

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Meeting on 13 March 2000

Social Welfare Services for Squatter Areas in the New Territories

INTRODUCTION

This paper reports on the social welfare services for squatter areas in the New Territories and the latest position on the recommendations of the Audit's Report No. 29 of 1997 on Neighbourhood Level Community Development Projects (NLCDPs). Particular regard is given to the points of interest raised by Members at the Panel meeting held on 12 July 1999.

POLICY ON NLCDPs

2. NLCDPs were introduced in the 1970s to fill gaps in welfare service provisions in deprived and transient communities where the provision of welfare service and facilities was considered inadequate or non-existent. The NLCDP service is provided by government-subsidised NGOs in service areas identified in accordance with a set of established selection criteria, including a population criterion of between 3,000 to 15,000.

PROVISION OF SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES FOR SQUATTER AREAS IN THE NEW TERRITORIES

3. NLCDPs are meant to be a stop-gap measure. The objective of filling service gaps in areas with insufficient welfare service provision would be regarded as accomplished upon the establishment of a more stable and developed community. Generally speaking, with the substantial increase in the overall provision of welfare and community building services as well as the full implementation of the District Administration Scheme over the past thirty years, the role of NLCDPs in filling social service gaps is fast diminishing.

4. Residents in squatter areas in the New Territories are entitled to welfare services according to planning standards. A wide range of

services is provided through family service centres, social security field units, children & youth centres, integrated teams, family life education units, group work units, community centres, home help teams, medical social service, child protective service, multi-service centres for the elderly, support teams for the elderly etc.

5. Residents in squatter areas in the New Territories can approach the above services units for centre-based programmes/activities in the same manner as other members of the public. However, having regard to the uniqueness of the areas, the services units of both SWD and NGOs have all along adopted a proactive and outreaching approach to meet the service needs of these residents. For example, the family caseworkers and medical social workers pay home visits to the residents there. The children and youth centres and integrated teams, in close cooperation with school social workers and schools, organize volunteer services to meet the residents' needs. The group work units conduct concern visits as well as social and recreational activities for the residents. Support Teams for the Elderly provide outreaching services for their target customers with strong support from volunteer and/or women groups. They also pay regular visits to elderly people in remote areas. The family life education workers give talks to pupils and parents in the village schools, in addition to organising seminars and outings with family life education elements for the residents. Home help teams provide outreaching services to the vulnerable groups.

6. The Executive Council decided in December 1995 that NLCDP service should not be extended to rural areas, new towns and public housing estates not yet affected by redevelopment. The decision was taken in view of the factors as described above and in full knowledge of the views of all parties concerned, including the welfare sector and residents' groups.

7. To further strengthen the outreaching activities to enable the residents in squatter areas to receive available welfare services, the Social Welfare Department, in conjunction with the NGOs, continue to implement special projects to meet the needs of the residents, such as the formation of the Working Group for Rural Areas in Tuen Mun and the setting up of a Rural Area Mobile Service Team in North district. The former provides tailor-made programmes/activities for residents in the squatter areas in Tuen Mun while the latter builds up a support network and provides integrated services for the vulnerable groups in the squatter areas in North District. The District Co-ordinating Committee on Volunteer Movement with members drawn from various government

departments (including SWD, HAD, ED), NGOs, school teachers/principals and local leaders has been appealing to the local community to promote and organize volunteer services in the rural areas of the districts concerned.

LATEST DEVELOPMENT IN FOLLOWING UP AUDIT COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS ON NLCDPs

8. As the funding for NLCDP service involves public money, the Audit Commission, in order to ensure that public funds are spent in a cost-effective manner and in accordance with established policy, conducted a review in October 1997 to examine the management of the NLCDP service. On the basis of the review findings, the Audit Commission has made a number of recommendations, including a recommendation for the Administration to take appropriate measures to maximize the use of NLCDP resources, and in particular, to review whether there remains sufficient justifications for those projects with a service population below 3,000 and projects with no clearance/redevelopment dates to continue.

9. The relevant parties, including the Home Affairs Bureau, Social Welfare Department (SWD), Housing Department (HD) and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) have been in active discussion over the follow-up actions to be taken arising from the Audit Commission's recommendations. SWD has met with representatives from the HKCSS and the operating agencies concerned in October last year to discuss how the Audit Commission's recommendations should be pursued, particularly in respect of teams which are currently serving a population below 3,000 with no scheduled clearance. The discussions are ongoing.

10. In accordance with the recommendation of the Audit Commission and as a work priority, the Administration is currently reviewing whether there are still sufficient justifications for NLCDPs with a service population below 3,000 and without scheduled clearance/redevelopment dates to continue, and to consider, where appropriate, taking the following measures in dealing with the affected teams :-

- (a) redeploying the project team to other NLCDPs or to other welfare services;

- (b) combining two or more projects serving areas with small populations to form a single project; and
- (c) reducing the number of staff of these project teams which serve areas with small populations.

11. In considering the application of the above measures in dealing with the affected teams, the Administration would examine the individual circumstances of teams concerned, taking into account cost-effectiveness, service needs and other justifications.

12. At the Panel meeting on 12 July 1999, the Administration was requested to consider not terminating the service of the NLCDP team at Tai O which is currently serving a population below 3,000. Having carefully examined the relevant factors, including the geographic location of the priority areas, availability of welfare services in the vicinity, service needs of the residents and cost-effectiveness in continuation of service or otherwise, the Administration is inclined towards adopting a flexible approach in dealing with this specific project team in the context of following up the Audit Commission's recommendations on the maximization of NLCDP resources.

13. Members are requested to note the progress of the issues reported above.

**Home Affairs Bureau/Social Welfare Department
March 2000**