

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2840/11-12
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS+CB1/PL/HG

Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Housing

**Minutes of joint meeting
held on Friday, 13 April 2012, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex**

Members present : Members of the Panel on Welfare Services

Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Chairman)

* Hon WONG Sing-chi (Deputy Chairman)

Hon Albert HO Chun-yan

Hon LEE Cheuk-yan

* Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP

* Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung

Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP

Hon LI Fung-ying, SBS, JP

* Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP

Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC

Hon IP Wai-ming, MH

Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP

Members of the Panel on Housing

Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH (Deputy Chairman)

Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP

Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, SBS, JP

Hon James TO Kun-sun

Hon Tanya CHAN

Members absent : Members of the Panel on Welfare Services

Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP

Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau

* Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS

Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou

- * Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
- * Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Members of the Panel on Housing

Hon LEE Wing-tat (Chairman)
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, SBS, JP
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon CHAN Hak-kan
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP

(* Also members of the Panel on Housing)

Public Officers : Item II
attending

Ms Caran WONG Ka-wing
Assistant Director (Family and Child Welfare)
Social Welfare Department

Mrs Alice LO CHAN May-yee
Chief Housing Manager (Applications)
Housing Department

Attendance by : Item II
invitation

Society for Community Organization

Mr CHAN Siu-ming
Community Organizer

Right for Homeless Concern Group

Mr SUEN Mo
Representative

Returning Hong Kong Concern Group

Mr CHAN Wa-yau
Representative

Right for Singleton Concern Group

Mr CHAN Chi-cheung
Representative

Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association,
Social Work Officer Grade Branch

Mr Sam LEUNG Kin-hung
Chairman

Christian Concern for the Homeless Association

Mr WANG Shing-mo
Outreaching Officer

The Salvation Army, Integrated Service for Street
Sleepers

Ms TSOI Ling-ling
In-charge

St. James' Settlement, Integrated Service Team for
Street Sleepers

Miss LEE Hong-yu
Registered Social Worker

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Mariana CHAN
Chief Officer, Policy Research and Advocacy

Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union

Mr WONG Hung-sang
Exco Member

Clerk in attendance : Miss Betty MA
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Ms Candice LAM
Senior Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

Action

I. Election of Chairman

Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che, Chairman of Panel on Welfare Service, was elected Chairman of the joint meeting.

II. Housing needs of street sleepers

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1601/11-12(01) to (03), CB(2)1664/11-12(01) to (03) and CB(2)1719/11-12(01) to (03)]

2. Assistant Director (Family and Child Welfare) of Social Welfare Department ("AD(FCW)/SWD") advised that the Administration had always been concerned about the needs of street sleepers and provided various support services to address their emergency needs and enhance their work motivation and skills so as to help them give up street sleeping and become self-reliant.

3. Chief Housing Manager (Applications) of Housing Department ("CHM(A)/HD") advised that the Housing Authority ("HA") had targeted at maintaining the average waiting time for the general Waiting List applicants at around three years. Any persons, including street sleepers, who had genuine, imminent and long-term housing needs but were not able to solve the problem by themselves might consider applying for compassionate rehousing through the recommendation of the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") to the Housing Department ("HD") for consideration of allocating public rental housing ("PRH").

4. At the invitation of the Chairman, a total of 10 deputations presented their views on the housing needs of street sleepers. A summary of the deputations' views is in the **Appendix**.

Discussions

5. In relation to the joint operation conducted by various government departments to clear the sleeping places of street sleepers on 15 February

Action

2012, Mr WONG Sing-chi criticised that the departments concerned had removed the belongings of the street sleepers affected without giving prior notice. In his view, the Administration should identify the problems faced by street sleepers and provide appropriate assistance to help them live off the street. Specifically, Mr WONG supported the suggestion put forward by some attending deputations that a specific quota should be set aside for middle-aged singletons under the points system for non-elderly one-person PRH allocation. As a member of HA, he would bring up the suggestion for the consideration of HA. This apart, Mr WONG appealed to SWD to raise the maximum level of rent allowance ("MRA") under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme to enable the recipients to meet the actual rental expense in the light of the upsurge in private housing rental.

