

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Progress Report on Phasing out of Self-Care Hostels and Homes for the Aged

PURPOSE

This paper provides Members with background to the phasing out of self-care hostels for elders (S/C) and homes for the aged (H/A), reports on progress to date and seeks Members' comments on the way forward in ensuring that residential services should concentrate on looking after frail elders with care needs.

BACKGROUND

Policy Directive

2. In August 1994, the Working Group on Care for the Elderly recommended in its report that the provision of S/C places should be phased out gradually as the need for such places has been reduced partly because of the development of community support services and partly because of the expansion of the sheltered housing scheme of the Housing Authority. In 1997, the Elderly Commission (EC) conducted a comprehensive assessment on the long-term need of elders for housing and residential care and recommended a strategy to meet these needs. In its report published in September 1998, the Elderly Commission considered that residential care services should be directed to elders with genuine needs. The Commission recommended that able-bodied elders and those who could take care of themselves should remain in the community. Under the Policy Objective on Care for Elders, the Administration has been actively pursuing a strategy of encouraging and facilitating elders with no or low impairment to age in their familiar environment.

Reducing the supply of S/C and H/A

3. Over the years, various measures have been adopted to channel resources on S/C and H/A places to care and attention (C&A) homes. For example, no new S/C has been built since 1992 and the total number of S/C places has been reduced from 1 976 in 1992 to only 166 in 2002. Similarly, no new H/A has been built since 1998 and a programme to convert H/As into C&A places is in place. A total of 370 H/A places have been converted into C&A places since 1997 and another 200 are planned for conversion within 2003-04. Instead, during the last decade, we have seen a huge expansion of subsidized C&A places, from 4 289 in 1993 to 17 197 at end March 2003 provided at subvented NGO homes, private homes under Bought Place Scheme/Enhanced Bought Place Scheme (BPS/EBPS) and contract homes. At present, there are only 97 subsidized S/C places and 7 343 subsidized H/A places operated by a total of 34 Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Strengthening matching of services

4. To implement the policy objective of targeting residential care services to elders with genuine needs and facilitating community-based support, we have undertaken a number of related initiatives in recent years. These include –

- (a) adopting a standardized care need assessment tool since November 2000 for all elders applying for subsidized long term care services to facilitate service matching;
- (b) strengthening carer support and implementing Support Teams for Elders to assist and support elders living at home;
- (c) introducing the Enhanced Home and Community Care Services (EHCCS) in early 2001 to provide a continuum of personal care services to elders of moderate level of impairment to be looked after at home;
- (d) based on the successful implementation of integrated elderly community projects, launching an extensive re-engineering of existing Social Centres (S/E) and Multi-Service Centres for Elders (M/E) which will result in the upgrading of all 35 existing M/Es into District Elderly Community Centres (DECC), the establishment of an additional DECC in Tseung Kwan O and the upgrading of 110 S/Es into Neighbourhood Elderly Centres (NEC) from April 2003; and
- (e) upgrading all but one Home Help Teams (138) into Integrated Home Care Services Teams (IHCST) from April 2003 providing a continuum of home-based services to elders living at home.

At the same time, significant improvements have been made by the Housing Authority in meeting elders' housing needs both in terms of quantity and the quality. For example, more self-contained small flats adopting universal design are being built to cater for the preferences of elders.

THE DIRECTOR OF AUDIT'S REPORT

5. In March 2002, the Director of Audit published a value for money report on residential services for the elderly which was tabled at the Legislative Council on 24 April 2002. The Audit review recommends, *inter alia*, that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) should formulate an action plan with target dates to phase out H/A, to cease accepting new applications for admission to H/A and to transfer applicants on the waiting list for H/A to the waiting list for C&A places if they meet the admission criteria.

6. On 6 May 2002, at the public hearing of the Public Accounts Committee, in response to Members' enquiry on the phasing out of H/A places, the Director of Social Welfare (DSW) said that the Administration agreed with the Audit recommendations and would shortly consult the EC on the phasing out plan including the ceasing of applications for S/C and H/A places.

7. At its meeting held on 13 June 2002, the EC discussed the Administration's proposed measures to take forward the major recommendations on residential services for elders as set out in the Audit Report. Specifically, on the phasing out of S/C and H/A places, the EC endorsed the Administration's observation that the current S/C and H/A waiting list arrangement is not efficient on the grounds that –

- (a) over 1 000 of elders (or 16%) on the S/C and H/A waiting list are inactive cases, i.e. they are not ready or willing to be admitted to homes when places are available within six months. On the other hand, some 60% of them are not receiving any community support services;
- (b) an analysis of referrals for waitlisting for S/C and H/A places in the month of March 2002 shows that “psychological insurance” (23%), lack of social support (32%), illness (10%) and relationship problem with family members (7%) are quoted as the main reason for registration for residential services while “housing problem” is only quoted by less than 1% of applicants as the main reason; and
- (c) for the period from May 2001 to April 2002, the average decline rate among applicants for S/C and H/A when a place became available was as high as 40%.

