Fact Sheet

Transitional housing in selected places

FS06/18-19

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Transitional housing generally refers to the provision of short-term help vulnerable individuals/households transition accommodation to into longer-term housing. According to the latest figures, there are some 150 200 general applications for Public Rental Housing ("PRH"), and an estimated 116 600 inadequately housed households in Hong Kong. In view of the time required to identify land for housing construction, the Government has since 2017 supported community initiatives on transitional housing to alleviate the hardship faced by these families.² Nevertheless, there are currently less than 1000 units of transitional housing provided in the community. The shortfall in transitional housing units has prompted some members of the public to urge the Government to step up its efforts in providing more transitional housing.³
- 1.2 On 19 February 2019, the Subcommittee to Follow Up Issues Related to Inadequate Housing and Relevant Housing Policies ("Subcommittee") will hold a meeting to discuss, among others, the Government's measures to facilitate transitional housing. The Research Office has prepared this fact sheet on transitional housing in Queensland of Australia, Vancouver of Canada, and Taiwan for Members' deliberation. These places are selected for their concerted efforts in supporting transitional housing projects in recent years. Specifically, Queensland has since 2010 implemented a comprehensive framework for transitional housing, Vancouver has expanded the development of modular housing with a streamlined approach, whereas Taiwan has devised a medium-term plan to increase the supply of short-term social housing with incentives given.

The Long Term Housing Strategy defines the inadequately housed as households living in units that are (a) made up of temporary structures; (b) located in non-residential buildings; (c) shared with other households; and (d) subdivided. See Transport and Housing Bureau (2014 & 2018).

² See GovHK (2017).

See Legislative Council Secretariat (2018).

1.3 This fact sheet will first give an overview on transitional housing in Hong Kong, followed by a discussion of transitional housing in selected places, covering details on policy support and delivery mode, funding and financing, and tenancy and rental. A summary table on the salient features of transitional housing in the places studied is set out in the **Appendix**.

2. Hong Kong

- 2.1 In Hong Kong, transitional housing involves the strategic use of vacant properties and/or idle sites unfit for long-term housing development. Since 2017, the Government has supported the implementation of various community initiatives on transitional housing. This includes supporting Hong Kong Council of Social Service's Community Housing Movement, which currently provides some 200 units by utilizing idle properties from private developers as transitional housing. In addition, the Government has provided HK\$36 million through the Community Care Fund for the Modular Social Housing Scheme on Nam Cheong Street in Sham Shui Po. A separate Modular Social Housing Scheme is also being taken forward on Yen Chow Street in the same district. The two modular housing projects together are expected to deliver around 300 units of transitional housing on or before 2020.
- 2.2 More recently, the Task Force on Transitional Housing has been set up under the Transport and Housing Bureau and is providing coordinated support for more than 10 transitional housing projects advocated by non-governmental organizations ("NGOs"). Specifically, the Task Force is working with the Lands Department to identify appropriate sites for transitional housing. In parallel, the Hong Kong Housing Society ("Housing Society") has introduced the T-Home Transitional Rental Housing Scheme in Yue Kwong Chuen. The Scheme utilizes three rental blocks, before their redevelopment after five years, to provide around 220 units for households or elderly persons with a valid PRH application.

The operators are non-governmental organizations and social enterprises such as the Salvation Army, St. James' Settlement, and Society for Community Organization. The Government provides partial funding for the 3-year operation through the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund.

⁵ See GovHK (2018).

⁶ See 香港社會服務聯會(2019) and 經濟日報(2018).

It will also assist NGOs to pursue projects where industrial buildings undergo wholesale conversion for transitional housing. Supported projects may be charged a nil waiver fee, and be subject to more flexible planning and building design requirements. See Development Bureau (2018).

2.3 At present, the Government does not provide an estimate for the number of available transitional housing units. By taking into account the announced initiatives which are supported and/or administered by public authorities, it is estimated that there are currently around 540 units of transitional housing, with a possible increase to around 1 240 units in the near future (Figure 1). However, there are concerns that the above transitional housing initiatives still fall short of the considerable need for affordable and adequate housing. Some Members have thus urged the Government to step up its efforts, including setting up a dedicated fund for transitional housing. ¹⁰

Figure 1 – List of initiatives on transitional housing⁽¹⁾

Initiativa	Responsible organization	No. of transitional housing units		
Initiative		Currently available	Provisional target	
Community Housing Movement		200	500 (by 2020)	
Modular Social Housing Scheme (Yen Chow Street)	Hong Kong Council of Social	-	210 (by 2020)	
Modular Social Housing Scheme (Nam Cheong Street)	Service	-	90 (by 4 th quarter of 2019)	
T-Home Transitional Rental Housing Scheme (Yue Kwong Chuen)	Housing Society	220	220 ⁽²⁾	
Light Housing / Light Home	Light Be	120	220 ⁽³⁾	
Total		540	1 240	

Notes: (1) The list excludes units that may be provided under Housing Society's T-Home Letting Scheme for Subsidised Sale Developments with Premium Unpaid, and the wholesale conversion of industrial buildings for transitional housing.