6. As regards the joint operation of 15 February 2012 conducted in Sham Shui Po, AD(FCW)/SWD advised that she would convey the concerns raised by members and deputations to the relevant departments.

7. To address the emergency and short-term accommodation needs of street sleepers, AD(FCW)/SWD said that some 200 temporary accommodation places were being provided by five urban hostels and two emergency shelters operated by non-governmental organisations ("NGOs") on SWD subvention, and the utilisation rate was around 82% in 2011-2012. SWD would closely monitor the service quality of these subvented places. This apart, there were eight street sleeper hostels or temporary shelters operated by NGOs on a self-financing basis. She would convey the concern about re-opening the singleton hostels previously operated by the Home Affairs Department ("HAD") to the latter for consideration.

8. AD(FCW)/SWD further said that various support services were provided for street sleepers to give up street sleeping as far as practicable. For instance, street sleepers might be assisted with emergency fund to meet their imminent needs to cover expenses such as payment of rent, rent deposit, other removal expenses and short-term living costs, etc. If other resources were not available, social workers of SWD or NGO Integrated Family Service Centres would, having regard to individual circumstances, provide temporary cash grants to individuals and families, including street sleepers, to help them tide over financial difficulties arising from emergencies.

9. AD(FCW)/SWD added that street sleepers with genuine long-term financial hardship could apply for CSSA, and rent allowance would be payable to eligible CSSA recipients for meeting accommodation expenses. MRA would be adjusted in accordance with the established mechanism, i.e.

Action

the movement of the Consumer Price Index (A) rent index for private housing. It was noteworthy that the prevailing rent allowance had been adjusted upwards by 5.7% in February 2012.

10. CHM(A)/HD said that any persons who had genuine, imminent and long-term housing needs but were unable to solve the problems by themselves could apply for compassionate rehousing. Having regard to the merits of individual cases, such applications could be processed and a PRH flat would be allocated within one to two weeks, if the case was very urgent, such as involving domestic violence, and that the applicant had not specified the location or estate or types of PRH for allocation. CHM(A)/HD further said that HA was aware of the needs for PRH flats by one-person applicants. A Quota and Points System for non-elderly one-person applicants had been established since 2005. Furthermore, eligible applicants, including non-elderly one-person applicants, would be invited to apply for fast-track access to PRH under the Express Flat Allocation Scheme. That said, the Administration would have to uphold an equitable distribution of public housing resources in PRH allocation between applications from ordinary families and those with special requests.

11. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung was regrettable at the joint operation of 15 February 2012 to clear the sleeping places of street sleepers. In his view, it was incumbent upon the Administration to formulate a comprehensive policy on street sleeping. The Chairman advised that the Public Complaints Office of the Legislative Council Secretariat was following up on matters relating to the joint operation concerned.

12. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung noted with concern that it would take nearly 25 years to clear the waiting list for PRH from non-elderly one-person applicants, if quota remained at the current level of 2 000 per annum. Instead of providing an annual quota specifically for non-elderly one-person applicants for PRH, the Administration should allocate more resources to increase the overall supply of PRH for those who could not afford private rental accommodation.

13. Mr Ronny TONG expressed disappointment at the Administration's stance that no change to the prevailing PRH policy and support services for street sleepers was considered necessary. Mr TONG asked about the number of street sleepers and whether short-term accommodation places were adequate to meet the imminent and emergency housing needs of street sleepers. More importantly, the Administration should formulate an action plan to reduce the number of street sleepers to zero within a target schedule.

Action

14. AD(FCW)/SWD advised that as at March 2012, the number of registered street sleepers in Hong Kong was 511. While the problem of street sleeping was attributed to various reasons, the Administration had always been concerned about the needs of street sleepers and had devised various support services for street sleepers so as to help them give up street sleeping.

