

Legislative Council Panel on Housing

Progress Report on the Housing Advisory and Service Team in Tin Shui Wai

Purpose

This paper aims to report on the progress of the pilot scheme for setting up the Housing Advisory and Service Team (HAST) in Tin Shui Wai (TSW).

Background

2. As at end of 2008, there were altogether 11 public rental housing (PRH) estates comprising 54 340 flats for a target population of 174 200 in TSW. Three blocks with 2 365 flats under Phase II of Tin Ching Estate is scheduled for completion in September 2009. By then, the number of PRH flats will amount to 56 700 with a population reaching 184 000.

Reasons for Setting up the HAST

3. The Housing Department (HD) will provide all prospective tenants of newly completed PRH with an information folder listing out the information about the social, community, transport and educational services available in the district. This information is particularly useful to tenants in TSW as a majority of them are originated from other districts, and are not familiar with the new living environment. In addition, we will also conduct orientation briefings to help the tenants assess if the housing offer is suitable for them.

4. However, since many of them have moved to TSW for a relatively short period of time, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and social service agencies have expressed difficulties in outreaching to these tenants, building up relationship with them, and enabling them to fully utilise their services.

5. To enhance services provided to the TSW community, we have discussed with the Home Affairs Bureau and the Labour and Welfare Bureau on the feasibility of setting up the HAST, and have obtained their full support. The Subsidised Housing Committee of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) endorsed this two-year pilot scheme in January 2008.

Implementation

6. Given the role of the HAST is to assist new tenants to adapt to the new living environment and to foster community building, we have commissioned an NGO through inviting the NGOs on the Social Welfare Department (SWD)'s subvention list by tender to provide the required services. Colleagues from SWD and the Home Affairs Department (HAD) have also participated in the vetting of the tender proposals. Taking into account that there are over 56 700 PRH flats in TSW, the HAST is staffed by a team of 10 members to ensure the effective and efficient discharge of their duties. To tap into the experience of local residents who have gone through the adjustment process and to create more job opportunities in TSW, we have specified in the service contract that at least seven members of the HAST are to be recruited locally. The HAST was formally set up on 16 April 2008 for a period of two years at an estimated cost of about \$4 million (including staff remuneration and other expenses).

Responsibilities of the HAST

7. To avoid duplication of the existing services rendered by SWD, HAD, NGOs and voluntary groups, the HAST is mainly tasked with the following responsibilities:

- (a) to assist new tenants in adapting to their new living environment by conducting orientation briefings and home visits, and to refer needy families to the concerned departments and voluntary agencies for assistance;
- (b) to assist Estate Management Advisory Committees (EMACs) in organising gatherings to incubate a stronger sense of belonging and to foster community building;
- (c) to assist the HD in providing training and conducting seminars on community building for EMAC members;
- (d) to assist PRH tenants in building up contacts with relevant Government departments and social organisations;
- (e) to coordinate with relevant Government departments and voluntary organisations in mobilising appropriate social services and community resources for the residents; and

- (f) to provide any other necessary advisory and counselling services to PRH tenants as required by HD.

Monitoring and Coordination Works of HD

8. HD is responsible for the overall steering and supervision of the services provided by the HAST which has all along adopted a proactive approach in assisting new PRH tenants to address the problems of settling down in TSW and facilitating their early integration into the community. The major monitoring and coordination works of HD include:

- (a) to convene regular meetings to monitor the operation, work progress and effectiveness of the HAST so as to ensure that its performance measures are up to the requirement and expectation of HD;
- (b) to ensure that the HAST organises community activities with EMACs regularly to incubate a stronger sense of belonging and to foster community harmony;
- (c) to coordinate with other Government departments and to take up an intermediary role from time to time by referring needy families in the district for assistance; and
- (d) to assist the HAST in building close ties with all the local estate management staff and property services agents, EMACs and related organisations in TSW, so as to provide comprehensive services to the PRH tenants.

Work Progress of the HAST

9. The HAST has carried out its services in a proactive and outreaching manner for about eight months, during which it has paid visits to all social service agencies, District Council Members and EMACs in TSW, set up a telephone hotline to answer tenants' enquiries and held roving exhibitions in PRH estates. So far, the HAST has held orientation briefings for about 3 000 households upon intake, and has provided advisory service to 1 700 households and case counselling service to over 90 households. The HAST has helped a number of families thus far. To cite a real-life example, through an orientation briefing and home visit, the HAST was able to better understand the need of a family which has recently settled down in TSW. HAST helped them get acquainted with the community and provided them with various kinds of

services, such as furniture donation, home refurbishment, switching schools of their children as well as professional support to the elderly and his spouse. Through the help of HAST, the family was able to settle down very quickly. A summary of the HAST activities is given at the **Annex**.

10. Looking ahead, the HAST will continue to promote neighbourhood mutual support by organising various activities in PRH estates on a regular basis so as to strengthen the operation of EMACs and community cohesion, which in turn would assist tenants in settling down in their new homes and integrating into the community as early as possible.

Way Forward

11. A comprehensive review will be conducted 18 months after the commencement of service by the HAST (i.e. October 2009) to gauge the effectiveness and map out the way forward of the pilot scheme, and to decide on whether to extend the scheme to other districts.

12. Members are invited to note the progress of the HAST in TSW and its way forward.

Transport and Housing Bureau
January 2009

Summary of Activities Organised by the HAST in TSW

Activities held in 2008

1. Orientation briefings to disseminate information on community services, medical services, transport and education in Tin Shui Wai
2. Distribution of information folder on TSW and telephone hotline reusable bags
3. Home visits to families upon intake
4. Follow-up on cases
5. Community activities
 - one-day tour of community facilities in TSW for new tenants
 - ‘Valued Friends’ of ‘The Circle of Friendship & Sunshine’ for residents of Tin Ching Estate for familiarisation purpose
 - ‘Friendly Christmas Eve’ — assisted by volunteers of ‘The Circle of Friendship & Sunshine’
 - ‘Colourful Life in Yuen Long’
 - ‘Olympic Games for Fun’ in TSW
 - ‘Reunion for You’ — visits of blessing during the Mid-autumn Festival
 - ‘Colourful Clouds and Blue Sea’ for the Mid-autumn Festival

Activities planned for 2009

1. Workshops for the EMACs in TSW — neighbourhood mutual support for community building
2. Inter-estate soccer matches and cooking class to promote neighbourhood relationship and community harmony and to incubate the sense of belonging to the community and the PRH estate
3. ‘Green Ambassadors’ — concerted efforts to build a green environment in TSW for better living environment