- (2) Tenancy for the Scheme has begun and tenants are expected to move into Yue Kwong Chuen on or before May 2018. Housing Society has not announced additional targets under the T-Home Transitional Rental Housing Scheme.
- (3) Light Be has recently announced plans to provide an additional 100 "light home" units over the next three years.

Sources: Community Housing Movement (2018), Housing Society (2018), Light Be (2019), South China Morning Post (2019), 文匯報 (2018), 香港 01 (2018), and 香港社會服務聯會 (2018 & 2019).

Information is based on the meeting of the Subcommittee held on 22 January 2019.

This estimate accounts for the Light Housing/Light Home projects operated by Light Be, which are reportedly providing some 120 units of transitional housing. See 香港 01 (2018).

¹⁰ See Transport and Housing Bureau (2019).

3. Queensland of Australia

3.1 In Queensland of Australia, the government has reformed the housing services and made transitional housing as part of the social housing system since 2010, aiming to provide timely housing assistance to applicants on the social housing register (i.e. waiting list for social housing) with dire housing needs. 11 It specifically targets social housing applicants who are homeless and/or are facing inappropriate housing conditions. According to the latest figures, there are some 3 300 households 12 living in transitional housing out of 17 400 households on the social housing waiting list. 13 In other words, about 19% of the households on social housing waiting list are allocated with transitional housing for temporary accommodation.

Mode of delivery and government funding

3.2 Transitional housing in Queensland is typically funded by the government and operated by non-profit housing providers. The Department of Housing and Public Works ("DHPW") supports non-profit housing providers to supply transitional housing by utilizing (a) idle public housing units and (b) properties rented from the private market. Idle public housing units are leased to the non-profit housing providers at nominal rate, while private properties are generally rented to them at market rate, with subsidies from DHPW. At present, the transitional housing units in Queensland consist of 1900 DHPW-owned properties, as well as 1400 private rental properties. According to the Queensland government, in 2018-2019, there were 20 non-profit housing providers receiving a total of A\$19 million (HK\$111 million) in funding, which covers rental and administrative costs for transitional housing.

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In Australia, social housing programmes are funded by the government and managed by both government agencies and/or NGOs. See Department of Housing and Public Works (2018b).

¹² The above figure is provided by DHPW at the request of the Research Office.

There were around 62 800 social housing dwellings in Queensland as at 30 June 2017. See Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018).

The above figures are provided by DHPW at the request of the Research Office. The funding is provided as part of Queensland's State Budget for social housing. See Queensland Government (2018a).

Housing allocation

- 3.3 Applicants on the social housing register waiting for long-term housing may at the same time be waiting for transitional housing. To determine the eligibility, social housing applicants are assessed and listed according to their degree of need. This is **determined by** a set of **criteria such as risk of homelessness**, ¹⁵ **appropriateness of housing, and issues in accessing and sustaining private tenancies**. Only those assessed with a **high or very high level of housing need** will be matched to transitional housing.
- 3.4 DHPW has specifically drawn up an **allocation framework** setting out the required processes and procedures in making allocations. Under the allocation framework, non-profit housing providers are responsible for matching applicants with vacant housing units, but they are not allowed to maintain their own waiting lists. Upon learning that a property is available for tenanting, a non-profit housing provider should notify the relevant Housing Service Centre under DHPW. The Housing Service Centre will then provide a shortlist of applicants, and the housing provider may determine the final match.

Tenancy and rental

3.5 DHPW maintains a rental policy to ensure that the rent for transitional housing is fair, affordable and consistent. In general, the **rent for transitional housing is capped at 25% of assessable household income**. In order to ensure that all households pay some rent, tenants with very low or no income will be charged a rent on par with the level paid by tenants receiving basic income support. In addition, work incentives such as guaranteed rent freezes are provided to encourage tenants to seek employment.

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Queensland's social housing register provides for three levels of homelessness. Category A includes those living on the streets, in makeshift and/or illegal housing, or fleeing domestic violence. Category B includes the dispersed homeless, i.e. people who are staying with family and/or friends as they have no housing of their own. Category C includes those living under a transitional housing programme. See Queensland Government (2018b).

