

Community Care Fund Programme
Re-launching “Subsidy for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance
Recipients Living in Rented Private Housing”
Evaluation Report

Background

The Community Care Fund (CCF) re-launched the “Subsidy for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients living in rented private housing” programme (the Programme) to provide a one-off subsidy to Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) households living in rented private housing and paying a monthly rent which exceeded the maximum rent allowance (MRA) under the CSSA Scheme, so as to relieve their financial burden as a result of periodic increase of rent.

Implementation of the Programme

2. The Programme is implemented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). SWD announced the details of the Programme and arranged publicity¹ in September 2013. Based on the record of the Computerised Social Security System (CSSS), eligible CSSA households were identified with a view to providing one-person household with a one-off subsidy of \$2,000 and two-or-more-person household with a one-off subsidy of \$4,000. A total subsidy of about \$51.26 million has been released so far.

Evaluation

3. SWD commenced the evaluation on the effectiveness of the Programme in April 2014 and completed it in May 2014. The effectiveness of the Programme was analysed mainly through the number of beneficiaries, subsidy disbursed, how the beneficiaries use the subsidy and the opinions of the beneficiaries etc. The data was collected from the record in the CSSS that was used for processing the subsidy and the survey conducted with the beneficiaries. Besides, in conducting the Programme evaluation, SWD had also made reference to the experience

¹ Publicity efforts included press release, distribution of programme leaflets via SWD’s District Social Welfare Offices and the Home Affairs Department’s District Offices, and uploading all relevant information onto the SWD Homepage.

gained in the evaluation of the Programme for its first launch in 2011 as well as the methodology used in other CCF programmes.

Analysis of the Evaluation Results

(a) Statistical Data on the Beneficiaries

4. Based on the record from the CSSS, SWD verified that 17 751 CSSA households had met the eligibility criteria and subsidy was already arranged to all of them. Meanwhile, another 25 households required follow-up action. The majority of beneficiaries, 9 873 households (approximately 55.6%) were from one-person households, followed by two-person households of 4 048 (approximately 22.8%). As at 31 May 2014, the total disbursement was about \$51.26 million, including \$19.75 million for one-person CSSA households and \$31.51 million for two-or-more-person CSSA households.

(b) Survey on the Beneficiaries

5. SWD conducted a telephone survey with 150 randomly-selected CSSA household beneficiaries², so as to understand their use of subsidy and their opinions on the Programme.

(i) Use of Subsidy

6. About 73% of the respondents used the subsidy for rental expenses, while 59% of the respondents spent it on daily expenses³. Some of the respondents had also used the subsidy on other aspects, including learning expense of their children (3 respondents), medical expense (1 respondent), consumables for infant (1 respondent) and savings (1 respondent).

(ii) Opinion on the Programme

7. Most of the respondents (95%) agreed that the Programme could relieve their burden on housing expenses, and 96% of the respondents were satisfied with the operational arrangement of the Programme. 75% of the respondents had no other comments on the

² All the 150 respondents had agreed to give their opinions.

³ As individual respondent was allowed to provide more than one option on their use of subsidy while the percentage for each option was calculated based on the overall number of respondents (i.e. 150), the total percentage did not add up to 100%.

Programme, while 12% and 8% of them suggested increasing the amount of subsidy and continuous release of the subsidy respectively. 5 respondents expressed that the subsidy was not effective enough and some of them considered that their housing problem could only be solved by assisting them in moving into the public housing in long run. There were also 4 respondents gave their opinions on the eligibility criteria and the release of programme information, and 1 respondent suggested providing other subsidies, for instance subsidy for furniture and equipment.

(c) Public Enquiries

8. Along with the re-launch of the Programme, SWD had set up a telephone hotline to provide necessary support and information to the individuals concerned. As at May 2014, SWD had received about 860 enquiries regarding the Programme, most of which were about their eligibility to the Programme (about 42%) and the arrangements for their payment (about 44%) while enquiries about confirming the amount of subsidy received and the implementation schedule of the Programme were both less than 10%.

