

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

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## **Panel on Welfare Services**

### **Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 14 December 2009**

#### **Provision of subsidised residential care places**

##### **Purpose**

This paper gives a brief account of past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services (the Panel), the Subcommittee on Elderly Services and the Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation on the provision of additional subsidised residential care places.

##### **Background**

2. Residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs) in Hong Kong are run by both the private sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

3. According to information provided by the Administration, as at end-October 2007, there were 772 RCHEs. Of these, 583 were run by private operators and 189 by NGOs. Altogether, they were providing 71 879 RCHE places, equivalent to about 8.2% of the 874 000 elderly population aged 65 or above in Hong Kong. At present, about 57 500 elders are staying in RCHEs. Of the 71 879 residential care places for the elderly, 25 829 (35.9%) are subsidised places. There are three different types of subsidised places, 18 693 places in subvented RCHEs run by NGOs, 745 places in purpose-built premises run by NGOs or private operators on a contract basis, and 6 391 places in private RCHEs participating in the "Enhanced Bought Place Scheme" (EBPS).

4. Given that subsidised residential care places are in huge demand, since November 2003, access to subsidised RCHE places is subject to care need assessments under the Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism (SCANAM). However, there is no means-test for subsidised residential care places. Eligible elders will be put on the Central Waiting List (CWL), for subsidised care and attention (C&A) places and nursing home (NH) places.

5. Similar to RCHEs, there are three types of RCHDs, namely subvented RCHDs, self-financed RCHDs operated by NGOs and private homes. According to the Administration, there were 187 subvented RCHDs and 17 self-financed RCHDs operated by NGOs offering residential care services for physically impaired, mentally impaired, ex-mentally ill and blind persons. As at December 2007, there were 10 700 subsidised residential care places for persons with disabilities (PWDs). As at 1 April 2008, there were 40 private RCHDs known to SWD providing 2 293 residential places with an enrolment rate of 69%.

6. In order to identify PWDs with genuine need for residential services and to match them with appropriate types of services, a Standardised Assessment Tool for Residential Services for People with Disabilities was implemented with effect from 1 January 2005. All applicants for subvented residential services for PWDs must be assessed by the Tool to ascertain their residential services needs before they are put on CWL or admitted to their required service units.

## **Deliberations by members**

### Residential care services for the elderly

7. The Subcommittee on Elderly Services had discussed residential care services for the elderly at its meetings on 22 January, 19 February and 11 April 2008. Members were advised that as at end-October 2007, the overall average waiting time for a subsidised C&A place was about 21 months (the waiting time for a subsidised C&A place in a private RCHE participating in EBPS was about 10 months, and that for a subsidised C&A place in a subvented/contract RCHE was about 32 months). The average waiting time for a subsidised NH place was about 42 months. Members expressed grave concern about the long waiting time for subsidised residential care services. They considered the waitlisting situation of subsidised residential care services unacceptable.

8. The Administration advised that subsidised residential care places for the elderly were meant for those who had long-term care (LTC) needs but could not be adequately taken care of at home. To meet the demand for subsidised residential care places, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) had been increasing the supply of subsidised residential care places from about 16 000 in 1997 to about 26 000 in 2007. In 2007-2008, the Government would provide an additional 743 subsidised residential care places (including 212 places in three new contract homes and 531 places purchased from private RCHEs under EBPS). In 2008-2009, an additional 107 subsidised residential care places would be provided in the new contract homes. Furthermore, the 2008-2009 Budget had earmarked \$29.8 million for the provision of an additional 278 subsidised residential care places. Another \$40 million would be deployed to upgrade 760 infirmary places in 19 RCHEs to provide infirmary care to medically stable elders. In addition, under the conversion programme launched since

2005, more C&A places providing continuum of care up to nursing level of care would be created to better meet the LTC needs of elders.

9. As regards the waitlisting situation, the Administration advised that there was no means-test for subsidised residential care places, and the average waiting time for a subsidised C&A place in private RCHEs participating in EBPS was about 10 months. As the pre-application care need assessment under SCNAM was only introduced in November 2003, not all elders currently on CWL had undergone the required assessment. The eligibility of some of them for subsidised residential care places had yet to be assessed and confirmed.