The maximum income support at the single no children basic rate is around A\$1,100 (HK\$6,448) per month. This is equivalent to a rent of A\$275 (HK\$1,612).

When household members on income support enter the workforce, they receive a guaranteed rent freeze for at least six months.

3.6 As part of the transitional housing programme, **supportive service** is provided to build households' capacity in obtaining long-term housing. For example, housing providers will conduct regular meetings with tenants to identify any barrier the tenants are facing, and where necessary, make referral to other social support services. A household will move on from transitional housing when it has secured long-term housing in the private market or social housing sector, or when it is no longer eligible for assistance. According to the Queensland government, providers of transitional housing are required to maintain an **average tenancy of less than two years** with transitional housing tenants. During tenancy, a household must maintain an active application on the social housing register.

4. Vancouver of Canada

In **Vancouver of Canada**, transitional housing is positioned as an intermediate step between emergency shelter and permanent social housing. It offers short-term supportive accommodation for vulnerable groups such as the homeless and those living in inadequate conditions. In recent years, in order to tackle Vancouver's crisis of housing affordability, the Vancouver city government has begun delivering temporary modular housing on underutilized sites. Under Vancouver's streamlined planning process, **modular housing units can be rolled out in as little as six months.** As at October 2018, there were 554 modular units that have begun tenancy, and another 52 units under construction.

Modular housing initiative

4.2 Modular housing in Vancouver involves the collaboration between provincial authorities, local agencies and community operators. The provincial housing authority, BC Housing, is responsible for the cost of construction and operation. In 2017, it earmarked C\$66 million

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As at 2017, there were around 6 100 persons who were homeless and/or living in inadequate conditions in Vancouver. In parallel, there were around 25 600 units of social housing in Vancouver. See City of Vancouver (2017b).

¹⁹ Vancouver's house price index has risen by almost two-folds since 2010, and has been ranked behind Hong Kong as the second most unaffordable housing market in the world. See Teranet and National Bank of Canada (2019) and Demographia (2018).

²⁰ See Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency (n.d.).

(HK\$397 million) for the construction of 606 units of transitional modular housing.²¹ The Vancouver city government works with BC Housing to **identify underutilized sites owned by the city and/or private partners for development**, and is responsible for all costs of land. It has also assigned the government-owned public housing developer, namely Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency, to provide overall project management support. Non-profit operators are contracted to operate individual modular housing sites, with funding coming from BC Housing.²²

4.3 Proposed development sites are selected based on a set of feasibility criteria, such as current land-use, lease considerations, alternative use, and access to community services. Development sites are expected to be available for five to ten years. As a means to expedite the housing supply, amendments were made to Vancouver's Zoning and Development By-laws. In projects where at least 70% of all dwelling units provide low-cost housing including modular housing, zoning provisions may be relaxed to help fast-track the development approval process.²³ Consequently, modular housing in Vancouver may progress from idea to tenancy in as little as six months' time.

Modular housing design and allocation

- 4.4 To standardize the provision of modular housing, the Vancouver city government has issued a **design guideline** covering the conditional use, external and internal design, and unit specifications for modular housing. Specifically, **modular housing must be self-contained units of at least 250 sq ft** which are equipped with a private bathroom and cooking facilities. Each modular housing site should also comprise a common room, laundry facilities, accessible design, and outdoor recreational space.
- 4.5 **Allocation** of modular housing units are **processed by a central application system** under BC Housing. The authority has developed an assessment tool to gauge an applicant's level of vulnerability, covering areas such as sociability, medical needs, and mental health. To ensure an optimal tenant mix, tenants with different backgrounds and/or levels of needs are

The funding was announced as part of British Columbia's Budget 2017 Update. See British Columbia Government (2017a).

Under the streamlined process, formal public hearings for proposed developments are not required. See Community Builder Group (2018).

The operation cost is estimated at C\$1.5 million (HK\$9 million) per year for a 50-unit modular housing project.

housed under the same site. Furthermore, non-profit operators may give preference to specific target groups (e.g. women and children, persons with disabilities, and lower-income residents) for individual sites under their management. They also act as points of contact by assisting the homeless in their applications.

Tenancy and rental

4.6 Vancouver's modular housing follows the "housing first" approach, which focuses on expediting housing for the homeless and providing supportive services that help transition tenants into longer-term housing. In general, on-site services include 24/7 staffing, meal programmes and non-clinical support. BC Housing also refers tenants to receive health and support services in local health centres. The **rent** for modular housing is set at the **shelter welfare rate of C\$375 (HK\$2,269)** per month.²⁴ The accommodation is temporary but the maximum duration of stay has not been specified.

