

## LCQ7: Support provided for street sleepers

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (June 10):

Question :

With subventions provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), three non-governmental organisations (NGOs) currently operate an Integrated Services Team for Street Sleepers each to provide integrated services for street sleepers. In addition, the Integrated Family Service Centres and Integrated Services Centres run by SWD or NGOs provide relevant support for street sleepers. The economic downturn that occurred over the past six months has rendered quite a number of people homeless, and the number of street sleepers has been on the rise. I have learnt, however, that owing to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic, the support received by street sleepers has been reduced rather than increased. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of street sleepers as registered in SWD's computerised Street Sleepers Registry in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by the District Council district where the street sleeping points were located;
- (2) of the method(s) currently adopted for compiling statistics on the number of street sleepers; whether it has projected the number of street sleepers in the coming three years for the purpose of assessing service demand;
- (3) of the number of hostel places for street sleepers provided by NGOs in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by whether they were subvented or self-financed places;
- (4) whether it has set a target number of hostel places for street sleepers; if so, of the details (including the criteria adopted); if not, the reasons for that;
- (5) whether it has taken measures during the epidemic to assist the various relevant organisations in continuing to provide support for street sleepers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (6) whether it has formulated measures or guidelines to ensure that street sleepers will still receive the various kinds of support under special circumstances (e.g. inclement weather and an epidemic); if so, of the details; if not, whether it will consider formulating the relevant measures or guidelines?

Reply :

President,

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) &(2) The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has been reaching out and providing services to street sleepers in need through subventing three Integrated Services Teams for Street Sleepers (ISTs) operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (including The Salvation Army, St. James' Settlement and Christian Concern for The Homeless Association) and related service units, as well as collecting service user information. With this arrangement, SWD collects information as reference for service planning. The number of street sleepers who had been approached by relevant service units over the past five financial years by district is at Annex (Table 1).

(3) & (4) To address the emergency and short-term accommodation needs of street sleepers, SWD subsidises NGOs to provide temporary shelter for street sleepers. During street sleepers' stay in the emergency and short-term accommodation, responsible social workers will provide them with assistance, including identification of more stable accommodation or appropriate residential care service. SWD will closely monitor the supply and demand of places and conduct service planning regularly. The number of places available for street sleepers at emergency / temporary shelters / hostels / short-term hostels subvented by SWD or operated by NGOs on a self-financing basis over the past five years is at Annex (Table 2).

(5) During the pandemic, ISTs continued to conduct outreaching visits so as to identify the social welfare needs of street sleepers and provide them with the services required. ISTs could make use of SWD's emergency fund for meeting the urgent needs of street sleepers as and when required. In addition, to assist welfare units to step up preventive measures against the spread of the virus, SWD has provided three rounds of special allowance to subvented NGOs (including service units serving street sleepers) and NGOs operating hostels for street sleepers on a self-financing basis to purchase personal protective equipment and disinfection supplies.

(6) According to the Funding and Service Agreement signed between SWD and the subvented NGOs, ISTs are responsible for cold weather-related work, including taking measures to help street sleepers prepare for extreme cold weather before it arrives, and providing outreaching services to the street sleepers in need under cold weather. During the pandemic, besides outreaching and counseling work, ISTs also provide virus prevention supplies and related health information for street sleepers in need.