15. Ms LI Fung-ying cast doubt as to whether the Administration had attached due care to the needs of street sleepers given that the deputations had repeatedly told members about the problems encountered by street sleepers to live off the street, such as inadequate short-term accommodation places, long waiting time for PRH allocation and inability of meeting rental expenses of private housing. Ms LI took the view that the Administration owed the street sleepers affected by the joint operation of 15 February 2012 an explanation why no prior notice was given and whether compensation would be made in respect of their removed belongings. AD(FCW)/SWD said that as pointed out earlier, she would convey Ms LI's view to the departments concerned. CHM(A)/HD added that any persons who had imminent housing needs might apply for compassionate rehousing for PRH allocation.

16. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that he was one of the Duty Roster Members meeting with the deputations on issues relating to the joint operation of 15 February 2012 and was astonished to learn about the happenings of the joint operation. In his view, the Administration should resolve the problem of street sleeping from the policy perspectives of welfare and housing, with a view to helping the street sleepers give up street sleeping and become self-reliant.

17. Mr Frederick FUNG cited that in the 1980s, HAD had spearheaded a three-year project to resolve the street sleeping problem in Sham Shui Po, under which HAD had solicited donations for renting private tenement as short-term hostels to meet the imminent housing needs of street sleepers in the district and collaborated the efforts of social workers to provide support services for street sleepers to help them live off the street. In view of the shortage of subvented urban hostel places, the Administration might consider making reference to the past experience and collaborating the efforts of District Offices, District Council members and local organisations so as to increase the supply of temporary accommodation places in private buildings to meet the imminent housing needs of street sleepers.

18. Mr Albert HO said that to address the housing needs of street sleepers, the Administration should critically examine the non-elderly

Action

one-person points system so as to speed up the PRH allocation for singleton applicants, review the MRA level and consider re-opening the singleton hostels previously operated by HAD. Noting that the average utilisation rate of subvented urban hostels and emergency shelters was around 82%, Mr HO sought the views of deputations as to whether these temporary accommodation places were considered adequate for meeting emergency housing needs of street sleepers.

19. Responding to Mr Albert HO, Ms TSOI Ling-ling of Salvation Army said that it should be noted that double-decker beds were provided in hostels and temporary shelters, and therefore aged street sleepers and those with disabilities could not occupy bedspace on the upper deck. This explained why some accommodation places were left vacant.

20. Mr Sam LEUNG of Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social Work Officer Grade Branch said that singleton hostels should be considered as transitional but not permanent housing arrangement for street sleepers. On compassionate rehousing, he pointed out that such applications had seldom been approved within 10 days. Moreover, it was beyond the profession of SWD social workers to conduct the means test assessment of recommending eligible applicants to HD for consideration of allocating PRH under compassionate rehousing. Mr LEUNG further said that while emergency grants were, on some occasions, payable for street sleepers to cover the rental deposit for PRH, it was seldom granted in respect of rental deposit for private housing. Mr LEUNG added that with respect to the Express Flat Allocation Scheme, applicants usually did not want to opt for the unpopular PRH flats.

21. Mr CHAN Siu-ming of the Society for Community Organization ("SOCO") said that the Administration should review the MRA level to the effect that 90% of the CSSA recipients on rent allowance could meet the actual rental expenses. Furthermore, HA should abolish the points system for PRH allocation for non-elderly one-person applicants, under which more points were allotted based on an applicant's age.

22. Mr WANG Shing-mo of the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association said that as emergency relief fund would seldom be granted to street sleepers to cover expenses for rental deposit, frontline social workers would therefore advise street sleepers that they were not eligible for the related expenses. He added that as a matter of fact, different practices and procedures were adopted by the three subvented Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers ("ISTs") in handling applications for emergency relief fund to cover expenses on rental deposit.

Action

23. Citing his own experience as an example, Mr WONG Hung-sang of the Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union said that an 80% utilisation rate of subvented urban hostels and emergency shelters was considered acceptable taking into account the turnaround time for the turnovers. He further said that it was noted that different work procedures were adopted by the three ISTs in processing applications for emergency relief fund to cover rental deposit. He added that the Administration should increase the annual allocation as emergency fund for each ISTs to cover eligible applicants' expenses, such as rental deposit and short-term living costs.

24. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan commented that the prevailing problem would remain unresolved given that the Administration did not have any plan to propose policy changes to increase the quota for PRH allocation for non-elderly one-person applicants, the provision of singleton hostels and the level of MRA. In his view, the Transport and Housing Bureau as well as the Labour and Welfare Bureau should jointly review the relevant policies.