5. Taiwan

housing for disadvantaged households (弱勢戶) under the Social Rental Housing Subleasing and Management Pilot Scheme (社會住宅包租代管試辦計畫) ("SRHSM Scheme"). The Scheme was introduced in 2017 with an aim to provide more affordable housing for those in need. The Taiwan government has set to provide 200 000 units of social housing from 2017 to 2024, including 80 000 units of short-term rental housing under the SRHSM Scheme. Operation of the Scheme for the first four years from 2017 to 2020 is estimated to cost TWD\$8.3 billion (HK\$2.2 billion), funded fully by the Taiwan government. The SRHSM Scheme is now being piloted in Taiwan's six special municipalities, including Taipei, New Taipei, and Kaohsiung. The

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The shelter welfare rate is the part of income assistance disbursed to individuals and/or households for the purpose of securing a shelter. The amount provided above refers to the rate for single individuals only. See British Columbia Government (2017b).

As at 29 January 2019, there were around 14 000 units of social housing in Taiwan. See 內政部不動產資訊平台(2019).

²⁶ See 行政院(2018).

The other special municipalities include Taichung, Tainan, and Taoyuan. It is estimated that there are around 176 600 disadvantaged households requiring social rental housing across Taiwan's six municipalities. See 行政院 (2017).

Construction and Planning Agency of the Ministry of the Interior (內政部營建署) provides overall policy support and individual city governments are responsible for administering the Scheme locally.

Mode of delivery and government incentives

5.2 Transitional housing is operated by government-approved housing The Taiwan government subsidizes approved housing operators to manage and sublease rental units from the private market to those in need at a **discounted rate**. There are two streams of leasing arrangement, namely subleasing stream and management stream. Under the subleasing stream (包租方式), the properties are rented by housing operators and subleased to tenants in need. Under the management stream (代管方式), housing operators help match landlords and tenants to sign a lease directly. landlords are incentivized through a range of subsidies and tax deductions²⁸ to lease their properties at 80% or 90% of market rate.²⁹ For every matched property, housing operators receive a one-off commission on top of monthly operation fee. At present, there are around 10 housing operators including NGOs and real estate agencies participating in the SRHSM Scheme. They are required to perform the duties in accordance with the Rules of Approval and Incentives for Rental Housing Services (租屋服務事業認定及獎勵辦法) including handling applications and managing tenancy.

Tenancy and rental

5.3 To ensure that the Scheme benefits those with the most pressing housing need, at least 40% of short-term social housing are allotted to disadvantaged households. According to the Housing Act (住宅法), disadvantaged households include socially disadvantaged tenants such as the elderly, the homeless, and victims of domestic violence, as well as economically disadvantaged tenants such as middle or low-income households. The rent for SRHSM housing units is set at 70% and 50% of

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For example, the first TWD\$10,000 (HK\$2,630) received on monthly rent is exempted from general income tax (綜合所得稅). In addition, landlords participating in the SRHSM Scheme may receive a maximum of TWD\$10,000 (HK\$2,630) per year in renovation subsidy.

Properties are leased at 80% of market rental rent under the subleasing stream and 90% under the management stream. The lower rate under the subleasing stream reflects the higher risk (e.g. rent arrears) borne by housing operators.

market rate for the socially and economically disadvantaged respectively. A standard lease for SRHSM housing units ranges from one to three years.

Housing operators are required to conduct regular home visits to ensure a smooth tenancy. In case of need, operators may refer tenants to relevant local social service departments. Tenants with emergency needs may also apply for **one-off government loans covering up to three months of rent**. As at January 2019, the SRHSM Scheme has provided 3 058 short-term social housing units, of which 2 010 units were served to disadvantaged households.³¹

6. Observations

- Transitional housing is a means to provide short-term housing relief to vulnerable households before they move on to longer-term adequate housing. Based on the observations of the places studied, transitional housing generally takes the form of modular housing on underutilized sites, idle public housing units for temporary use, and/or rental properties from the private market. To ensure that transitional housing is given to those with a high or very high housing need, Queensland has established an allocation policy for transitional housing which targets applicants on the social housing waiting list facing poor housing conditions or homelessness. Applications are assessed by housing service centres under DHPW.
- Among the places studied, capital and/or operational funding for transitional housing programmes comes predominantly from the government. In Queensland, the provincial government provides a recurrent subsidy covering the rental and administration costs of non-profit housing providers. Similarly in Vancouver, the provincial government provides capital and operation funding for modular housing units, and the city government covers all costs of land. It has also adopted a design guideline to specify the parameters for modular units, and amended the zoning bylaws to expedite the development approval process. Finally, the Taiwan government has set a provisional supply target for short-term social rental housing, with a budget set

The difference in rent paid to landlords and rent collected from tenants is subsidized by the Taiwan government.

