

**For discussion on  
8 May 2017**

## **Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services**

### **Support Services for Singletons**

#### **Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the existing welfare, housing and other support services provided by the Government for singletons.

#### **Integrated Family Service Centres**

2. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) and subvented non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operate 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) over the territory to provide a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial welfare services including counselling, family life education, volunteer training, support/mutual help groups and refer persons in need for community support services, community care services, financial assistance, etc. Social workers of the IFSCs/ISCs will assess service users' needs and provide appropriate service to them through different work strategies, such as early identification and intervention, service integration and partnership with other service stakeholders, etc. The social workers will provide appropriate services and assistance in accordance with the situation and needs of the persons concerned and provide them with early support, including enhancing their stress-coping skills and problem-solving capability, cultivating good interpersonal relationships and building social networks. If the persons concerned have financial difficulties, social workers will refer them to apply for appropriate financial assistance. In 2016-17, IFSCs handled a total of 83 609 cases and organised 3 183 and 3 200 groups and programmes respectively. In 2016-17 (as at end-December 2016), the average monthly caseload per IFSC social worker was 36.8.

## **Family Support Programme**

3. To identify needy individuals and families (including singletons) who are reluctant to seek help as early as possible, SWD has implemented the Family Support Programme since 2007 at a total of 86 units including IFSCs, ISCs, Family and Child Protective Services Units and Psychiatric Medical Social Service Units. Social workers will, through telephone calls, home visits and other outreaching services, contact individuals and families with social isolation problems and refer them to a host of support services. Furthermore, these service units recruit and train volunteers (including those with personal experience in overcoming family problems or crises) who will contact the aforementioned individuals and families and encourage them to receive appropriate services for building a community care and support network. As at end-December 2016, there were about 4 240 volunteers under the Family Support Programme. From 2007 to end-December 2016, this Programme successfully contacted 99 241 individuals/families and provided them with support services.

## **Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme**

4. The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme administered by SWD aims to provide a safety net for those who cannot support themselves financially (including those suffering from financial hardship owing to old age, disability, illness, unemployment, low earnings or any other reasons) so as to meet their basic needs. It is a non-contributory scheme but CSSA applicants are subject to means test.

5. Payments for different categories of recipients under the CSSA Scheme can be broadly classified into three types, namely standard rates, supplements and special grants, to meet their basic needs. The CSSA Scheme takes care of the special needs of singleton elderly and disabled recipients through the provision of a higher asset limit and higher standard rates, special grants and supplements. Eligible elderly and disabled recipients are entitled to supplements including community living supplement and long-term supplement. They may also apply for special grants such as grant to cover costs of medical, rehabilitation surgical appliances and hygienic items, etc. based on their needs and circumstances.

## Public Rental Housing

6. It is the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA)'s objective to provide public rental housing (PRH) for low-income families who cannot afford to rent private accommodation. Owing to limited PRH resources, HA accords priority to general applicants (i.e. family and elderly one-person applicants) in PRH allocation, with a target to provide the first flat offer at around three years on average<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, HA introduced the Quota and Points System (QPS) in September 2005 to rationalise and re-prioritise PRH allocation to non-elderly one-person applicants. As at end-December 2016, there were about 148 800 general applications and 133 500 non-elderly one-person applications under QPS.

7. Unlike general applicants, the priority of QPS applicants in PRH allocation is determined by a points system. Points are assigned to applicants based on their age and waiting time, as well as whether they are already living in PRH. The target of providing the first flat offer to general applicants at around three years on average is not applicable to QPS applicants. The number of PRH units that can be allocated to QPS applicants is also subject to an annual quota.