10. The Administration further advised that some of the elders on CWL were staying in non-subsidised residential care places while waiting for subsidised places. Some who were staying at home while waiting for subsidised residential care places were also receiving subsidised home-based community care services or day care services. According to the Administration, of the 6 294 elders on CWL waiting for the subsidised NH places, 10% were receiving subsidised home-based community care or day care services, 4% were staying in residential care places, and about 50% were on CSSA and staying in private RCHEs.

11. Notwithstanding the provision of additional subsidised residential care places, members considered that the measures put in place by the Administration were inadequate to meet the strong demand for subsidised residential care places arising from the ageing population. While recognising that most elders did not object to ageing in the community, some members pointed out that there were practical difficulties for those elders with LTC needs to be taken care of at home due to various reasons. For instance, some elders were left unattended if their family members had to work during daytime. Although the average waiting time for a subsidised C&A place in private RCHEs participating in EBPS was only about 10 months, members noted with concern that some elders preferred to wait for a subsidised C&A place in a subvented/contract RCHE which was currently about 32 months. They considered that the waitlisting situation was primarily due to the worry about the quality of life in private RCHEs. The Administration should take this into account and examine critically the reasons why elders preferred to wait for subsidised RCHE places.

12. Members considered that it was the Government's responsibility to provide adequate residential care places for those elders who had LTC needs. In this regard, the Subcommittee on Elderly Services strongly urged the Administration to draw up a specific timetable and long-term plan to increase the number of and shorten the waiting time for subsidised residential care places. The Administration should make a pledge for the allocation of subsidised residential care places. To target subsidised residential care services at elders most in need, some members considered that the Administration should spell out the specific impairment level under which elders would be classified as having imminent LTC needs for admission to subsidised RCHEs.

13. The Administration stressed that it fully recognised the huge demand for subsidised residential care services for the elderly as a result of the ageing population. It would continue to bid for additional resources to increase the supply of subsidised RCHEs. However, increasing continuously the supply of residential care places alone would not be sufficient to meet the growing needs due to a number of contributing factors, and the Administration would encourage a balanced mix of public and private elderly care services to widen the choices for quality self-financing and private residential care places providing different services. As there were many factors affecting the number of elders on CWL, the Administration was unable to give a pledge on the waiting time for the allocation of subsidised residential care places. Nevertheless, it would monitor the waitlisting situation closely. It would also consider the long-term planning of the provision of residential care services for the elderly in consultation with the Elderly Commission (EC).

14. The Administration pointed out that elders with LTC needs did not necessarily age in RCHEs. SWD was in parallel providing a range of subsidised community care and support services to facilitate elders to age in the community. The Administration further pointed out that taking into account the non-subsidised residential care places for the elderly, there were some 74 500 RCHE places in Hong Kong. At present, about 57 000 elders were staying in subsidised or non-subsidised places in RCHEs. Notwithstanding the some 20 000 surplus places in private RCHEs, some elders preferred to wait for subsidised places. The Administration would work with EC to explore how to promote further development of quality self-financing/private residential care services in meeting the LTC needs of elderly.

15. Noting that the Administration had yet to consult EC on the long-term planning of elderly services, members expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of a long-term planning and the slow progress made as EC had discussed the subject matter for almost 10 years. The Administration explained that EC had been focusing on promotion of active ageing in the past two years and had only started to focus on the review of residential care services for the elderly in late 2007; EC would need some time to study the subject in view of the complexity of issues involved.

16. Taking into consideration the lead time required to implement changes to the present arrangements on the provision and allocation of residential care places for the elderly, members urged the Administration to put in place interim measures to shorten the waiting time of the elderly currently on CWL waiting for various types of subsidised residential care places. In view of an inadequate supply of subsidised RCHE places and the waitlisting situation, some members suggested that the Administration should categorise RCHEs in accordance with their quality and fees and introduce a means-tested mechanism for the allocation of subsidised residential care places. Reference could be made to the mechanism for allocation of public rental housing units and Home Ownership Scheme flats. To increase the supply of residential care places, the Administration should designate land use for the construction of purpose-built RCHE premises, relax the building requirements for operating RCHEs and convert vacant Government properties for the purpose.