In light of the above, EC endorsed the Administration's proposal that a detailed plan to phase out S/C and H/A places involving ceasing admission to S/C and H/A waiting lists from a given date and care review of all existing waitlisting cases should be implemented. The EC further advised that elders concerned should be briefed about the community support services available to avoid causing them unwarranted concerns.

8. On 18 July 2002, SWD had a sharing session with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and representatives from NGOs operating S/C and H/A. At the session, NGO representatives were briefed about the scope of the phasing out plan for S/C and H/A and exchanged views about possible ways to convert H/A places into C&A places.

9. Separately, discussions were held with the Housing Department (HD) on referral mechanisms between SWD and HD in respect of those elders on the waiting list or potential applicants for S/C and H/A to meet their housing needs. Preparation for relevant caseworkers to review waiting list elders was also made.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

10. On 18 December 2002, DSW conducted a briefing for all referring service units as well as representatives from NGOs providing elderly services on the phasing out plan. At the briefing, we introduced detailed arrangements relating to the phasing out of S/C and H/A and announced that no new applications for admission to S/C and H/A would be accepted as from 1 January 2003 and vigorous review of the cases on the waiting lists for S/C and H/A would be conducted over the next six months to ascertain the elders' genuine welfare needs. Elders on the existing waiting lists will be offered community support services or housing as appropriate as the first step. However, if these elders insist to remain on the existing waiting lists to await their turn for admission when vacancies from the reduced stock of S/C and H/A become available, they will be allowed to do so. Representatives of HD also attended the session to brief participants about the available arrangements to meet elders' housing needs.

11. To facilitate case review by workers, SWD published in January 2003 a Guidebook on Services for Elders which sets out a wide spectrum of community support services in health, housing and welfare programmes available to elders. The Guidebook was sent to each and every one of the elders on the waiting lists for S/C and H/A together with a letter from DSW to explain the phasing out arrangements and address elders' concerns. A copy of DSW's letter and the Guidebook is at the Annex for Member's reference.

12. At its meeting held on 21 January 2003, DSW reported to the EC what had been done in implementing the phasing out plan for S/C and H/A.

13. We are aware that since implementation of the plan, concerns have been expressed in some quarters that by ceasing admission to the waiting lists for S/C and H/A and implementing this particular decision at short notice, we are denying needy elders of their choice and accessibility to services. We do not agree with this view. As pointed out above, the S/C and H/A waiting process is simply not meeting elders' immediate service needs. If the elder is in need of housing, he or she should immediately be assisted by the caseworker to register with HD or where justified, to be referred for compassionate rehousing. If the elder has no or low impairment but is living alone and has home help or social support needs, he or she should likewise be networked with available support services or invited to use centre services as appropriate. If the elder is frail and has care needs, he or she may still be admitted to the C&A waiting list whilst being provided with home care support. Put simply, by stopping the practice of waitlisting elders for S/C and H/A, we are ensuring that attending caseworkers would carefully assess elders' genuine needs and make the appropriate arrangements.

PROGRESS TO DATE

14. As at 31 December 2002, there were 5 607 applicants registered with the Residential Care Services Delivery System (REDS) for waitlisting for admission to S/C and H/A. As at 31 March 2003, the total number of elders on the waiting lists for S/C and H/A has dropped to 4 376 including 3 828 active applicants and 548 non-active applicants, representing a drop by 22%. The drop can be attributed to a number of factors including -

- (a) applicants being admitted to S/C and H/A when places are available and service matching accepted (16%);
- (b) applicants not matched to residential service under the standardised assessment (10%);
- (c) applicants' withdrawal of applications voluntarily during case review with alternative support rendered as needed (48%); and
- (d) others (e.g. decease of applicants, change to other service types, etc.) (26%).

15. With concerted efforts from SWD and HD, we have put in place arrangements to refer eligible elders for consideration of allocation to Housing for Senior Citizens (HSC) units under the compassionate rehousing quota. To facilitate elders to make an informed decision in applying for HSC housing units, SWD and HD have arranged group visits by elders and frontline caseworkers to some of the HSC housing units. A total of some 40 elders and frontline

caseworkers participated in the group visits held on 28 March 2003. Further visits will be arranged as necessary.

WAY FORWARD

16. The phasing out of S/C and H/A should be perceived as a definite and positive step to actualise the concept of ageing in the community. It also represents optimal and rational use of community resources, including both housing and welfare which are particularly relevant under the current fiscal situation. Subject to resource availability, SWD will continue to develop and expand community support services while residential service would be targeted towards those frail elders whose care needs cannot be adequately taken care of at home.