8. The Long Term Housing Strategy Steering Committee (Steering Committee) was set up by the Government in 2012 to make recommendations to the Government in formulating the Long Term Housing Strategy (LTHS). In the LTHS public consultation document published in 2013, the Steering Committee was concerned that older applicants under QPS might have relatively limited upward mobility and therefore should be given higher priority. During the public consultation on LTHS, a considerable number of respondents agreed that more points should be given to non-elderly one-person applicants who were above the age of 45. At the same time, in his Report No. 61 on the allocation and utilisation of PRH units, the Director of Audit observed that there was a built-in incentive for applicants to apply for PRH early under QPS (i.e. to apply at the minimum eligible age of 18 in order to accumulate as many waiting time points as possible), and recommended HA to conduct a comprehensive review of QPS. The Legislative

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<sup>1</sup> Waiting time refers to the time taken between registration for PRH and first flat offer, excluding any frozen period during the application period (e.g. when the applicant has not yet fulfilled the residence requirement; the applicant has requested to put his/her application on hold pending arrival of family members for family reunion; the applicant is imprisoned, etc.). The average waiting time for general applicants refers to the average of the waiting time of those general applicants who were housed to PRH in the past 12 months.

Council's Public Accounts Committee also considered that HA should review the points system under QPS with a view to introducing improvement measures.

9. Taking into account views and recommendations of the above-mentioned parties, HA endorsed the refined QPS in October 2014. Refinements included awarding a one-off bonus of 60 points to QPS applicants when they have reached the age of 45 to accord them with a higher priority over other younger QPS applicants; and increasing the scale of age points from three to nine points per year of age increase at the time of application to reduce the incentive for early application and to give priority to older applicants. The calculation of points under the refined QPS is as follows –

- (a) Points are assigned to an applicant based on his/her age at the time of his/her successful registration for PRH application. Under the points system, zero point will be assigned to an applicant at the age of 18; nine points at the age of 19; 18 points at the age of 20; and so on;
- (b) A one-off bonus of 60 points will be awarded to applicants when they reach the age of 45;
- (c) 30 points will be deducted if applicants are currently residing in PRH units (including the rental housing units under the purview of the Hong Kong Housing Society);
- (d) One point will be given to applicants for each waiting month since the day of registration for PRH application;
- (e) The priority accorded to an applicant for PRH allocation will be based on his/her points. Provided that all the criteria for PRH application are met, the higher the points accumulated, the earlier the PRH allocation will be.

10. The refined QPS has been implemented since 1 February 2015. Besides refining the points system, HA also increased the annual allocation quota under QPS from 8% to 10% of the total number of flats to be allocated to general and QPS applicants, subject to a cap which was also increased from 2 000 to 2 200 units, starting from 2015/16.

11. The refined QPS has increased the chance for non-elderly singletons to receive PRH allocation. However, the actual priority of individual applicants is subject to their points under the refined QPS, and the time of his/her PRH allocation also depends on the supply of PRH units and the situation of other PRH applicants, hence cannot be generalised. Applicants may also apply under the Express Flat Allocation Scheme to increase the chance of earlier PRH allocation. Besides, for those who have imminent and long-term housing needs on medical or social grounds but have no other feasible means to solve their housing problems, they may approach SWD for relevant welfare or assistance. SWD will assess each case and recommend eligible cases to the Housing Department for early allocation of PRH through “Compassionate Rehousing”.

### **Other Services**

12. There are urban hostels and emergency shelters subvented by SWD or operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on a self-financing basis. They provide short term accommodation to assist people on the verge of homelessness and street sleepers for transit to their long-term accommodation plan.

13. As regards the Singleton Hostel Programme (the Programme) under the Home Affairs Department, it is a designated project to tie in with the introduction of the licensing regime under the Bedspace Apartments Ordinance (the Ordinance) implemented in 1994. The objective of the Programme is to provide short-term accommodation for those bedspace lodgers affected by the implementation of the Ordinance. The number of lodgers affected by the Ordinance has significantly declined since implementation of the Ordinance. At present, there are two singleton hostels operated by NGOs under the Programme which can fully meet the service needs.

## **Conclusion**

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

Labour and Welfare Bureau  
Social Welfare Department  
Housing Department  
Home Affairs Department  
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