

**For information on  
10 June 2013**

**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services**

**Support for Street Sleepers who are not on  
Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA)**

**Purpose**

The Administration briefed Members on the services provided for street sleepers at the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services held on 9 May 2011 vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1646/10-11(05) and on 13 April 2012 vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1601/11-12(01). This paper briefs Members on the latest support for street sleepers.

**Estimation of the Number of Street Sleepers**

2. As explained in the said papers, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has been registering the number, and recording the data of street sleepers through the computerized Street Sleepers Registry (SSR) which captures street sleepers' personal data and service records. At present, both SWD and services units of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) specialized in serving street sleepers register with SSR newly confirmed street sleeper cases and their personal information on a monthly basis. Apart from registering new cases, service units will also de-register cases upon confirmation of cessation of street sleeping by street sleepers for the sake of data accuracy in SSR. As at 30 April 2013, the number of registered street sleepers was 642, including 272 not on CSSA.

**Support and Assistances for Street Sleepers Who are not on CSSA**

**Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs)**

3. Any individuals or families (including street sleepers) who have genuine and pressing housing needs but are unable to solve the problems themselves may approach IFSCs run by SWD or NGOs. We will, based on specific circumstances and needs of each individual case, provide the persons concerned with the appropriate assistance, including the provision

of short-term financial assistance, arranging them to stay in hostels run by NGOs, and referring cases eligible for Compassionate Rehousing to the Housing Department (HD) for consideration of allocating public rental housing (PRH), etc. Please refer to paragraph 8 below for details.

### **Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers (IST)**

4. SWD continues to provide subvention to three NGOs for each to operate an Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers (IST) to provide one-stop services for street sleepers, including day and late-night outreaching visits, emergency shelter and short-term hostel placement, counselling, employment guidance, personal care (e.g. bathing, haircut and meals), 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 the 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 as far as possible.

5. An allocation of \$90,000 is included in the annual subvention for each of the three ISTs as emergency fund to cover eligible users' expenses such as payment of rent, rental deposit, other removal expenses and short-term living costs, etc. If other resources are not available, social workers of SWD or NGO service units will, having regard to individual circumstances, provide temporary cash grants to individuals and families (including street sleepers) through applying for charitable trust funds (including Li Po Chun Charitable Trust Fund, Tang Shiu Kin & Ho Tim Charitable Fund, Kwan Fong Trust Fund for the Needy and Brewin Trust Fund) to help them tide over financial difficulties arising from emergencies. In addition, with subvention from SWD, Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention will provide a maximum of two months' rental assistance for non-CSSA newly-discharged rehabilitated offenders, in order to help them meet their imminent accommodation need.

### **Care and Support Networking Team (CSNT)**

6. Apart from the aforementioned support services, SWD also subvents the Society for Community Organization to run CSNT. Through the provision of outreaching support, casework and group work services, the CSNT aims at helping street sleepers and other vulnerable groups reintegrate into the community.

### **Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects (STFASPs)**

7. Since February 2009, SWD subvents five NGO-operated STFASPs to provide food assistance to needy persons, including street sleepers. From February 2009 to April 2013, a total of 2 271 street sleepers have been assisted by these service projects.

### **Public Rental Housing (PRH)**

8. We are concerned about the housing needs of the street sleepers. It is the objective of the Government and the Housing Authority (HA) to provide PRH to low-income families who cannot afford private rental accommodation. Low-income households meeting the eligibility criteria, including street sleepers, may apply for PRH under HA. Any street sleepers 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 through the SWD for its assessment of recommending eligible applicants to HD for consideration of allocating PRH.

### **Urban Hostels and Emergency Shelters**

9. To address the emergency and short-term accommodation needs of street sleepers, SWD subvents NGOs to operate five urban hostels and two emergency shelters, providing a total of 202 accommodation places. The average utilisation rate of these hostels and shelters in 2012-13 was 81.1%. On top of the government subvented hostels and temporary shelter mentioned above, there are seven hostels operated by NGOs on a self-financing basis, providing a total of 397 places of overnight or temporary accommodation for street sleepers. Among these 14 hostels, four are free of charge, while the hostel fees for the remaining 10 hostels range from \$700 to \$1,440 per month. For individuals who are unable to pay the fees due to financial difficulties, social workers may make suitable arrangements according to the circumstances of the cases, such as applying for charitable trust fund.

