

## LCQ10: Housing problem of the grassroots families

Following is a question by the Hon Starry Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (December 9):

Question:

On April 16 this year, the Government set up the Task Force for the Study on Tenancy Control of Subdivided Units (the Task Force) to study the feasibility of, and possible options for, implementing tenancy control of subdivided units (SDUs). In addition, the Government will launch a trial scheme in July next year to disburse cash allowance to grassroots families that have been awaiting the allocation of public rental housing units for a prolonged period (the rent allowance scheme). On the other hand, as revealed by the findings of a survey on the housing problem of the grassroots families conducted last month by the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, 88.9 per cent of the respondents considered that the Government's measures for supporting SDU households were inadequate, 65.2 per cent of the respondents supported the implementation of tenancy control, and 86.1 per cent of the respondents hoped that the Government would address, through the introduction of tenancy control of SDUs, the problem of landlords overcharging SDU households of water and electricity tariffs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the measures in place to assist the Task Force in further expediting its work, with a view to completing the study in the first quarter of next year as targeted or even earlier, so that the relevant bill may be passed within the current term of the Legislative Council;

(2) whether the Task Force will study the enactment of legislation to stipulate a cap on rent increase for SDUs, provide for security of tenure, require that tenancy agreements must be made in the form of written standard contracts, and prohibit landlords from overcharging water and electricity tariffs;

(3) whether it can expedite the launch of the rent allowance scheme and disburse, prior to the implementation of the scheme, allowance to grassroots families through the Community Care Fund's One-off Living Subsidy for Low-income Households Not Living in Public Housing and Not Receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Programme; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) of the new plans in place to build more transitional housing in the urban areas?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Starry Lee is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Government appointed the Task Force for the Study on Tenancy Control of Subdivided Units (the Task Force) in April 2020. Three dedicated working groups were established by the Task Force in July 2020. So far, the Task Force has held five meetings and ten working group meetings. Although the work of the Task Force was affected by the epidemic situation in the past few months, it has been pressing ahead with work on various fronts, including appraising the actual tenancy situations of the subdivided units and collecting views from different stakeholders in the community. Given tenancy control is a policy issue of such a complicated nature, it is understandable that detailed study is required prior to arriving at a conclusion. Hence, the Task Force has appointed independent institutions to undertake research studies on various aspects of the issues with a view to proposing to the Government a set of comprehensive and objective policy options and recommendations.

The Task Force strives to complete the study in the first quarter of 2021 and submit its report to the Government for consideration. The Government will handle the matter in a timely manner once receiving the report.

(3) The Chief Executive announced on January 14, 2020 that the Government will provide cash allowance on a trial basis to eligible General Applicant households which are not living in public housing, not receiving the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and have been waiting for public rental housing (PRH) for more than three years, until these households are offered the first PRH allocation. The policy objective of the trial scheme is to alleviate the difficulties on livelihood faced by grassroots families which have been waiting for PRH for a prolonged period of time. The proposed cash allowance is not a "rental subsidy". The Housing Department has been preparing for the launch of the trial scheme. The Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address also announced that the Government aims to start receiving applications in mid-2021 and disbursing cash allowance from July 2021 onwards. This target is about half a year ahead of the timetable announced by the Chief Executive in January this year (i.e. to launch the scheme in the second half of 2021).

Before the implementation of the above trial scheme, the Community Care Fund (CCF) provides two rounds of "One-off Living Subsidy for Low-income Households Not Living in Public Housing and Not Receiving CSSA" in 2020-21 so as to relieve the financial pressure of low-income households who are not living in PRH and not receiving CSSA (commonly known as the "N have-nots"). The first-round of living subsidy was disbursed in July 2020 and application was closed in end-November. It is expected to benefit around 105 500 households (around 272 000 persons). The CCF will launch the second-round of the living subsidy programme in January 2021 with a 5-month application period. It is expected to benefit around 137 150 households (around 353 600

persons).

(4) As for transitional housing, the Task Force on Transitional Housing under the Transport and Housing Bureau will continue to explore with various community organisations, land or property owners, and related government departments on the feasibility of providing transitional housing on short-term government or private vacant premises or lands. The Government will seek funding from the CCF to launch a pilot scheme to subsidise community organisations to rent suitable rooms in hotels and guesthouses for use as transitional housing. The Government will also consider providing subsidies to the hotels or guesthouses concerned through the transitional housing funding scheme to carry out alteration works for increasing the supply of transitional housing. The above measures will be implemented in various districts in Hong Kong, including urban and rural areas.