

**Community Care Fund**  
**“Assistance Programme to Improve the Living Environment of**  
**Low-income Subdivided Unit Households”**  
**Evaluation Report**

## **Purpose**

This paper concludes the “Assistance Programme to Improve the Living Environment of Low-income Subdivided Unit Households” (Assistance Programme) administered by the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

## **Background**

2. SWD launched the two-year Assistance Programme in June 2020 with a view to providing a one-off subsidy in kind (the subsidy) for low-income households living in subdivided units<sup>1</sup> (SDUs) to improve their living environment through carrying out minor improvement/repair works, purchasing furniture and household goods as well as pest control services, and strengthening these SDU households’ connection with community services/resources. The ceiling of the subsidy is set at \$8,500 for one-person households, \$10,000 for two-person households, \$11,500 for three-person households, and \$13,000 for four- or-more-person households respectively. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) has been entrusted to co-ordinate the implementation of the Assistance Programme and partner with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as agents to implement the Assistance Programme. A total provision of \$287.04 million was allocated to the Assistance Programme, which included \$276 million<sup>2</sup> for the costs of subsidised items, and \$11.04 million<sup>3</sup> for administrative fees. The Assistance Programme was expected to benefit about 24 000 low- income SDU households.

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<sup>1</sup> According to pages 13 to 18 of the Census and Statistics Department’s 2016 Population By-census Thematic Report: Persons Living in Subdivided Units, SDUs are formed by splitting a unit of quarters into two or more “internally connected” and “externally accessible” units. Under this Assistance Programme, besides SDU households, the targeted beneficiaries also include households living in cubicles, bed spaces/cocklofts, rooftop structures, squatters, licensed structures for residential use, huts, industrial buildings and commercial buildings. The above-mentioned private residential housing units are collectively referred to SDUs under the Assistance Programme.

<sup>2</sup> The subsidised items included a subsidy of \$240 million to beneficiary households and a service fee of \$36 million to agents. For each successful application, agents will receive a service fee of \$1,500 upon case completion.

<sup>3</sup> This includes the estimated administrative fees of \$8.28 million and \$2.76 million to HKCSS and SWD respectively.

## **Implementation**

### *Agents*

3. Since the commencement of the Assistance Programme, the HKCSS has partnered with 56 agents (**Appendix**) to introduce the Assistance Programme and relevant community resources to potential beneficiary SDU households who were potential beneficiaries via different publicity channels through outreach and collaboration with local bodies in 18 districts. To expedite the application process, the HKCSS has developed a computer system. After verifying the eligibility criteria of the applicant households, the staff of the agents would bring tablet computers provided by the HKCSS while conducting household visits to register the required information of the applicants and order the required goods / services.

### *Executive committee*

4. To provide more appropriate assistance to eligible SDU households, the HKCSS has set up a multi-disciplinary executive committee to formulate a prescribed checklist of more than 100 improvement items and select suitable suppliers. The executive committee comprises representatives from government departments and the Consumer Council, university professors, lawyers, accountants, engineers and representatives from the business sector, etc. Moreover, the HKCSS would consult members of the executive committee for professional advice from time to time and update the checklist of items or make flexible adjustments having regard to the views and needs of SDU households. For instance, firefighting equipment was added swiftly to the checklist in response to a number of fatal fires in 2021.

### *Application procedures*

5. After vetting the eligibility of applicant households, the agents would assess their living environment through home visits and assist them in ordering goods and/or arranging for services required. Once the applicant households acquire the services and goods required, the staff of the agents would once again conduct home visits to confirm that the applicant households have acknowledged receipt of the concerned services/goods. In the meantime, the agents would introduce poverty alleviation measures as well as community services and resources to the households and help connect or refer those in need to relevant organisations or units for other appropriate support. Eligible households should use the subsidy within a six-month effective period. There is no upper limit on

the number of times for applying for subsidised items. However, the ceiling of the subsidy must not be exceeded.

