

LCQ12: Support to transitional housing projects

Following is a question by the Hon Alice Mak and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

The Government has earlier set up a task force to provide one-stop support for various community-led transitional housing projects. In addition, the Financial Secretary has set aside \$2 billion in the Budget for the next financial year to support non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in taking forward transitional housing projects. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) whether it will set a specific target on the number of transitional housing projects commencing within the coming three years;
- (2) whether it will consider providing NGOs with loan guarantees to facilitate their raising funds for transitional housing projects;
- (3) whether it knows the current unit cost of and the time needed for converting the existing housing units into transitional housing; of the measures in place to assist NGOs in persuading more property owners to let their idle units be used as transitional housing and expediting the relevant conversion works;
- (4) whether it knows the current unit cost of modular transitional housing built by modular integrated construction methods; how the Government currently assists NGOs financially and technically in saving construction costs and expediting the works, and whether it will consider helping those NGOs jointly procure prefabricated parts in order to reduce costs;
- (5) how the Government financially supports the Hong Kong Housing Authority, the Hong Kong Housing Society and the Urban Renewal Authority to take forward transitional housing projects; whether the aforesaid task force will provide any assistance to such projects; and
- (6) whether it will formulate a long-term policy that regards transitional housing as a supplementary source of housing for the short and medium terms, and make relevant legislative amendments to provide for the technical standards for the construction, specifications and safety standards in respect of transitional housing?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been striving to address the housing problem faced by the low-income families with poor living conditions by increasing the supply of housing. It takes time to identify land for housing construction. Therefore, on top of the long-term housing policy and measures, the Government will support and facilitate the implementation of various short-term initiatives put forward and carried out by the community to provide transitional housing for alleviating the hardship faced by families awaiting Public Rental Housing and other inadequately housed households. To this end, the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) has set up a task force to provide one-stop coordinated support to facilitate the implementation of transitional housing projects by the community, including offering advice on relevant administrative or statutory procedures, and assisting them in applying for appropriate funding, etc. Regarding the enquiries as raised by Hon Alice Mak, the consolidated replies are as below:

In view of the short-term nature, different details and objective situation of each transitional housing project, setting a fixed target for transitional housing (such as the number of units or the estimated completion year, etc) is not realistic and does not contribute to the work of non-government organisations (NGOs). Nevertheless, we will continue to adopt an open attitude to facilitate the provision of more transitional housing, and offer necessary support on each of the transitional housing projects, including the technical requirements and procurement of modular housing units etc. With a view to lowering the capital cost, the projects should be in line with the principles of efficiency, and effectiveness in facilitating the provision of more transitional housing. Transitional housing may come in different arrangements and with different ideas. We hope to bring together community efforts, especially allowing different NGOs to extend their creativity to provide various kinds of transitional housing projects. The task force has also conducted three meetings among relevant bureaux and departments to explore ways to overcome obstacles related to the prevailing policies, technical guideline, requirements and safety guideline so as to expedite the provision of transitional housing.

Regarding the funding issue, it is noted that there are a variety of arrangements for different transitional housing projects in the community. For instance, the Community Housing Movement operated by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) has launched a number of projects with operating expenses funded by both the Community Chest of Hong Kong and the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund. For the Modular Social Housing Scheme on a private site at Nam Cheong Street in Sham Shui Po, the HKCSS has secured funding support from the Community Care Fund.

The Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved the Government's proposal in January 2019 to set up a \$1 billion fund to support NGOs in facilitating the gainful use of vacant government sites. The fund can also provide funding support to applicable transitional housing projects and the Development Bureau has commenced to receive funding applications. To further increase the funding support, the Financial Secretary announced in the 2019-20 Budget that \$2 billion would be set aside to support NGOs in constructing transitional housing. The THB will consider the experience in

transitional housing and views from the community to map out the detailed arrangements. If all the preparatory work proceeds smoothly, the Government hopes that funding proposals can be submitted to the Legislative Council in 2019. Before the implementation of the scheme, the NGOs may apply the aforementioned funding for gainful use of the vacant government sites so as to expedite the provision of transitional housing. Until now, there is no request from community organisations regarding the loan guarantee arrangement by the Government.

Based on the information about the Community Housing Movement as provided by HKCSS, the estimated capital cost and time required to renovate/convert an existing residential unit into a transitional housing unit at about \$0.12 million and 6 months respectively including the construction and invitation of service operators. For old domestic buildings with genuine planning and design constraints, in particular those old tenement houses with deep footprint and narrow frontage, the Buildings Department (BD) will consider granting modification/exemption regarding the application of the regulation under the Buildings Ordinance to eligible transitional housing projects in the said buildings. This will facilitate their implementation subject to the project proponent's agreement to operate effectively and implement the compensatory measures continuously. For example, the Building (Planning) Regulations requires the provision of windows in living areas to provide natural ventilation and lighting. If there are difficulties for eligible transitional housing projects to fully comply the requirements under the Regulations because of the building design, the BD will consider granting exemptions. At the same time, the BD will require the project proponents to provide artificial lighting and mechanical ventilation systems, as well as communal living areas that meet the relevant natural ventilation and lighting requirements and to ensure that the compensatory measures can be sustained.

Regarding the Modular Social Housing at Nam Cheong Street, the construction of modular housing through assembly of synthetic building technology must meet the safety requirements for housing under the existing law and regulations. The project will last for about two years. The pilot scheme's total funding provision is \$35.74 million and is expected to benefit about 88 households. With a view to facilitating a wider use of Modular Integrated Construction (MiC) technology for constructing transitional housing by community organisations, the BD has set up a pre-acceptance mechanism for granting in-principle acceptance to MiC systems / components or prototype.