programmes will be strengthened for HA members to obtain first-hand knowledge of the Housing Department's work and the living condition of tenants," he noted.</p>

Members will also have the opportunities to meet prospective tenants through visits to private accommodation and meetings with Customer Liaison Groups, which is one of the avenues to solicit feedback from Waiting List applicants.

To promote better understanding and trust between HA members and the media, HA and committee members will be encouraged to meet the media.

An annual get-together session with reporters on the housing beats will be arranged. Besides, new HA members will be invited to meet the press after their appointment.

"Apart from the existing practice to have HA and committees chairmen to give press briefings and interview, members will also be encouraged to appear on television and radio programmes to explain policies and decisions," the spokesman said.

"These are opportunities for the Authority to speak on the rationale behind specific issues, to stimulate healthy debates and to dispel misconceptions," he added.

Members also agreed that the meetings of the Authority and its committees could be made more transparent by releasing the agenda in advance. Discussion papers already approved and ready for implementation will also be made public.

To facilitate public access, both local and overseas, to information on the Authority and its work, plans are in hand to set up a home page on housing on the Internet.

The spokesman said other channels to promote public participation would include inviting professionals, Legco, Municipal Council and DB members as well as tenants to attend housing seminars.

"We will also invite tenants to contribute articles for publication in the HA's Bi-monthly Newsletter," he said. Regular surveys on public perception of the Authority's policies and feedback on the services of the Housing Department will be carried out. The findings will be released and tracked over time as an indicator of the performance of the Authority and Department.

Today's meeting also endorsed a proposal to extend the Estate Management Advisory Committee (EMAC) Scheme to all public housing estates over two years by phases from April 1996.

With about 20 estates to join the scheme every three months, the scheme is expected to be fully implemented by the end of 1997.

The spokesman said that a pilot scheme to set up EMACs in eight estates in the past year had received positive response from tenants and the EMAC members.

"More than 70 per cent of the respondents in a survey conducted among tenants of these estates recognised the effectiveness of the scheme and over 80 per cent of them were in favour of its extension to other estates.

"The response from EMAC members was also very encouraging and supportive," he said.

The spokesman pointed out that the EMAC pilot scheme had improved communication between tenants and the management through better structured bi-monthly meetings and EMAC newsletters.

"The scheme also helped cultivate a stronger sense of belonging among tenants and a better understanding of the nature and progress of improvement works," he said.

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