17. The allocations for the provision of S/C and H/A services, in the region of \$338 million per year in 2002-03, should in time to come be redeployed to meet other pressing needs of the elders, subject to the overall fiscal stringency. Phasing out of S/C and H/A has been identified as an area for efficiency savings but our intention is to achieve this through natural wastage as we still have over 4 000 elders on the waiting list for S/C and H/A and we should uphold the principle of ageing in place for elders residing in these homes as far as possible.

18. To better prepare for the phasing out of S/C and H/A and to mitigate the effect on NGOs and their staff, and provided that resources are available, we will in consultation with the sector pursue the following –

- (a) the conversion of existing H/A places into C&A places especially when existing H/A residents are already of a moderate level of frailty so that these elders may continue to age in their familiar environment. In 2003-04, funds are earmarked for an additional 200 H/A places to be converted into C&A places. However, based on a 2000 survey, only about 38% of existing H/A places are technically suitable for conversion into C&A places;
- (b) the reprovisioning of those H/As with less than satisfactory premises into new purpose-built RCHE premises originally intended for competitive bidding. Upon reprovisioning, they will serve elders of a higher level of frailty such as those requiring C&A or Nursing Home attention;
- (c) the transformation of these subvented homes into a mixed mode operation providing subsidized and non-subsidized places as in the case of the contract homes in anticipation of the introduction of a fee assistance scheme under which elders requiring subsidized care would be given the choice to pick their own homes; and

- (d) the upgrading of skills and knowledge of existing care staff in the H/A so that they may continue to serve in the new operating environment.

ADVICE SOUGHT

19. Members are invited to note the progress of phasing out S/C and H/A as set out in this paper and to comment on the way forward.

Social Welfare Department
April 2003

Our Ref.: SWD 20/150/780/49

21 January 2003

Dear Elders,

**Case Review on Applications for Admission to
Self-care Hostels and Homes for the Aged**

Like hundreds of elders, you are on the waiting list for admission to subsidised places in self-care hostels or homes for the aged. Based on the current demand and supply, it will take some time for you to be offered a suitable placement. In fact, our experience indicates that quite a number of elders would like to continue to stay with their families when they were informed of the availability of placements in residential care homes. Such sentiments are also expressed by elders' family members as their carers. This is only natural as elders prefer to age in an environment with which they are familiar.

We fully understand elders' concerns and the dilemma of their family members who as carers would like to take care of their aged family members at home on the one hand whilst on the other are worried that they may not be able to do so adequately because of work engagements or other reasons. In view of this, the Government advocates "ageing in place" as one of its policy objectives for elderly services. In recent years, the Government has made considerable progress in strengthening the provision of community support services with a view to implementing the aforesaid policy objective. This includes setting up Support Teams for the Elderly, improving home care and meal services, launching Enhanced Home and Community Care Services, establishing Family Support Network Teams, etc. The Social Welfare Department has lately re-engineered community support services for elders to upgrade Multi-service Centres for the Elderly and Social Centres for the Elderly to District Elderly Community Centres (DECC) and Neighbourhood Elderly Centres (NEC) respectively. These centres as upgraded will have expanded functions to provide services to

both healthy and frail elders as well as to their carers. All these service developments have taken into account the wishes of elders and their carers and are intended to facilitate elders with family support to age in the community.

Having regard to the progress made in strengthening community support services as well as the increased provision of housing for elders by the Housing Authority and the Housing Society in recent years, we reckon that the Social Welfare Department should focus on developing care and attention home services for elders of moderate to severe level of impairment. Healthy elders and those who can take care of themselves should continue to stay in the community. This policy direction has the support of the Elderly Commission.

Since 1 January 2003, the Social Welfare Department has ceased accepting new applications for waitlisting for admission to self-care hostels and homes for the aged. This arrangement, however, does not affect elders who were registered with the Residential Care Services Delivery System for the Elderly before 1 January 2003 to waitlist for admission to self-care hostels or homes for the aged. In other words, **your application remains on the waiting list pending the offer of a placement in self-care hostel or home for the aged.**

To facilitate you and your family members to better understand available community support services, I enclose a copy of the *Guidebook on Services for Elders* (Chinese version only) which sets out different types of community support services that elders may tap whilst ageing at home. The caseworker responsible for your application for residential care placement will contact you between now and June 2003 to review your application and introduce to you the support services and housing assistance available in the community. They are ready to refer you for appropriate welfare services with due regard to your need and wishes so that you may age in a familiar environment with adequate support.

In case you and your family members have any questions about the case review or you need leaflets of the various community support services in English, please do not hesitate to contact the caseworker concerned.

With regards.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs Carrie Lam)
Director of Social Welfare