

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)262/11-12(03)

Ref : CB2/PL/HA

Panel on Home Affairs

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 15 November 2011

Hostels for single youths

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Government's proposed initiative to support non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") to build hostels for single youths and highlights the views and concerns of members of the Panel on Home Affairs ("the Panel").

Background

2. In his 2011-2012 Policy Address, the Chief Executive stated that the Government was aware of some NGOs' concern about the aspiration of working youths to have their own living space, and would actively support NGOs' plan to use part of the land granted to them by the Government for "Government, Institution or Community" ("GIC") use to build hostels for youths. In the Administration's view, the proposed initiative would not only optimize land use but also allow the Government to draw on NGOs' resources and experience to provide another choice of accommodation for young people.

Existing government-supported hostel programmes

3. At present, there are a number of government-supported hostel programmes for single persons. Since 1991, the Home Affairs Department has launched the Singleton Hostel Programme ("SHP") in **Appendix I** to provide alternative accommodation to any registered bedspace apartment lodgers aged under 60 who are rendered homeless as

a result of the implementation of the licensing scheme of bedspace apartments under the Bedspace Apartments Ordinance (Cap. 447) in 1994. As at March 2011, SHP comprised two purpose-built singleton hostels managed by NGOs and provided a total of 580 bedspaces.

4. The Social Welfare Department ("SWD") has also subvented NGOs to operate five urban hostels for single persons and two emergency shelters, providing a total of 202 places of short-term accommodation and counseling services for street sleepers and other needy persons, as detailed in **Appendix II**.

Existing NGO-run hostel services

5. Some NGOs have provided hostel services for youths with different objectives and eligibility criteria, etc. For instance, the Holland Hostel run by the Hong Kong Student Aid Society has provided since 1998 a residential service for young working males aged 15 to 21 and with inadequate family care and emotional and behavioral difficulties. Applications must be routed through the social workers of SWD or non-governmental welfare organizations, etc. The service provides a capacity of 15 living units at a monthly fee of \$700. The maximum stay of residence is two years and extension may be considered on an individual basis. Residents are provided with interpersonal skills and self-esteem training and career counseling to help them prepare for their career path.

6. Caritas Hong Kong ("Caritas") also launched a hostel service in early 1960s to accommodate fishermen's need for shelter, and has subsequently expanded the service to provide inexpensive accommodation to young workers and students who could not live with their families. People aged between 18 and 65 who are full-time students in Hong Kong or have stable employment and income are eligible for the service. There are currently six hostels run by Caritas providing accommodation at a monthly fee ranging from \$2,600 to \$12,000 for an average of about 200 tenants daily.

Members' views and concerns

7. The Government's proposed initiative to support NGOs' plan to build hostels for single youths was discussed at the Panel meeting on 14 October 2011. Members' views and concerns are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Policy objectives

8. There was a view that the proposed initiative could help address part of the housing problems of young people but lacked clear policy objectives. The Administration was called on to make clear whether the initiative was to promote youth development or address the housing problems of young people. According to the Administration, while youth matters straddled various government bureaux, the Home Affairs Bureau had focused on youth development and formulated the initiative from that perspective.

Housing needs of youths

9. Concern was expressed that the proposed single-youth hostels might not solve the problem of how to meet the needs of youths for their own living space, if the occupants of such hostels would need to move out when married or after a certain period of time. The Administration should consider introducing a points system under which lodgers living in single-youth hostels for a longer period would be given more points and higher priority in the queue for public rental housing ("PRH"). Members generally considered that the issues relating to the provision of accommodation to youths could not be handled by a single government bureau or relegated to NGOs, and urged the Administration to formulate a long-term policy to address the housing needs of youths. The Administration admitted that the youth housing demand was an important matter that needed to be addressed by the Government and the Housing Authority. However, while there were several housing schemes that accorded priority to elderly PRH applicants, there was still no consensus in the society on whether single youths should be given priority in the allocation of PRH flats.