Furthermore, consideration could be given to increasing the number of purchased places in private RCHEs under EBPS.

17. The Administration assured members that EC had decided to conduct a further study on the recommendations of the former Commissioner on Poverty (CoP) regarding the waitlisting situation of subsidised residential care services, and to explore the following –

- (a) how to target subsidised residential care services at elders most in need; and
- (b) how to promote further development of quality self-financing/private residential care services and encourage shared responsibilities among individuals, their families and the society in meeting the LTC needs of the elderly.

Apart from taking into account CoP's recommendations and the Administration's overall objective of encouraging "ageing in the community", the study would look into the LTC needs of elders and the soon-to-be-old, i.e. those aged 45 or above, and project the future demand for RCHE places.

18. At its meeting on 6 April 2009, the Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation was briefed on the measures to enhance residential care services for the elderly as announced in the 2009-2010 Budget. Members were advised that SWD would purchase an additional 500 subsidised places through EBPS and provide 150 additional subsidised places in two newly built contract RCHEs. Members were also advised that the consultancy study led by EC on residential care services for the elderly, which was originally scheduled for completion in the first quarter of 2009, was expected to be completed by the second quarter of 2009 due to unforeseeable difficulties encountered by the consultant in conducting face-to-face interviews with the elders.

19. In the light of the ageing population, members expressed grave concern about the waitlisting situation of and the long-term planning on the provision of subsidised residential care places for the elderly. The Administration advised that to meet the growing care needs of elders, the Government had been increasing the supply of subsidised residential care places through the construction of contract RCHEs, which provided both C&A and NH places. The C&A places in contract homes were required to provide a continuum of care so that elders could continue to stay in the same home when their health deteriorated to a level that required nursing care. The Government would continue to identify suitable sites for the construction of new contract RCHEs and explore with existing contract RCHEs to convert some of the C&A places into NH places so as to shorten the waiting time for NH places. The Administration further advised that while SWD had from time to time liaised with relevant departments to identify suitable sites for the construction of new contract RCHEs or convert vacant government premises/school sites into RCHEs, most of the vacant sites were available for temporary use only and were not suitable for

development of RCHEs. Moreover, as stipulated under the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance (Cap. 459), no part of an RCHE should be situated at a height more than 24 metres above the ground floor owing to fire safety considerations. This imposed restrictions on site selection and the capacity of RCHEs.

#### Residential care services for PWDs

20. The Panel has discussed time and again the provision of RCHD places. At its meeting on 12 November 2007, when the Panel was consulted on the proposals of setting up two new Integrated Rehabilitation Services Centres (IRSCs) for PWDs, members noted that the average waiting time for Hostel for Severely Mentally Handicapped Persons in 2006-2007 was as long as 83 months. The Panel held a strong view that the waiting time for RCHD places was unacceptable. In the absence of a regulatory framework, the quality of the private RCHDs varied greatly, and therefore PWDs preferred to wait for subsidised residential care places. Members urged the Administration to provide more subvented residential care services for PWDs, set specific targets to shorten the waiting time for such services and expedite the introduction of a licensing scheme for RCHDs. Some members suggested that consideration should be given to converting vacant Government premises and schools into subvented RCHDs and buying places from private RCHDs.

21. The Administration advised that it was aware of the problem and had accorded priority to the provision of new subvented residential care places for PWDs. However, the provision of additional RCHDs would also depend on the availability of suitable premises. On some occasions, the proposed projects could not be proceeded with right away on account of objection by the local communities. The Administration further advised that it would consider buying places from private RCHDs after the introduction of the licensing scheme.