### **Contingency measures during the epidemic**

6. Since the implementation of the Assistance Programme in June 2020, SWD has been liaising closely with the HKCSS (which coordinated the programme) and NGO agents to make special arrangements according to the development of the epidemic so as to implement the Assistance Programme continuously and cater for the different needs of SDU households. The special arrangements include the following:

- Since the end of 2020, physical home visits have been suspended several times when the epidemic situation was severe. Instead, photos or videos are used to verify the purchased items and video conferencing is adopted for vetting to expedite the assessment of SDU households' applications and reduce infection risks.
- With the stabilisation of the epidemic situation, the HKCSS contacts the suppliers to speed up the ordering and delivery of goods.
- The agents exercise discretion to extend the effective period of applications for subsidy from beneficiary households who are unable to complete their applications within six months.

7. Besides, the HKCSS consults members of the executive committee for professional advice from time to time and updates/fine-tunes the prescribed checklist of improvement items to respond to the feedback of SDU households and satisfy their special needs arising from the epidemic. Various anti-epidemic household goods, such as air purifiers, multi-purpose disinfectants, spray cleaners, broom and mop sets and disinfecting and cleaning items, have been included in the checklist.

### **Application overview**

8. A total of 19 799 applications were received under the Assistance Programme as at 28 February 2022. Of the total number of applications, 17 774 met the eligibility criteria, involving a total subsidy amount of about \$189.25 million (representing 79% of the total allocation from the

Community Care Fund (CCF) to beneficiary households), 126 failed to meet the eligibility criteria, while 484 were withdrawn by the applicants<sup>4</sup>.

9. The 17 774 eligible households mainly involved small households, with one-person households, two-person households and three-person households making up 24%, 30% and 25% of the total respectively. In terms of the districts of residence, 4 041 and 3 536 beneficiary households resided in Sham Shui Po and Yau Tsim Mong districts respectively, accounting for 43% of the total. The HKCSS partnered with a total of 17 agents in these two districts so as to expedite the vetting of applications. In addition, over 1 000 beneficiary households resided in each of the four districts of Tsuen Wan, Kwun Tong, Kowloon City and North District, making up a total of 5 562 households and representing 31% of the total.

10. As regards income eligibility, beneficiary households mainly met the criterion of being low-income households whose monthly household incomes fell below 75% of the median monthly domestic household income, with 7 230 applications (40.7%) in total. Households receiving assistance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme made up the second largest proportion of the beneficiary households, with 3 862 applications (21.7%) in total. Households receiving assistance under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme formed the third largest group, with 3 568 applications (20.1%) in total. The three groups altogether contributed to 82.5% of the total number of beneficiary households. The remaining 17.5% of beneficiary households was made up by households receiving assistance under the Working Family Allowance Scheme (2 166 applications), the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme (702 applications), the Old Age Living Allowance (222 applications), and those receiving Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme<sup>5</sup> (24 applications).

11. Most of the eligible beneficiary households came from households living in private residential units (96.2%), while those from industrial buildings and commercial buildings made up 1% and 0.5% respectively of the total. Furthermore, beneficiary households living in SDUs represented 83% of the total, while those living in squatters and cubicles

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<sup>4</sup> Of the 126 applications that failed to meet the eligibility criteria, 106 were not living in SDUs, 19 failed to meet the income requirements while 1 did not have at least one household member as a Hong Kong resident. As for the 484 applications that were withdrawn, no reason was provided by the applicant households.

<sup>5</sup> The Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme was abolished in June 2021.

accounted for 7.2% and 4.1% respectively<sup>6</sup>. All the 12 317 beneficiary households having completed the application procedures spent the subsidy on purchasing furniture and/or household goods, while 53 of them procured pest control services and 20 of them carried out minor repair works at the same time. Of the actual expenditure of subsidy, the expenditure on household goods contributed to 70.7%, and that on furniture made up 29.2%, while that on pest control services and minor repair works accounted for 0.09% and 0.02% respectively.