Collaboration with NGOs

10. Some members were concerned whether the Administration would undertake to build the proposed hostels for single youths if it received no applications from NGOs for doing so, and whether it would request NGOs to allocate a certain number of such hostels to youths who were in urgent need of temporary lodging. There was a suggestion that counseling services should be available in such hostels. According to the Administration, while it would communicate with NGOs which wished to build such hostels on GIS sites, the implementation of the initiative would depend on the degree of support from NGOs. NGOs would have more flexibility in the operation of such hostels if they would not rely on public funding. If they needed public funding to run such hostels, their operation would be subject to more conditions (such as

eligibility criteria) set by the Administration.

Operation

11. There was a concern that the proposed initiative would give rise to various social problems if it was not clearly positioned and properly monitored. The Administration was called on to carefully consider various aspects of the initiative, such as the definition of "single youths", eligibility criteria and hostel lodging fees. According to the Administration, some NGOs had been providing hostel services for single youths. The lodgers' length of stay in hostels was capped and they were requested to save some of their income for meeting their accommodation needs after leaving the hostels. The Administration assured members that it would carefully formulate the details of the initiative with reference to relevant experiences.

Relevant papers

12. A list of the relevant papers with their hyperlinks at LegCo's website is in **Appendix III**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
11 November 2011

Home Affairs Department's Singleton Hostel Programme

- Objective** : To provide short-term accommodation to registered bedspace apartment lodgers who are displaced as a result of the implementation of the licensing regime of bedspace apartments under the Bedspace Apartments Ordinance (Cap. 447)
- Eligibility** : Singletons who are under 60 years of age earning a monthly salary of not more than \$9,900 and currently living in an apartment less than 5.5m² in size for more than six months are eligible to apply for a place in the hostels under SHP. Compassionate cases referred by the Social Welfare Department or other non-governmental organizations are also accepted when there are vacancies in the hostels.
- Hostels** :
1. Sunrise House ("SH") on Shun Ning Road, Sham Shui Po, managed by Salvation Army
2. High Street House ("HSH") on High Street, Sai Ying Pun, managed by Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council
- Capacity** : 580 (310 in SH and 270 in HSH)
- Charges** : Ranging from \$700 to \$1,260 per month
- Average occupancy rate** : 88% (in 2010)

Sources: Homepage of Home Affairs Department, the reply from the Secretary for Transport and Housing to the written question raised by Hon LEE Wing-tat at the Council meeting of 27 January 2010, and the reply from the Director of Home Affairs to the initial written question raised by Hon Wong Kwok-kin at the special meeting of the Finance Committee to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12.

Urban hostels for single persons/emergency shelters subvented by the Social Welfare Department

- Service Description** : Urban hostels for single persons/emergency shelters seek to provide short-term accommodation for needy persons and street sleepers. During the stay at the hostels/emergency shelters, the residents are encouraged to be self-reliant and self-helping. They are also provided with counseling and guidance so as to help them seek alternative long-term accommodation.
- Target Group** : Street sleepers, bedspace apartment lodgers and homeless persons, particularly the aged, disabled, or those in weak health.
- Application** : Referred by social workers
- Capacity** : 202 places
- Charges** : The fees of urban hostels for single persons are within the maximum rent allowance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme. The emergency shelters offer free accommodation service.
- Average utilization rate** : Around 80% (in 2010-2011)

Sources: Homepage of Social Welfare Department and the Administration's paper on support services for street sleepers (LC Paper No. CB(2)1646/10-11(05).

**Relevant papers on
Hostels for single youths**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Council	27.1.2010	Written question raised by Hon LEE Wing-tat on measures to assist low-income persons to meet housing needs
Special meeting of Finance Committee	25.3.2011	Initial written question raised by Hon WONG Kwok-kin on Singleton Hostel Programme
Panel on Welfare Services	9.5.2011 (Item VI)	Administration's paper on support services for street sleepers
Council	12.10.2011 (Item II)	Agenda 2011-12 Policy Address
Panel on Home Affairs	14.10.2011 (Item III)	Agenda Administration's paper on policy initiatives of Home Affairs Bureau in 2011-12