25. The Chairman took the view that the subject matter under discussion straddled various policy areas. Specifically, the Panel on Welfare Services should follow up on issues relating to the adequacy of rent allowance for low-income families on CSSA to meet the actual rental expenses. Housing needs of singletons should continue to be followed up by the Panel on Housing. Issues relating to the re-opening of affordable singleton hostels would more appropriately be followed up by the Panel on Home Affairs. Members might wish to follow up various issues of concern under the purview of respective Panels. The Chairman appealed to the Administration to actively consider formulating a comprehensive policy on street sleeping, as detailed in the submissions from SOCO and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

[To allow sufficient time for discussion, the Chairman directed that the meeting be extended for 10 minutes beyond the appointed time.]

26. Mr Frederick FUNG said that as far as the problem of street sleeping was concerned, to address the accommodation needs of street sleepers, the Administration should enhance the provision of temporary accommodation places for street sleepers while they were waiting for PRH allocation. He also called upon the Administration to examine the causes for street sleeping so as to formulate concrete policy to tackle the problem. Instead of providing financial assistance to address the short-term needs of street sleepers, the Administration should collaborate with ISTs and NGOs concerned to provide support services to enable street sleepers to move into permanent accommodation and live off the street. In his view, the

Action

Administration should increase the provision of PRH flats for those who could not afford private housing.

27. The Chairman was of the view that the crux of the problem was lack of a comprehensive policy on street sleeping and thus fragmented measures had been taken by different departments to tackle the problem. Given that street sleeping existed even in an affluent society, the Administration should consider increasing the annual allocation for emergency relief fund from \$70,000 to say, \$150,000 and the resources for self-financing temporary shelters operated by NGOs to improve the living environment and facilities. He also called upon the Administration to provide temporary cold shelters at conveniently located venue.

28. AD(FCW)/SWD advised that SWD would endeavour to help street sleepers to live off the street as early as practicable. As a matter of fact, the annual allocation for emergency fund for each of ISTs had been increased from \$50,000 to \$70,000. SWD would take into account the utilisation of the emergency fund and consider the need for further increasing the allocation. It would continue to closely monitor the demand for and operation of street sleeper services and introduce further measures if necessary. To her knowledge, the number of PRH allocation under compassionate rehousing had exceeded the quota reserved for the purpose.

III. Any other business

29. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:58 pm.

Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Housing

Joint meeting on Friday, 13 April 2012

Housing needs of street sleepers

Summary of views and concerns expressed by deputations

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
1.	Society for Community Organization [LC Paper No. CB(2)1601/11-12(03)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the joint operation taken by various government departments had cleared the sleeping places of street sleepers without giving prior notice ● although urban hostels and emergency shelters were available to address the short-term accommodation needs of street sleepers, the accommodation places were undesirable as the living environment of most emergency shelters was poor, notably, some were located in the vicinity of refuse collection points and public toilets. The waiting time for subvented urban hostels would normally be up to three to four months ● the rent allowance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme was fallen short of the actual rental of private housing, it was beyond the affordability of street sleepers to rent private housing units and live off the street ● appealed to the Administration to expedite the construction of the proposed singleton hostel in Yau Ma Tei
2.	Right for Homeless Concern Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● it was extremely difficult if not impossible for street sleepers to give up street sleeping and become self-reliant simply because they could not afford the high rental of private housing and the related expenses, such as rental and utilities deposits. The Administration should increase the maximum level of rent allowance ("MRA") under the CSSA Scheme so as to catch up with the high rental of private housing ● as there were over 70 000 singleton applicants for public rental housing ("PRH"), it would take more than seven years for them to be allocated with PRH units

