

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Implementation of the
Integrated Family Service Centre Service Mode

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the measures taken by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and Housing Department (HD) to address the concerns relating to handling housing assistance cases by Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs).

Background

2. At its meeting on 12 December 2011, the Panel was briefed on the progress of follow-up action taken by SWD on the 26 recommendations of the report on the Review of the Implementation of the IFSC Service Mode. Members noted with concern that issues relating to handling housing assistance cases were major concerns of IFSC staff. It was decided that another meeting would be held to further discuss with the Administration and receive views from concerned deputations.

Liaison Groups on Issues Relating to Housing Assistance Cases

3. IFSCs are set up to provide a spectrum of services to address the multifarious needs of individuals and families. Around 15% of the cases served by the social workers of IFSCs are related to housing assistance cases. To address concerns on handling these cases, a Liaison Group (LG) at headquarters level and five Local Liaison Groups (LLGs) at district level were set up in April and August 2010 respectively. Membership of the LG comprises an Assistant Director of SWD (as chairperson), two Assistant Directors and two Chief Housing Managers of HD, a District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO) of SWD, as well as

representatives from non-governmental organisation (NGO) IFSC operators and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS). The LLGs convened by SWD, each chaired by a DSWO, are made up of representatives from HD's Estate Management Division and Allocation Section, officers-in-charge (Oi/c) of relevant SWD service units and service co-ordinators / Oi/c of relevant NGO IFSCs. Both the LG and LLGs hold meetings regularly. Concerns raised by the frontline colleagues are discussed at LLGs and, where necessary, brought up to LG for further deliberations and follow up. Mechanism has been set up to facilitate members of LG and LLGs to liaise with each other in-between meetings to follow up issues of concern.

4. The LG and LLGs have reviewed and streamlined the work procedures on handling housing assistance cases and implemented improvement measures as summarised in the ensuing paragraphs -

- (a) *Enhancement measures on facilitating the delineation of responsibilities between SWD / NGO IFSCs and HD*

To facilitate effective and appropriate handling of the requests from service users or tenants of public rental housing, measures have been developed to handle cases not requiring social work input to be directly handled by HD, such as cases on purely medical grounds, etc.

- (b) *Mechanism to enhance collaboration and interfacing between the two parties*

Mechanisms have been put in place to facilitate communication between social workers in IFSCs and staff of HD at different levels. Apart from enhancing the referral mechanism, there are designated officers of HD to facilitate direct communication on issues of concerns at operational level. A reporting system has been set up to ensure that irregularities can be brought to the attention of senior management for appropriate handling or rectification.

- (c) *Streamlining of work procedures on handling cases with special requests*

In handling cases with changing requests / situations on housing assistance, e.g. change of location preference or

income level, measures have been worked out to streamline the work procedures so as to address the needs of the service users more directly and efficiently. An example of the streamlining procedures is that SWD / NGO IFSC, instead of routing through DSWO, may make direct recommendation to HD for service users' changing requests of widening location preference to the neighbouring geographical districts if housing resources in the recommended district is not available.

Way Forward

5. SWD/ NGO IFSCs and HD will continue to enhance collaboration and communication to further streamline work procedures on handling housing assistance cases and address issues of concern.

Advice Sought

6. Members are invited to note the measures taken by SWD and HD to address the concerns of IFSC colleagues on handling of housing assistance cases.

**Social Welfare Department
March 2012**