22. In the light of members' grave concern about the long waiting time for subvented RCHD places, the Panel decided to write to the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) and the Financial Secretary (FS) requesting the Administration to formulate a long-term plan and set specific targets for the provision of residential care services for PWDs, and to allocate additional resources for the purpose. In his reply, CS advised that the Administration adopted a three-pronged approach, as set out in the newly published 2007 Rehabilitation Programme Plan (RPP), to expedite the waiting time for residential services and day services for PWDs. An additional \$33 million had been allocated for providing 490 additional residential places in 2007-2008 and SWD was actively identifying suitable premises for such places, including vacant schools.

23. When the Panel was consulted on 11 May 2009 on the proposals of setting up two new IRSCs, members noted that the average waiting time for Hostel for Severely Physically Handicapped Persons in 2008 was as long as 106.8 months. Given that only 490 subvented residential care places would be provided in 2010 through the two new IRSCs and 181 residential care places would be provided through other projects in the coming two years, the Panel held a strong view that the provision of subvented

residential care services for PWDs should be expedited to shorten the average waiting time to a reasonable time frame.

24. The Administration assured members that it had endeavoured to increase the number of and shorten the waiting time for residential care places for PWDs. Notably, it would continue to liaise with other authorities in town planning to strive for suitable long-term venues for RCHDs as well as study the viability of turning vacant premises into RCHDs. The Panel decided to write to the Secretary for Education and the Government Property Administrator to enlist their support in identifying suitable vacant premises for conversion into RCHDs.

#### Initiatives under the 2009-2010 Policy Address

25. At its meeting on 22 October 2009 when members were briefed on the policy initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau for 2009-2010, members were advised that the Administration would accelerate the provision of additional subsidised residential care places which provided nursing and continuum of care through a novel multi-pronged approach, including increasing the ration of nursing home places (from 50% on average to 90%) in existing contract RCHEs, purchasing vacant places from self-financing RCHEs, maximising the space in existing subsidised RCHEs to provide more LTC places with continuum of care under the conversion programme. In parallel, the Administration would continue to increase the provision of subsidised places through the development of new contract RCHEs. Five new contract homes would open in the next three years. In addition, about 1 000 residential care places for the elderly would be provided upon completion of the 12 development projects under planning. In respect of the additional places arising from the conversion programme and bought place schemes, members were advised that the details would be made available after FS had announced his forthcoming Budget.

26. Members were also advised that the Administration would provide additional places for pre-school training, vocational rehabilitation and residential care service, in accordance with the directions set out in the 2007 RPP. The Administration had also advised that it would introduce a pilot Bought Place Scheme to encourage the operators of private RCHDs to upgrade the service standard of these homes, help the market develop more service options for PWDs, and increase the supply of subsidised residential care places.

#### **Relevant papers**

27. A list of relevant papers is at the **Appendix**. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk/> for details.

## Relevant Papers/Documents

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Papers</u>
Panel on Welfare Services	12 November 2007	Administration's Paper LC Paper No. CB(2)254/07-08(04)  Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)521/07-08  Letter of the Panel Chairman dated 16 November 2007 and the reply from the Chief Secretary for the Administration dated 11 January 2008 LC Paper No. CB(2)863/07-08(01)
	11 May 2009	Administration's Paper LC Paper No. CB(2)1451/08-09(03)  Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)1710/08-09  Reply from the Secretary for Education to the Panel Chairman dated 5 June 2009 LC Paper No. CB(2)1862/08-09(03)
	22 October 2009	Administration's Paper LC Paper No. CB(2)6/09-10(01)  Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)379/09-10
Subcommittee on Elderly Services	22 January 2008	Administration's paper LC Paper No. CB(2)835/07-08(01)  Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)1319/07-08
	19 February 2008	Administration's paper LC Paper No. CB(2)1038/07-08(01)  Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)1651/07-08

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Papers</u>
	11 April 2008	Administration's paper LC Paper No. CB(2)1493/07-08(01)  Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)2171/07-08
Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation	6 April 2009	Administration's Paper LC Paper No. CB(2)1191/08-09(01)  Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)1496/08-09

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