The above figure is provided by the Construction and Planning Agency of the Ministry of the Interior, at the request of the Research Office.

for the initial four-year period. To encourage private landlords to lease their vacant flats for short-term social housing, tax incentives and subsidies are given.

6.3 All three places have specified the level of rent for transitional housing, determined based on income earned or market rental rate. With support from the government, non-government housing operators in these three places play a pivotal role in delivering transitional housing. In addition to managing tenancies and/or sites of housing, they are also responsible for providing complementary support services such as services referral and regular visits/meetings with a hope to build tenants' capacity to progress to appropriate long-term housing arrangements.

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Tel: 3919 3585

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Appendix

Salient features of transitional housing programmes in selected places

	Hong Kong	Queensland (Australia)	Vancouver (Canada)	Taiwan
1. Background				
- Size of targeted groups	 150 200 general applications for PRH. 116 600 inadequately housed households. 	17 400 households on the social housing register.	 2 100 homeless individuals. 4 000 people living in inadequate conditions. 	176 600 disadvantaged households requiring social rental housing in six special municipalities.
 No. of public/social rental housing units currently available 	• 815 000 units.	• 62 800 units.	• 25 600 units.	• 14 000 units.
 No. of transitional housing units currently provided 	• 540 units.	• 3 300 units.	• 606 units.	• 3 058 units.
- Regular funding or annual budget for transitional housing	No. HK\$36 million for 90 units under the Modular Social Housing Scheme, with source of funding from the Community Care Fund.	Yes. A\$19 million (HK\$111 million) in 2018-2019, with source of funding from the Queensland State Budget.	 Yes. C\$66 million (HK\$397 million) in capital funding in 2017, with source of funding from the British Columbia Budget. 	 Yes. TWD\$8.3 billion (HK\$2.2 billion) from 2017 to 2020, with source of funding from the Housing Fund (住宅基金).⁽¹⁾

Note: (1) The Housing Fund is established under the Housing Act (住宅法) and provides funding for social housing and housing subsidies.

Appendix (cont'd)

Salient features of transitional housing programmes in selected places

	Hong Kong	Queensland (Australia)	Vancouver (Canada)	Taiwan	
2. Delivery of transitional housing					
- Responsible authorities	Transport and Housing Bureau.	Department of Housing and Public Works.	 BC Housing (Provincial housing authority). Vancouver Affordable Housing Agency. 	• Construction and Planning Agency, Ministry of the Interior (內政部營建署).	
- Sources of housing/ land	Properties from private developers, modular housing, and converted industrial buildings.	Vacant public housing units and properties from the private market.	Modular housing on underutilized sites.	Rental properties from the private market.	
 Party responsible for processing applications/ determining allocation 	Individual service operators.Housing Society.	Department of Housing and Public Works.	BC Housing.	Approved housing providers.	
- Party responsible for tenancy management	Individual service operators.Housing Society.	Non-profit housing providers.	Non-profit housing operators.	Approved housing providers.	
- Supportive services provided	Community-based social services which develop tenants' capacity for living independently in the community.	Work incentives provided to unemployed tenants.	Onsite services including 24/7 staffing, meal programmes and non- clinical support services.	 Regular home visits and referral to social services in case of need. One-off government loans covering up to three month's rent. 	

Appendix (cont'd)

Salient features of transitional housing programmes in selected places

	Hong Kong	Queensland (Australia)	Vancouver (Canada)	Taiwan	
3. Tenancy and rental					
- Level of rent	Varies by programme, but generally not more than the maximum level of rent allowance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme.	25% of household assessable income.	Shelter welfare rate of C\$375 (HK\$2,269) for single individuals.	70% or 50% of market rate depending on level of need.	
- Length of tenancy	Two to five years.	Less than two years on average.	BC Housing will help tenants transition to more permanent homes under its portfolio.	One to three years.	
- Other remarks	• Nil.	Allocation framework specifying the standard criteria, procedures, and requirements in allocating transitional housing.	Modular housing guideline which specifies the design, facilities, and requirements of modular housing units.	Incentives such as tax deductions and renovation subsidies are provided to private landlords who lease their properties at below market rate.	

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Taiwan

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