## **Expenditure of the Approved Budget**

12. A total of 17 774 applications were approved under the Assistance Programme as at 28 February 2022, involving a total subsidy amount of about \$189.25 million (comprising 79% of the total allocation from the CCF to beneficiary households)<sup>7</sup>. About \$14.91 million was disbursed to the agents as service fees (contributing to 41% of the total allocation from the CCF to the agents as service fees). The total amount spent on administrative fees was \$8.45 million (representing 3% of the total allocation for subsidised items from the CCF), of which the fees for SWD and the HKCSS accounted for \$1.46 million (0.5%) and \$6.99 million (2.5%) respectively.

13. For swift ordering and arrangement of the required subsidised goods and services for eligible households as well as timely disbursement of service fees to the agents, SWD will disburse an estimated amount to HKCSS ahead of each quarter for handling cases. It covers subsidy and the related service fees required for handling approved cases, cases pending approval, and new cases expected to receive during the quarter. SWD disbursed about \$234.71 million of subsidy (including the estimated amount of subsidy for beneficiary households and service fees for the agents) to the HKCSS as at 28 February 2022, accounting for 85% of the total allocation from the CCF for subsidised items. Upon the completion

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<sup>6</sup> The types of accommodation of beneficiary households having completed the application procedures include private housing (17 102 applications), industrial buildings (169 applications) and commercial buildings (86 applications), while those of the remaining 417 applications were not specified. As for the types involved, they included SDUs (14 747 applications), squatters (1 277 applications), cubicles (720 applications), rooftop structures (427 applications), bed spaces (238 applications), huts (85 applications), cocklofts (63 applications) and licensed structures for residential use (27 applications), etc.

<sup>7</sup> Among the applications, 12 317 were completed and disbursed with the full amount of subsidy, totalling about \$130.26 million (contributing to 54% of the total allocation from the CCF to beneficiary households). As for the remaining applications having met the eligible criteria, the agents are still following-up on the improvement items/services concerned.

of the Assistance Programme, the HKCSS shall refund to SWD the difference between the advanced payment of subsidy and the actual amount of subsidy required.

## **Effectiveness and conclusion**

14. The HKCSS conducted a survey of 9 890 cases and received a total of 9 882 questionnaires with a response rate of almost 100%. Over 97% of the respondents reported that the Assistance Programme was able to improve their living environment, while nearly 95% of the respondents revealed that the Assistance Programme helped them learn more about community services and resources. Over 99% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the services provided by the agents. In addition, some respondents mentioned that the choices of goods and services (e.g. items, reference prices and suppliers on the checklist, etc.) were relatively limited, and proposed using more flexible means, such as cash coupons, instead.

15. In conclusion, the Assistance Programme has been widely publicised with the support of the HKCSS and a network of 56 agents. The living environment of SDU households had been improved and their understanding towards community services and resources had been enhanced. The Assistance Programme successfully reached out to more than 19 000 SDU households<sup>8</sup> and many of them required continued follow-up on their welfare needs. The HKCSS considered that the two main objectives of the Assistance Programme had been achieved and would work with the agents to pool resources so as to provide enhanced services to those families with welfare needs.

16. Based on the application progress reported by the HKCSS, the total subsidy amount disbursed accounted for 79% of the total allocation from the CCF to beneficiary households. It is estimated that there will be sufficient resources for providing services to SDU households that submit applications within the application period (i.e. on or before 31 May ) until around the end of 2022<sup>9</sup>, and hence additional resources will not be required. In case of any additional needs from SDU households to improving their living environment upon the end of the Assistance Programme, the agents will mobilise resources of the community and/or private sector to render assistance. As such, the SWD accepted the

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<sup>8</sup> The Assistance Programme received a total of 19 799 applications as at 28 February 2022.

<sup>9</sup> It covers the six-month effective period for applying for subsidised items which may be extended by the agent at its discretion if necessary.

recommendation of the HKCSS that the Assistance Programme would stop accepting new applications by the end of May 2022 as scheduled. The HKCSS and the agents will continue to follow up on the applications received before the end of the Assistance Programme until the completion of services for SDU households.

