

Press Releases

LCQ8: Housing needs of female victims of abuse

Following is a question by the Hon Lee Wing-tat and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, in the Legislative Council today (November 30):

Question:

Regarding the housing needs of female victims of abuse in the territory, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the numbers of female victims of abuse seeking assistance from the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in each of the past five years; among them, of the respective numbers of those originally residing in public rental housing (PRH) units and private flats, as well as the respective numbers of new arrival women or ethnic minority women;

(b) whether it knows, among the female victims of abuse in (a), how many of them petitioned for divorce each year, and among them, of the number of those who sought housing assistance from SWD, and whether SWD has provided them with information leaflets on the Conditional Tenancy (CT) Scheme or Compassionate Rehousing (CR) Scheme offered by the Housing Department (HD); how many women moved into PRH units under CR Scheme or CT Scheme upon the recommendation of SWD each year; how many women were not recommended by SWD and of the reasons for that; among the women recommended for CT Scheme, of the respective numbers of domestic violence victims who belonged to the categories of bringing along minor children, having no offspring and bringing along no dependant children when leaving their matrimonial home; among the women in the aforesaid categories, how many of them were offered CT and what the average waiting time was; how many of them were not offered CT and of the reasons for that (and provide the respective figures of new arrival women and ethnic minority women);

(c) among the cases in (b) in which CTs were offered, of the number of cases in which a CT was successfully converted into a normal tenancy each year to date; and the number of cases in which conversion into normal tenancy is successful because of recommendation by SWD on other compassionate rehousing grounds; how many applications for conversion into normal tenancy had been turned down and of the reasons for that (and provide the respective figures of new arrival women and ethnic minority women);

(d) of the criteria considered by SWD in deciding whether or not an application for CR or CT Scheme should be recommended, and the difference between the two sets of criteria (eg whether there are different requirements on years of residence in Hong Kong); of the guidelines or criteria adopted by SWD in considering social and medical factors; whether mental stress and the risk of being abused will be taken into account in considering the medical factors of the applicant; whether such guidelines and criteria will be reviewed;

(e) in considering an application for CR or CT Scheme, whether the living environment of the applicant at the time will be taken into account; if so, what objective criteria have to be met to satisfy the conditions of "having genuine housing needs" and "in grave need of assistance" for recommendation for CR or CT, whether the applicants have to sleep on the street to become eligible; whether SWD will review those criteria;

(f) in providing assistance to female victims of abuse seeking

help, of the time generally taken by SWD to decide if their applications for CR or CT should be recommended to HD; and how it will notify help-seekers of its decision on making recommendation or otherwise and the justifications, as well as the decision of HD and the justifications; and

(g) of the respective quotas of PRH units for CR and CT Schemes in each of the past five years, and the allocation of such quotas; among them, of the respective numbers allocated to female victims of abuse, elderly persons, persons with disabilities and other persons; and whether such quotas will be reviewed?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to Hon Lee Wing-tat's question is as follows:

(a) The numbers of new spouse/cohabitant battering cases handled by the Family and Child Protective Services Units of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in the past five years are set out below:

Year	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
No. of cases	2 578	2 555	2 447	2 279	2 340

SWD does not have any statistical breakdown on the gender, living conditions, years of residence in Hong Kong and ethnicity of the abused persons of the cases concerned.

(b) Compassionate Rehousing (CR) is a form of housing assistance which aims at providing assistance for individuals and families who have genuine and imminent long-term housing needs which, however, cannot be resolved by themselves. Under CR, the Conditional Tenancy (CT) Scheme provides housing assistance to those who are assuming custody of children and in need of accommodation while awaiting the court decision on their divorce applications. The CT Scheme also covers victims of domestic violence who do not assume custody of children but have petitioned for divorce.

SWD does not have any breakdown on the marital status and housing assistance application for the spouse/cohabitant battering cases listed in (a) above. In handling cases involving domestic violence, SWD will, having regard to the circumstances of individual cases, provide the victims in need with information on housing assistance, including leaflets on CR (with information of CT included). The leaflets are also made available at SWD service units and relevant non-governmental organisations for distribution to those in need. Relevant information can also be found in SWD's website at www.swd.gov.hk.

The Administration does not have the breakdown as requested in the question. Overall speaking, the numbers of CR cases (including CT cases) recommended by SWD and received by the Housing Department (HD) in the past five years are set out below:

Year	Number of CR cases (including CT cases shown in brackets)
2006-07	1 851 (510)
2007-08	1 857 (428)
2008-09	2 168 (449)
2009-10	2 727 (501)
2010-11	2 738 (479)

Generally speaking, in view of the urgent nature of CT applications involving victims of domestic violence as recommended by SWD, HD could complete the vetting within seven working days,

followed by prompt arrangement of flat allocation.

The numbers of CR (including CT) cases not recommended by SWD in the past five years are set out below:

Year	Number of CR cases not recommended by SWD (including CT cases shown in brackets)
2006-07	55 (2)
2007-08	43 (1)
2008-09	25 (1)
2009-10	36 (4)
2010-11	54 (5)

The reasons for not recommending CT by SWD included failure of the applicants to take any formal action to cancel their ownership of private properties or subsidised home ownership flats; insufficient medical or social grounds to support the applications; applicants having sufficient financial means to meet their housing needs; and the marital situation of the applicants or the custody arrangements of the children could not be verified, etc.

(c) and (g) As HD does not have the required breakdown in part (b) of the question, HD cannot provide the required breakdown on case numbers in parts (c) and (g) of the question.

(d) and (e) Generally speaking, CR (including CT) applicants have to meet the eligibility criteria applicable to the Waiting List for public rental housing, including meeting the Comprehensive Means Test and the Domestic Property Test, as well as compliance with the residence rule. However, SWD may also exercise discretion based on the merits of individual cases. As mentioned in part (a) of the reply, the targets of the CT Scheme under CR include those who are involved in domestic violence cases and in need of accommodation while awaiting the court's decision on their divorce applications. In deciding whether there are sufficient grounds for making CR (including CT) recommendation, social workers will make professional assessment on the individual circumstances of each case, including consideration on the medical grounds (eg, physical and mental conditions of the applicants and related supporting documentary proofs) and social grounds (eg, living and family conditions of the applicants and the resources available), etc. SWD will review the operation of CR (including CT) from time to time.

(f) Applications for CR (including CT) are processed promptly by social workers upon receipt. Under normal circumstances, if sufficient information and supporting documents are in place, SWD's recommendation will be made in six weeks for consideration by HD. The responsible social worker will inform the applicant of SWD's recommendation in writing. Nevertheless, the processing time of individual applications may vary according to the circumstances of each case. As for cases not recommended by SWD, the responsible social worker will inform the applicant of the decision as well as the reasons for not granting recommendation.

Upon receipt of the recommendation from SWD, HD will conduct eligibility checking and vetting of these cases. After the completion of these procedures, eligible applicants will be informed by HD of the allocation arrangements.

In addition, the responsible social workers will arrange abused women with urgent accommodation needs to be admitted to refuge centres for women or assist them in securing private rental housing.

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