

For information
on 16 February 2016

Legislative Council Subcommittee on Poverty

Support for street sleepers

Purpose

This paper sets out the support measures for street sleepers rendered by the Government.

Background

2. Government departments and local welfare organisations have been in collaboration to enhance street sleepers' motivation to receive support and encourage them to quit street sleeping and be self-reliant. To keep track of the support service demand, SWD has set up a computerised Street Sleepers Registry (SSR) to capture street sleepers' particulars and record the services they receive. As at 31 December 2015, the number of registered street sleepers in SSR was 881.

Support Services for Street Sleepers rendered by SWD

Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers (IST)

3. Since 2004, SWD has subvented the Salvation Army, St. James' Settlement and the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association for each of them to operate an Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers (IST). ISTs provide street sleepers with integrated services, including day and late-night outreaching visits, emergency shelter/short-term hostel placement, counselling, employment guidance, personal care (e.g. bathing, haircut and meal), emergency relief fund to cover various expenses (e.g. short-term payment of rent and living costs, rental deposit, other removal expenses, etc), aftercare service and service referrals, etc. The wide

range of support services provided by ISTs aim to address the emergency needs of street sleepers and enhance their work motivation and skills so as to help them give up street sleeping and become self-reliant.

Accommodation arrangement

4. To address the emergency and short-term accommodation needs of street sleepers, SWD subvents non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to operate five urban hostels and two urban emergency shelters, providing a total of 202 accommodation places. Besides, there are eight hostels operated by NGOs on a self-financing basis, providing a total of 421 places of overnight or temporary accommodation for street sleepers.

5. Anyone who have genuine and imminent housing needs but are not able to solve the problem by themselves, including street sleepers, may approach Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) run by SWD or NGOs. IFSCs will provide assistance with regard to their actual situation and needs, including short-term financial assistance, referred for application of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), arranging them to be admitted to shelter operated by NGOs and assistance for applying for public rental housing etc.

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance

6. Street sleepers in financial hardship may apply for CSSA. The CSSA Scheme provides a safety net for families or individuals who cannot support themselves financially because of age, disability, illness, unemployment, low earnings, etc. to meet their basic needs. CSSA recipients, if eligible, may apply for rent allowance to meet their actual rent paid. The amount of the rent allowance is the actual rent paid, or the maximum level determined by the number of members in the household eligible for CSSA, whichever is less.

Health Services

7. For health care services, street sleepers can approach the Hospital Authority (HA) or Department of Health to receive medical and mental health services if needed. In addition, SWD has set up the Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness (ICCMWs) in Hong Kong since October 2010 to provide community mental health support services for those in need and residents living in the serving districts. Social workers of ISTs can refer suitable cases to ICCMWs or to HA in the respective districts and arrange the cases to receive psychiatric service from the Specialist Out-Patient Department of HA for further follow-up and treatment.

Support Services for Street Sleepers rendered by Home Affairs Department

Pilot Scheme on Enhancement of District Administration: Watchers' Project

8. In 2014, the Government introduced the Pilot Scheme for the Enhancement of District Administration (the Pilot Scheme) in Sham Shui Po (SSP) and Yuen Long to provide the relevant District Management Committees (DMCs), chaired by the District Officers, with decision-making power to tackle the management and environmental hygiene problems of some public areas. The District Councils (DCs) would advise on the work priorities.

9. After in-depth discussion, the DMC and DC of SSP decided to follow up on two issues under the Pilot Scheme, namely, strengthening support for street sleepers; and strengthening support for “three nil” buildings. The Pilot Scheme commenced in April 2014 and was completed in August 2015.

10. With the support of the DC and additional funding available under the Pilot Scheme, the SSP District Office engaged the Society for Community Organisation (SoCO) to strengthen support services for street sleepers in the district. The “Watchers' Project” adopted a caring approach by engaging dedicated social workers to reach out to the street

sleepers to better understand and follow up on their needs and problems. Depending on the situations of the street sleepers, suitable measures would be taken with a view to helping them leave the streets for good. Social workers would continue to follow up on and provide necessary support to street sleepers after they have left the streets. Also, additional support from the community (including district personalities and organisations) such as job referral, moving-in and household item allowances was available to street sleepers leaving the streets.

11. As at 31 August 2015, dedicated social workers of the Pilot Scheme conducted over 90 out-reach services sessions and helped 65 street sleepers leave the streets. Among them, 26 have left the streets for more than six months. Another feature of the Project was motivation and ability training for street sleepers. Altogether 20 training and 185 voluntary services session have been arranged to help them bridge over to a normal life, as well as to enhance their self-reliance and social skills. During the Pilot Scheme, 29 street sleepers found short-term or long-term jobs to move towards the objective of self-independence.

Temporary Cold Shelters

12. The Home Affairs Department operates temporary cold shelters (TCSs) to provide temporary shelter to people (including street sleepers) in need of refuge during cold spells. When the Cold Weather Warning is issued by the Hong Kong Observatory, eleven TCSs will open from 5:30 pm to the next morning. TCSs in another six districts will be activated upon request from the public.

13. Apart from making available mattresses and blankets etc to shelter users for rest or sleep, food (hot meals and cup noodles) and hot water will also be provided in the TCSs.

14. TCSs are mainly set up in community halls/community centres. We will review the operation of the TCSs regularly having regard to the needs of the districts and the optimal use of resources.

15. In view of the persistent intense cold surge in the latter half of January 2016, special arrangement has been put in place to open all the 17 TCSs during the daytime when the Cold Weather Warning is still in

force.

Advice Sought

16. Members are invited to note and comment on the content of this paper.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
Home Affairs Department
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