

For discussion
on 9 April 2018

**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Social Welfare Support Services for Street Sleepers**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the social welfare support services for street sleepers provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

Preface

2. Street sleeping is a complex social problem, involving policies and work of various bureaux and departments. All government departments and local service units have been in close collaboration to assist street sleepers (including the homeless staying in 24-hour fast food shops etc.) and enhance their motivation to receive support, so as to persuade them to quit street sleeping as soon as possible. The SWD is mindful of the welfare needs of street sleepers, and has been providing relevant social welfare support service for them through various means.

Number of Street Sleepers

3. To keep track of the social welfare support service demand of street sleepers, the SWD has set up a computerised Street Sleepers Registry (SSR). The SWD's service units and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) specialised in serving street sleepers, including the Integrated Services Teams for Street Sleepers (ISTs) operated by the subvented NGOs (i.e. the Salvation Army, the St. James' Settlement and the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association) as well as the Society for Community Organisation, shall update the SSR's information and data by capturing the particulars of street sleepers in Hong Kong, including those staying in 24-hour fast food shops who are newly confirmed as street sleeper cases. Social workers also de-register

individual street sleeper cases upon confirmation of their cessation of street sleeping. As at end-February 2018, the number of street sleepers registered in the SSR was 1 091.

Social Welfare Support Services provided for Street Sleepers

Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers

4. Since 2004, the SWD has been subventing the Salvation Army, the St. James' Settlement and the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association for each of them to operate an IST. The ISTs provide street sleepers with integrated services, including day and late-night outreaching visits, emergency shelter/short-term accommodation, counselling, employment support/guidance, personal care (e.g. bathing, haircut and meal arrangement, etc.), emergency fund to cover various expenses (e.g. short-term payment of rent and living costs, rental deposit, other removal expenses, etc.), and service referrals, etc. Through the provision of a wide range of support services, the ISTs aim to address the emergency needs of street sleepers as well as enhance their work motivation and skills, so as to enhance their self-reliance for reintegration into the community.

5. In response to the societal condition as well as changes in the characteristics and needs of street sleepers, the ISTs strive for initiating various services and programmes so as to meet the different service needs of street sleepers. For instance, the Salvation Army and the St. James' Settlement have, through strengthening cooperation with the medical care sector, launched the "Healthy Action Level Up Project" and the "Healing Heart Wellness Programme" respectively, so as to enhance street sleepers' awareness of physical and mental health, foster a healthy living pattern, and achieve the target to have early intervention into cases, etc.

6. Besides, the Lotteries Fund has allocated resources to the St. James' Settlement in this financial year for renovating its hostel, with additional single beds to cater for the special needs of the elderly street sleepers, and provide them with a more suitable accommodation arrangement after re-planning the layout of the hostel. To vacate the

lower bunk beds for the needy street sleepers in the hostel, the Salvation Army offers concessionary fee-charging alternative for those using upper bunk beds. The Christian Concern for the Homeless Association also continues to enhance the support facilities of its hostel for addressing the increasing number of female street sleepers within its service scope and, through early intervention and counselling during their stay in hostel, strengthen their confidence and capacity for reintegrating into the community.

Integrated Family Service

7. The 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and the two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) over the territory operated by the SWD or NGOs provide a series of preventive, supportive and remedial services to needy individuals and families (including street sleepers), including outreaching, counselling, crisis intervention, enquiry and referral, etc. Social workers of IFSCs/ISCs would thoroughly assess and take care of the welfare needs of street sleepers, so as to provide them with appropriate service.

Short-term Accommodation Arrangement

8. To address the emergency and short-term accommodation needs of street sleepers, the SWD subvents six NGOs, including the Salvation Army, the St. James' Settlement, the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association, the Pok Oi Hospital, the Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council and the Caritas – Hong Kong, to operate urban hostels for single persons and emergency shelters¹. The SWD also provided 20 additional accommodation places through allocation of additional resources in 2016-17, increasing the total number of subvented places to 222. Besides, NGOs, including the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association, the Caritas – Hong Kong, the Street Sleepers' Shelter Society Trustees Incorporated and the Missionaries of Charity, also provide 418 self-financing places. At present, the total number of subvented/self-financing places providing overnight or temporary accommodation for street sleepers is 640.

¹ Among which, there are three shelters providing self-financing places concurrently.

9. During the stay in the hostels, responsible social workers will provide assistance to street sleepers, including the identification of long-term accommodation or appropriate residential care service. Although the hostel placement normally lasts for a maximum period of six months, responsible social workers will closely review their conditions and consider extending their stay in hostels having regard to the needs of individual cases, so as to assist them in making a smooth transition to long-term accommodation arrangement.

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance

10. Street sleepers with financial needs may apply to the SWD for the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). The aim of the CSSA is to provide a safety net for families or individuals who cannot support themselves financially because of old age, disability, illness, unemployment, low income, etc., so as to enable them to meet their basic daily needs.

Other Services

11. For health care services, street sleepers in need can use the various medical and mental health services under the Hospital Authority (HA) or the Department of Health. Apart from the CSSA recipients, who are eligible for free medical treatment at public hospitals or clinics, street sleepers in need who are unable to pay the medical fees due to financial difficulties may apply for fee waiving through the ISTs or directly to the Medical Social Services Units or the SWD's IFSCs.

12. In addition, the SWD has set up the Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness (ICCMWs) over the territory since 2010 to provide community mental health support services for those in need. Social workers of ISTs can refer cases to the ICCMWs or the HA's Community Psychiatric Nursing Services, and arrange those cases to be followed up by the HA's Psychiatric Specialist Out-Patient Clinics.

Advice Sought

13. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Social Welfare Department
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