

LCQ5: Transitional housing projects

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (November 20):

Question:

In this year's Policy Address, the Government put forward a plan to increase the number of transitional housing projects substantially to provide a total of 10 000 transitional housing units within the coming three years, and indicated that it had earmarked \$5 billion for meeting the costs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following details of each project (set out in a table): the location, the floor or site area, the parties owning the titles to the premises or site, the number of housing units that can be provided, the name of the operator, as well as the anticipated dates for completion and intake of residents;

(2) as some members of the construction sector have relayed that the construction standards to be met by transitional housing projects are quite high, resulting in high construction costs and long construction time, whether the Government has assessed if the earmarked provision of \$5 billion will be sufficient for meeting the expenditure, and whether it will relax the relevant construction standards; and

(3) given that community groups have been/will be responsible for all the tasks, from the construction or conversion works to the management and operation of the various transitional housing projects, how the Government ensures that all such projects will be completed on schedule, so as to achieve the target of providing 10 000 housing units within three years; of the reasons why the Government does not directly undertake such tasks?

Reply:

President,

Having consolidated the information provided by the Development Bureau and relevant departments, set out below is my consolidated reply of the question raised by the Hon Tony Tse:

The continued increase in land and housing supply remains the fundamental solution to resolve insufficient housing supply. Quality living is the cornerstone for ensuring social stability and the Government will continue to identify land for housing construction to rectify the housing problem with the greatest effort.

On transitional housing, we have earlier announced the provision of a total of over 6 000 units in three phases. The first phase, which includes the Community Housing Movement, commenced in 2017. Up to now, about 620 units

have been provided in existing residential buildings, benefiting about 1 000 families. In the second phase, provision of about 960 units was announced, with intake of residents yet to commence. For details of these projects, please refer to Annex 1.

Projects which provide approximately 4 500 units in the third phase were also announced at the "Symposium on Connecting and Co-creating of Transitional Housing" early this month. These projects include those to be participated by the private developers, the Hong Kong Construction Association etc.. Together with those 1 580 units with resident intake completed or projects announced in the first and second phases, the three phases will provide over 6 000 units in total.

The task force under the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) is now examining the feasibility of building large-scale transitional housing estates on a number of short term idle government and private sites with different community groups, private developers and professional/technical organisations. Details, when available, will be announced by the relevant organisations in due course. Subject to the progress with relevant procedures and local view, and taking into account the 6 000-odd units being occupied or having been announced, it is estimated that about 10 000 transitional housing units can be provided in three years.

On construction costs, the total financial subsidy for each transitional housing unit shall not exceed: (a) \$200 000 for each unit in vacant residential buildings; and (b) \$550 000 for each unit to be provided through erection of temporary structure on vacant lands or in non-residential buildings. This capital amount is estimated with reference to all the projects underway and is believed to suffice in meeting the construction costs. More importantly, the construction of modular housing can be reused, they can be relocated to other developments upon disassembly. In fact, modular housing can have a decades-long lifespan. It is an efficient, economic and environmentally friendly construction method for increasing the supply of transitional housing.

As regards construction standards, the construction of transitional housing must comply with the structural safety, fire and the associated building regulations. The safety and hygiene standards of transitional housing will not be inferior to the current standards applicable to other permanent residential buildings with the same design. Nevertheless, with the concerted efforts of the task force and the earnest collaboration among relevant departments, application procedures are simplified as far as practicable, thus facilitating and expediting approval and implementation for various projects.

A cross-sector collaboration is one of the features of transitional housing. The initiative is rolled out under the active facilitation by the Government and close collaboration between the community and the Government throughout the process from policy inception to project implementation. Apart from exercising flexibility in utilising social resources for the provision of various types of transitional housing for the community, participating

organisations can provide appropriate support for residents according to their needs. We will continue with our communication with the community and make use of the potential and resources in the community outside the Government, to offer flexible and multiple social services.

On monitoring and implementation of the funding scheme, we will vet applications and oversee the progress of projects to ensure that the projects are carried out in line with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources thereby achieving good value for money. To ensure transparency and accountability on the use of the grants under the funding scheme, the Government will submit an annual report on the approved applications and implementation progress of projects to the Panel on Housing.

While it is a challenge to provide 10 000 transitional housing units within three years, as long as we work together with concerted efforts, we have confidence to overcome the difficulties and accomplish the mission.