Social Welfare Department  
May 2022

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**List of Agents**

<b><u>District</u></b>	<b><u>Name of Agent</u></b>
<b>Central &amp; Western &amp; Islands</b>	Caritas Community Centre – Caine Road
	Caritas Mok Cheung Sui Kun Community Centre
	The Hong Kong Catholic Marriage Advisory Council – Grace & Joy Integrated Family Service Centre
	Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong Reedfield Growth Centre
<b>Eastern</b>	New Home Association Hong Kong Island Service Centre – Jockey Club Hong Kong East Service Centre
	Methodist Epworth Village Community Centre, Social Welfare – Community Work Unit
	Project Space Limited
<b>Wan Chai</b>	St. James' Settlement
<b>Southern</b>	New Home Association Hong Kong Island Service Centre – Wah Fu Service Centre
	Aberdeen Kai-fong Welfare Association Social Service Community Centre
	Caritas Community Centre – Aberdeen
<b>Yau Tsim Mong</b>	Baptist Oi Kwun Social Service – Training and Employment Service (Mong Kok Centre)
	Concern For Grassroots' Livelihood Alliance Limited
	Jubilee Ministries Limited – Love Our Neighbor Ministry
	Mong Kok Kai Fong Association Limited Chan Hing Social Service Centre
	People Service Centre Limited – Food Friend Action Yau Tsim Mong Centre
	Service Development Section, Community Services Division, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals

<u>District</u>	<u>Name of Agent</u>
<b>Sham Shui Po</b>	J Life Foundation Limited
	New Home Association Kowloon West Service Centre
	People Service Center Limited
	Social Development Practice and Research Centre Limited – Family Mutual Hub
	Society for Community Organization – Care and Support Networking Team
	Society for Community Organization – SoCO New World
	St. Jame’s Settlement – Kowloon Kindness Centre
	The Society for Truth and Light
	The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong – Kowloon West Intergrated Service Centre for Social Rehabilitation & Community Support (KWISC)
	The Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong Full Grace Service Centre
Windshield Charitable Foundation Sham Shui Po Social Services	
<b>Kowloon City, Sai Kung &amp; Wong Tai Sin</b>	Caritas Community Centre – Kowloon
	Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service – Family Support Networking Team
	People Service Centre Limited – Food Friend Action Kowloon City Centre
	The ABM Hong Kong Swatow Baptist Church Community Service Association
<b>Kwun Tong</b>	New Home Association Kowloon East Service Centre
	Caritas Community Centre – Ngau Tau Kok
	Christian Family Service Centre – Support Service for Enhancing Mutual Help among Residents Living in Sub-divided Units in Kwun Tong
	Kwun Tong Methodist Social Service
<b>Tuen Mun</b>	The Church of United Brethren in Christ Tuen Mun Integrated Children and Youth Service Centre
	Yan Oi Tong Community Service Center
	Yan Oi Tong Tuen Tsz Wai San Hing Tsuen Ching Churn Wai Rural Community Service Centre

<b><u>District</u></b>	<b><u>Name of Agent</u></b>
<b>Yuen Long</b>	New Home Association Jockey Club Tin Shui Wai Service Centre
	Yuen Long Town Hall Community Centre
<b>Tsuen Wan &amp; Kwai Tsing</b>	Asbury Methodist Social Service – Help Community Service Centre
	Caritas Community Centre – Tsuen Wan
	H.K.S.K.H. Lady MacLehose Centre – Group & Community Work Unit
	The Urban Peacemaker – Peaceful City Team
	Windshield Charitable Foundation Kwai Chung Social Services
	New Home Association New Territories West Service Centre – Kwai Tsing
<b>Tai Po &amp; Sha Tin</b>	ELCHK Tai Wo Integrated Youth Service Centre
	Tai Po Baptist Church Social Service Centre
	Tai Po Baptist Church Social Service – TPBCSS Charis Parent Integrated Service Centre & Centre for Children with Special Educational Needs
	The Salvation Army Sam Mun Tsai Community Development Project
	Shatin Women's Association
	New Home Association Limited Sha Tin Service Centre
<b>North</b>	Assembly of God Grace Light Church – Social Services Department
	Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service – Shek Wu Lutheran Community Development Project
	New Home Association New Territories East Service Centre