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Agencies press for aid teams

By Denise Wong

SIX community development teams, costing a total of \$6.36 million, could help Hongkong cope with political and social changes in the run-up to 1997, according to voluntary welfare agencies.

The Hongkong Council of Social Service has recommended the Government set up the six teams in 1991/92 as an experimental project, subject to review after a year.

Lai Sau-ling, chairman of the council's community development division, said the teams would enable in-depth contact, particularly in old private housing areas and new towns.

"There is an obvious need for rebuilding community cohesion among the residents of new towns who move in from various districts," Miss Lai said.

"Many old private housing estates are also deprived of community development service."

Grace Leung, the council's division officer, said a lack of manpower and working scope were holding back development workers running in-depth services.

Miss Lai said the six proposed teams could alleviate the present inadequate coverage of services, as each team would have more manpower but would be serving smaller numbers of people compared with a community centre.

The council suggested each team with four trained social workers could serve a population of 40,000 to 60,000.

A community centre is now set to serve 80,000 to 120,000 people.

The council also wants the Government to spell out a long-term policy on community development services and voluntary agencies' roles.

At present, the development services are under the Secretary for Home Affairs at policy-making level. But at operational level, voluntary agencies are dealing with the Social Welfare Department.

"In most of our past experience, dealing with two bosses has meant we have had to cross an additional hurdle when wanting to start a new project or to get money," Miss Lai said.