

Exemption of waiver fee, rent and associated costs for land applications related to provision of transitional housing

The Government announced today (April 18) that the Chief Executive (CE) in Council had approved the exemption of waiver fee, rent and associated costs for land applications related to the provision of transitional housing, with a view to facilitating more community initiated transitional housing projects to alleviate the hardship faced by families awaiting public rental housing or living in inadequate housing.

According to prevailing policy, if non-profit-making organisations or social enterprises (collectively termed as NGOs) plan to utilise private non-residential sites or buildings for provision of transitional housing, the owners should submit waiver applications to the Lands Department for a temporary permit to use the sites or buildings for residential purposes and pay the waiver fees and associated costs if residential use is not permitted in the leases. Additionally, if the NGOs plan to use vacant government sites or premises for provision of transitional housing, they also need to apply to the Lands Department for Short Term Tenancy and pay the rents and associated costs. A spokesman of Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) said that the facilitating measure would lessen the financial burden of NGOs.

The spokesman pointed out that if NGOs plan to provide transitional housing projects, they are required to seek policy support from the THB, and sign an agreement with the Bureau on operational details, including rental arrangement, management and service responsibilities, as well as the exit arrangement at the end of the project. This is a prerequisite for the Lands Department to consider exempting the fees and associated costs and to ensure that the rent is affordable to tenants and the project is self-financing as far as possible.

So far, the transitional housing projects initiated by the community have provided over 600 units for needy families. Most of the units comply with the permitted land use and no application to the Lands Department is required. Subsequent to the CE's announcement in June 2018 on transitional housing, the Government has endeavoured to facilitate NGOs to utilise vacant government sites and buildings, and the conversion of private non-residential sites and buildings, to take forward more transitional housing projects.

Since late 2018, the Government has taken various measures to facilitate the launching of transitional housing projects. These include (i) the pragmatic approach adopted by the Buildings Department in granting modification or exemption under the Buildings Ordinance for submissions in old domestic buildings and wholesale-converted Industrial Buildings (IBs)

with genuine planning and design constraints; (ii) the Town Planning Board's agreement to treat transitional housing projects in permanent buildings for five years or less, including wholesale-converted IBs in designated zones in the urban and new town areas, as a temporary use always permitted under the relevant Outline Zoning Plans; and (iii) the exemption of waiver fees for not-for-profit transitional housing projects in wholesale-converted IBs. In addition, the Financial Secretary also announced on February 27 this year that another \$2 billion would be set aside to support transitional housing projects.