

## **Legislative Council Panel on Housing**

### **Provision of Assistance to Low-Income Households**

#### **PURPOSE**

This paper outlines the measures implemented by various Government departments to provide assistance to low-income households. The Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Home Affairs Bureau have contributed relevant sections of this paper.

#### **BACKGROUND**

2. The Government has always attached great importance to meeting the needs, including housing needs, of low-income households. We adopt a multi-pronged approach to the provision of a safety net for the needy. Low-income households who cannot afford private rental accommodation may apply for Public Rental Housing (PRH) from the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA). Those who are unable to support themselves financially can apply for assistance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme to meet their basic needs.

#### **PUBLIC RENTAL HOUSING**

3. The HA is charged with the responsibility to provide PRH flats to low-income families who cannot afford private rental accommodation, with a target of maintaining the average waiting time (AWT) for the general PRH applicants at around three years. As at the end September 2011, the AWT for general applicants and elderly one-person applicants were 2.3 and 1.2 years respectively. Waiting List applicants who have genuine, imminent and long term housing needs but are not able to solve the problem by themselves may consider applying for Compassionate Rehousing (CR) through the Social Welfare Department (SWD), or for the Express Flat Allocation Scheme for earlier allocation of PRH flats. In 2010/11, about 2 400 cases were allocated PRH through CR.

4. In 2001, the HA launched a pilot scheme, namely the Rent Allowance for Elderly Scheme, to allow qualified elderly Waiting List applicants to get a rent allowance to rent private accommodation in lieu of PRH. As the applicants generally preferred PRH for better tenure security, and having regard to the potential financial implications the scheme would have on the HA on a long term basis, the HA decided to phase out the scheme in 2003 and focus its resources on the provision of PRH.

### **SAFETY NET**

5. There is a long-held and well-functioning mechanism through the CSSA to provide a safety net for those who cannot support themselves financially, such that their income will be brought up to a prescribed level to meet their basic needs. Rent allowance is payable to CSSA households to meet their accommodation expenses. The maximum rate of the rent allowance for a particular CSSA household is determined with reference to the number of members in the household who are eligible for CSSA.

6. Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) operated by SWD or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provide a range of preventive, supportive and remedial family services to address the multifarious needs of individuals and families. For those who are in need of support to address their accommodation problems, apart from recommendations for housing assistance by HA, SWD may provide short-term financial assistance for them to meet temporary rental or removal expenses.

7. For people residing in bedspace apartments, staff of IFSCs will visit them from time to time to introduce to them current welfare support services, and to provide appropriate assistance to those in need. The Housing Department also reaches out to the occupants of licensed private bedspace apartments via visits or through relevant NGOs to provide information on and assistance in PRH application.

### **OTHER SUPPORT MEASURES**

8. Apart from the above, the Community Care Fund (CCF) has, since its establishment in 2011, launched over ten programmes to provide assistance to people facing economic difficulties, in particular those who

fall outside the social safety net or those within the safety net but who have special circumstances that are not covered. Among others, the CCF has rolled out an assistance programme in October 2011 to provide a one-off subsidy to CSSA recipients living in private housing and paying rents that exceed the maximum rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme. In addition, the CCF Steering Committee endorsed in February 2012 an assistance programme to provide a one-off allowance to non-CSSA low-income elderly tenants in private housing in view of the rising inflation and cyclical rental increase.

## **WAY FORWARD**

9. The Government considers that to provide assistance to low-income persons, concerted efforts have to be made in different policy areas so that appropriate assistance in terms of housing, social welfare, community services etc. can be rendered. The HA will continue to provide PRH to eligible low-income persons who cannot afford private rental accommodation. On the social welfare front, the SWD will continue to help those with welfare needs. The CCF will also continue to consider other programme proposals to provide assistance to the underprivileged and low-income families, taking into account actual experience gained and views collected from the public and stakeholders. The Government will continue with this multi-pronged approach to address the needs of low-income households in the community.

Transport and Housing Bureau  
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