Conclusion

(a) Programme Publicity

9. The CSSA households meeting the eligibility criteria were identified based on the CSSS records. Although the beneficiaries were not required to submit applications, SWD had carried out a series of publicity work, including press release, distribution of programme leaflets via SWD's District Social Welfare Offices and the Home Affairs Department's District Offices, and uploading all relevant information onto SWD Homepage so as to foster the eligible persons to understand the arrangement of the Programme, and also to let the persons, who had met the eligible criteria but did not duly report their change(s) in housing to SWD, aware of the launch of the Programme and to report respective change(s) timely so as to be disbursed the subsidy entitled to.

(b) Operational Arrangement

10. Although some of the surveyed beneficiaries suggested increasing the amount of subsidy and expressed their opinions on the eligibility criteria and the release of programme information, over 95% of the surveyed beneficiaries were satisfied with the operational

arrangement of the Programme. Furthermore, compared with the overall 17 751 CSSA household beneficiaries, the public enquiries concerning the Programme in a number of about 860 was on the low side, which reflected that the release of programme information during its implementation was sufficient, and the telephone hotline set up had effectively provided immediate support and information to the persons concerned.

(c) Overall Effectiveness

11. As revealed by the survey statistics, the surveyed beneficiaries generally agreed that the Programme could relieve their burden on housing expenses. This showed that the Programme had achieved its objective of relieving the financial burden of the beneficiaries as a result of periodic increase of rent.

12. The MRA under the CSSA Scheme is adjusted annually in accordance with the movement of rent index for private housing under the Consumer Price Index (A). Based on the index, compiled by the Census and Statistics Department on a monthly basis for measuring the rental movements of private housing among non-CSSA households with relatively low expenditure, the MRA is adjusted to meet the rental expenses of the CSSA households. Under the mechanism, the MRA in the years of 2012 to 2014 was adjusted upwardly by 5.7%, 7.8% and 6.5% respectively. Along with this, the number of CSSA households benefited from the Programme due to their rents exceeding the MRA has dropped from about 22 600 at its first launch to about 17 700 at its re-launch, which indicated that the mechanism had effectively reflected the relevant rental change. If the rent allowance is adjusted according to the actual rent paid by the CSSA households living in private housing, under the tight housing provision, it might induce an increase of private housing rent and thus increase burden to the non-CSSA households with low income which may indirectly result in more households falling into the net of CSSA.

13. The rent of private housing and its supply are closely linked. In long run, the Government will continue to increase the supply of public housing to fulfill the housing needs of those who cannot afford rented private housing. For individuals who have pressing housing needs, the social workers of the Integrated Family Service Centres of SWD or non-governmental organisations would provide them with appropriate assistance in light of the circumstances of individual cases, including short-term financial assistance to meet rental and removal expenses,

arrangement for admission to urban hostels for single persons, and/or recommendation for allocation of public rental housing flats under the Compassionate Rehousing Scheme.

14. The above measures have already taken care of the housing needs of the CSSA households in various aspects, and SWD will continue to adjust the MRA in accordance with the existing mechanism, so as to reflect relevant rental change; hence it is not necessary to incorporate the Programme into the Government's regular assistance programme. In addition, as shown by the recent figures⁴, the variation of private housing rent has been relatively steady. Yet, there is still a sign of periodic rental increase and CSSA households living in rented private housing are therefore still in need of assistance at this stage. Since the Programme has acted as a buffer in relieving the financial pressure of the CSSA households living in rented private housing during the periodic increase of rent and can avoid triggering the increase of rent in private housing, it is recommended for its re-launch to provide additional support by one-off subsidy to the households concerned.

Social Welfare Department
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⁴ According to the Monthly Report on the Consumer Price Index published by the Census and Statistics Department, the month-to-month increase of private housing rent index under the Consumer Price Index (A) ranged from 0.4% to 0.6% during the period from January to May 2014.