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
3.	Returning Hong Kong Concern Group [LC Paper No. CB(2)459/11-12(03)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the rental of a partitioned flat in private housing was terribly high, which amounted to \$4,000 monthly. As the MRA for singleton CSSA recipients was HK\$1,335 monthly, it was impossible for the recipients to rent private housing and MRA should be adjusted upwards ● the waiting time for singleton PRH applications would take several years
4.	Right for Singleton Concern Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● expressed dissatisfaction at the unreasonable actions taken by government departments to dispel street sleepers from their sleeping places ● complained against the joint operation taken by various government departments on 15 February 2012 in Sham Shui Po to clear the sleeping places of street sleepers and remove all their belongings without giving prior notice
5.	Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social Work Officer Grade Branch [LC Paper No. CB(2)1664/11-12(01)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● of the some 600 temporary sheltered places, some 400 places were operated by non-governmental organisations ("NGOs") on self-financing basis and were usually fully occupied. It was therefore difficult for social workers of the Social Welfare Department to seek immediate temporary shelters for street sleepers from some 200 remaining subvented places, which would take one to two days for completing the admission process ● the emergency fund allocated for street sleeping service was inadequate to meet the accommodation needs of street sleepers as the amount could barely cover the rental payment for one to two nights of stay in private guest houses only ● rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme were inadequate for street sleepers on CSSA to cover private housing rental and other related expenses such as rental deposit ● urgent application for compassionate rehousing would normally take at least six to twelve weeks for approval, and able-bodied street sleepers would normally not be approved for compassionate rehousing on social grounds
6.	Christian Concern for the Homeless Association [LC Paper No. CB(2)1664/11-12(02)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● no financial assistance had been provided for street sleepers to meet the rental deposit for renting private housing ● the subvention for the three integrated services ("IST") teams for street sleepers was not the same, and therefore the three ISTs would provide different services for street sleepers based on

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
		<p>their own available resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the level of MRA was inadequate for street sleepers on CSSA to rent a cubicle in private housing and live off the street ● the Administration should re-open the singleton hostels to meet the accommodation needs of street sleepers ● the location of temporary cold shelters managed by the Home Affairs Department were not easily accessible
7.	<p>The Salvation Army, Integrated Service for Street Sleepers [LC Paper No. CB(2)1664/11-12(03)]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● as a result of an upsurge in rentals, rent allowance was inadequate for street sleepers on CSSA to move into private tenement and live off the street ● the number of street sleepers had increased upon redevelopment of old buildings because old private tenement at affordable rental for low-income earners or those receiving CSSA were in scarce supply ● the annual quota of 2 000 PRH units for non-elderly one-person applicants was fallen short of the demand of 56 000 waislistees. The Administration should provide a separate queue for PRH allocation for middle-aged one-person male applicants
8.	<p>St. James' Settlement, Integrated Service Team for Street Sleepers [LC Paper No. CB(2)1719/11-12(01)]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the housing needs of street sleepers should be resolved from the perspective of housing policy, and not welfare policy. Specifically, the Administration should allow singletons aged below 60 to apply for urban PRH where they could have more employment opportunities ● the specific needs of female and single parent families with children should be taken care of in the development of urban hostels and emergency shelters in providing short-term accommodation places
9.	<p>The Hong Kong Council of Social Service [LC Paper No. CB(2)1719/11-12(02)]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● according to the study conducted by HKCSS on rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme, it was noted that the monthly actual rental of more than 50% of CSSA households living in private housing exceeded MRA by \$100 to \$1,000. As for singleton CSSA households, 67% of them were paying an actual rental higher than MRA

No.	Name of deputation	Major views and concerns
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● the Administration should review the adjustment mechanism for MRA, increase the provision of urban hostels and temporary shelters for street sleepers, and review the policy on PRH allocation for non-elderly one-person applicants
10.	Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union [LC Paper No. CB(2)1719/11-12(03)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● expressed disappointment at the non-attendance of senior officials from the Housing Department to the meeting ● housing needs of street sleepers should be resolved from the perspective of housing policy, and not welfare policy ● social workers should not be asked to be present during the joint operation of government departments to clear the sleeping places of street sleepers ● the annual subvention of \$70,000 for ISTs as emergency fund to cover the emergency needs of street sleepers should be increased to \$150,000 ● temporary cold shelters and emergency shelters should be conveniently located ● the Administration should review the discrepancies in performance indicators adopted by the five urban hostels