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Panel on Housing

Meeting on 7 December 2009

**Background brief on the pilot scheme of the
Housing Advisory and Service Team in Tin Shui Wai**

Purpose

This paper sets out the progress of the pilot scheme of the Housing Advisory and Service Team (HAST) in Tin Shui Wai (TSW), and gives a brief account of the views and concerns expressed by the Panel on Housing (the Panel).

Background

2. It has been an established practice for the Housing Department (HD) to provide all prospective tenants of newly completed PRH with an information folder listing out the information about the social, community, transport and educational services available in the district. HD will also conduct orientation briefings to help the tenants assess if the housing offer is suitable for them. These services are particularly useful to tenants in TSW where the number of public rental housing (PRH) flats would amount to 56 700 with a population reaching 184 000 by September 2009.

3. Given that many of tenants in TSW have moved to the district for a relatively short period of time, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social service agencies have expressed difficulties in outreaching to these tenants, building up relationship with them, and enabling them to fully utilise their services. To enhance services provided to the TSW community, HD has discussed with and obtained the support of the Home Affairs Bureau as well as the Labour and Welfare Bureau in setting up HAST, which aims to assist new tenants to adapt to the new living environment and to foster community building. The pilot scheme was endorsed by the Subsidised Housing Committee of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) in January 2008. An NGO was commissioned to provide the service through tender, and HAST was subsequently set up on 16 April 2008 for a period of two years at an estimated cost of about \$4 million (including staff remuneration and other expenses).

Work progress of HAST

4. To avoid duplication of the existing services rendered by the Social Welfare Department, Home Affairs Department, NGOs and voluntary groups, HAST is mainly tasked with the following responsibilities -

- (a) to assist new tenants in adapting to their new living environment by conducting orientation briefings and home visits, and to refer needy families to the concerned departments and voluntary agencies for assistance;
- (b) to assist Estate Management Advisory Committees (EMACs) in organizing gatherings to incubate a stronger sense of belonging and to foster community building;
- (c) to assist HD in providing training and conducting seminars on community building for EMAC members;
- (d) to assist PRH tenants in building up contacts with relevant Government departments and social organisations;
- (e) to coordinate with relevant Government departments and voluntary organisations in mobilising appropriate social services and community resources for the residents; and
- (f) to provide any other necessary advisory and counselling services to PRH tenants as required by HD.

5. As at January 2009, HAST has paid visits to all social service agencies, District Council members and EMACs in TSW, set up a telephone hotline to answer tenants' enquiries and held roving exhibitions in PRH estates. So far, HAST has held orientation briefings for about 3 000 households upon intake, and has provided advisory service to 1 700 households and case counselling service to over 90 households. A summary of HAST activities is given in Annex to LC Paper No. CB(1)669/08-09(05) which is hyperlinked below for ease of reference.

6. HD is responsible for the overall steering and supervision of the services provided by HAST. It plans to conduct a comprehensive review 18 months after the commencement of service by HAST (i.e. October 2009) to gauge the effectiveness and map out the way forward of the pilot scheme, and to decide on whether to extend the scheme to other districts.

Major concerns raised by the Panel

7. The work progress of HAST was discussed at the Panel meeting on 2 February 2009.

8. While welcoming the setting up of HAST, some members opined that efforts should be made to provide more services to enhance mutual support, particularly outreaching services for "hidden" families (i.e. those which were isolated and received no support from friends and relatives) which were the origins of some past tragedies in TSW. They also pointed out that the various enhanced housing arrangements for fostering harmonious families in PRH, including HAST, could not achieve their intended purposes of fostering harmonious families in PRH if children of elderly tenants were not allowed to live with their parents. Besides, the setting up of HAST could not resolve the problem associated with the inadequacy of services in TSW, particularly medical services as there was no general hospital in the district. There was also concern on the possible overlapping of services between HAST and other NGOs.

9. Given that a comprehensive review would be conducted 18 months after the commencement of services by HAST (i.e. October 2009), the Administration was requested to report the outcome of the review to the Panel in due course.

Latest development

10. The Administration proposes to brief the Panel on the review of implementing HAST at the next Panel meeting on 7 December 2009.

Relevant papers

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Housing Panel meeting on 2 February 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/papers/hg0202cb1-669-5-e.pdf>

Minutes of the Housing Panel meeting on 2 February 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/hg/minutes/hg20090202.pdf>