

**For discussion  
on 13 April 2015**

**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services**

**Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures  
to Tackle Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence**

**Further Discussion on Shelter Service and Housing Assistance  
for Victims of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence**

**Purpose**

This paper provides the Government's response to the issues raised by Members and deputations at the meeting of the Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence under the Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services held on 9 March 2015.

**Increase the Capacity of Refuge Centres for Women**

2. Refuge centres for women provide temporary/short-term accommodation and support services for women and their children facing family crisis or domestic violence. At present, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) subsidises five refuge centres for women operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with a total capacity of 260 places. In addition, the Multi-purpose Crisis Intervention and Support Centre (named as CEASE) also provides 80 places of short-term residential service for individuals or families in crisis.

3. SWD has been maintaining close liaison with NGOs operating the five refuge centres for women and CEASE through regular meetings for discussing the operational and service issues of the refuge centres/CEASE as well as keeping in view the service needs. Views on service needs of victims from front-line social workers have also been collected through regular meetings with Family and Child Protective Services Units of SWD.

4. In the past years, SWD has allocated additional resources to enhance the support to the refuge centres for women, such as strengthening the manpower to extend the social work support of the refuge centres to Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays as well as providing after-care service to the ex-

residents. To strengthen support for the victims of domestic violence, the Victim Support Programme for Victims of Family Violence (Victim Support Programme) was launched in June 2010 which provides, inter alia, child care support to the victims. Residents of the refuge centres for women/CEASE may make use of the services of the Victim Support Programme.

5. In recent years, there is a rise in the utilisation rate of the refuge centres. In 2013-14, the average utilisation rate was 103%, and some centres were fully occupied on some occasions. Nevertheless, spare space and related support are available in some refuge centres to cater for unforeseen/transient extra service demand. Moreover, the refuge centres are flexible in admission and have set up a mutual referral mechanism to ensure that those in need will not be denied the service because a refuge centre is full. Having regard to the fluctuating service demand, SWD will continue to closely monitor the utilisation of the refuge centres for women. SWD will also examine ways to cater for the new service demand, including exploring with the refuge centres the possibility of providing more places by utilising any spare space of the existing refuge centres, and bid for the required resources for the additional manpower and facilities arising from any increase in places.

### **Applications for Compassionate Rehousing**

6. Compassionate Rehousing (CR) (including the Conditional Tenancy (CT) Scheme under CR) is a housing assistance scheme, aiming at providing housing assistance for individuals or families, including victims of domestic violence or sexual violence, who have genuine, urgent and long-term housing needs but are unable to solve the problems by themselves. At present, 2 000 flats are reserved for CR in the Public Rental Housing (PRH) Allocation Plan every year. The number of 2 000 flats only serves as a reference for allocation purpose, rather than an upper limit. For applicants recommended by SWD and having met the other eligibility criteria for PRH, the Housing Department will proceed with the allocation which will not be constrained by any limits. In considering whether CR should be recommended, social workers will exercise professional judgment having regard to individual circumstances of the cases, including their social and medical needs. The nature and complexity of the family violence or sexual violence problems which give rise to the need for housing assistance, as well as the resources and support network available to the applicants of individual cases, are different. Social workers therefore need to determine the eligibility for CR on a case by case basis, having regard to the

merits of individual cases and information provided by the applicants and the family members included in the applications.

7. For those CR applications not recommended in the past five years, the major reasons are: (i) the information provided by the applicant indicates that he/she has sufficient financial means to solve the housing problem on his/her own; (ii) the applicant intends to raise his/her CR application on medical grounds but fails to obtain recommendation from the case medical officer to substantiate his/her claims for CR on medical grounds; (iii) the marital status of the applicant is unclear; or (iv) the applicant fails to take action to relinquish his/her property rights in private residential property/Home Ownership Scheme flat.

8. SWD has devised standardised procedural guidelines for handling CR cases, which set out in details the assessment criteria and the processing procedures in handling the applications, so as to assist the social workers in assessing the housing need of the victims of domestic violence or sexual violence in an objective and professional manner. To ensure consistency in assessment yardsticks, all cases recommended for CR are subject to the review and endorsement by the District Social Welfare Officers.

9. Currently, a CR applicant, if not satisfied with the application result, may appeal to the officer-in-charge, supervisor of the concerned service unit or the District Social Welfare Officer of the respective district. Besides, all the services units of SWD and the NGOs responsible for assessing CR applications are required to implement the 16 Service Quality Standards (SQSs), which stipulate that every service user has the right and freedom to lodge a complaint to raise his/her dissatisfaction against an organisation or service unit, and the complaints should be properly addressed. If a service user is not satisfied with the assessment of individual social worker or the officer-in-charge, he/she may lodge a complaint with the management of the organisation concerned in accordance with the established complaint handling policy and procedures of the organisation.

10. SWD will continue to ensure that each CR case will be handled properly through the existing monitoring system. SWD will later discuss with the welfare sector (including the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and the concerned NGOs) on measures to further enhance the concerned complaint handling mechanism.

11. Copies of a leaflet on CR are available at SWD and NGO service units for the reference of the persons in need. The leaflet has also been uploaded to the website of SWD. SWD will consider enriching the content of the leaflet, to include some information contained in the procedural guidelines for handling CR cases.

### **Advice Sought**

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

**Labour and Welfare Bureau  
Social Welfare Department  
Housing Department  
April 2015**