### **Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA)**

10. We are concerned about the financial needs of the street sleepers. Street sleepers with long-term financial hardship can apply for CSSA to meet their basic needs. Apart from standard rates, able-bodied recipients are also entitled to grants on certain essential items, including rent

allowance, water/ sewage charge allowance, grant to cover schooling expenses, grant to cover child-care centre fees and burial grant. All CSSA recipients are entitled to free medical treatment at public hospitals or clinics in Hong Kong.

11. Besides, recipients such as elders, persons with disabilities and in ill health are entitled to other special grants (e.g. costs of glasses, dental treatment fees, transport fares to and from hospital/clinic, etc.) to cater for their special needs. As for able-bodied CSSA recipients (including street sleepers), SWD may consider, according to the merits of individual cases, a discretionary payment of special grants to cover the relevant expenses.

### **Medical services**

12. Apart from the aforementioned support services, needy street sleepers can also use the various medical and mental health services provided by the Administration (including the public hospitals, general outpatient clinics, specialist clinics under the Hospital Authority (HA) and elderly health centres under the Department of Health). Apart from CSSA recipients who are entitled to free medical treatment at public hospitals or clinics as mentioned in paragraph 10, other non-CSSA street sleepers who are unable to pay the fees due to financial difficulties, they may approach ISTs or IFSCs for assistance, in arranging medical fee reduction.

13. As regards mental health support services, SWD has set up the Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness (ICCMWs) across the territory since October 2010 to provide community mental health support services for those in need and residents living in the serving districts. In order to strengthen the collaboration of ICCMWs with other service units and facilitate the effective delivery of services, SWD and the stakeholders concerned have jointly drawn up relevant referral procedures and collaboration guidelines. Social workers of both ISTs and IFSCs can refer their cases to ICCMWs in the respective districts. Where necessary, ICCMWs can refer their cases through community psychiatric services of the respective clusters under the HA to the psychiatric specialist out-patient clinics under the HA for further follow-up and treatment.

### **Employment Assistance**

14. On the employment side, the Labour Department (LD) is committed to helping job seekers, including street sleepers, find suitable work. LD provides a comprehensive range of free employment support services for job seekers through a network of 12 job centres, two

industry-based recruitment centres, a Telephone Employment Service Hotline, and the Interactive Employment Service website. A wide range of facilities, including telephones, fax machines, vacancy search terminals, and computers with resume-building software and internet connection, are provided in job centres. Job seekers may use these facilities to search for vacancy information, write application letters and contact employers, and complete the whole job hunting process. Besides, job centres also provide personalised employment advisory services for needy job seekers, including street sleepers. Job seekers can meet the employment officers in the job centres. The employment officers will provide job search advice to job seekers in accordance with their individual situation, and/ or assist them to participate in LD's employment programmes to enhance their employability.

15. Besides, to facilitate job seekers to find jobs more expeditiously and conveniently, LD stages large-scale job fairs across the territory and organises district-based job fairs in job centres. Job seekers can submit their job applications or attend job interviews with the recruiting employers on-the-spot to secure employment. Apart from visiting the job centres or participating in the recruitment activities, job seekers may also make use of LD's vacancy search terminals installed at various locations throughout the territory to obtain vacancy information and identify suitable jobs.

16. The Work Incentive Transport Subsidy (WITS) Scheme rolled out by LD in October 2011 aims to relieve the burden of work-related travelling expenses on low-income earners and encourage them to secure and stay in employment. Anyone being employed or self-employed lawfully in Hong Kong, regardless of whether they are working on a full-time or part-time basis, may apply for WITS if they meet the monthly income and asset limits and incur travelling expenses in commuting to and from work. Applicants who work no less than 72 hours per month may apply for full-rate subsidy of \$600 per month, while those who work less than 72 hours but at least 36 hours per month may apply for half-rate subsidy of \$300 per month.

### **Advice Sought**

17. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.