

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1074/20-21
(These meeting notes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Notes of informal meeting for policy briefing by videoconferencing
held on Wednesday, 30 December 2020, at 10:30 am**

Members participating : Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon YIU Si-wing, BBS (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, SBS, MH, JP
Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH
Hon Holden CHOW Ho-ding
Hon Wilson OR Chong-shing, MH
Dr Hon Pierre CHAN
Hon LUK Chung-hung, JP
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP

Public Officers attending : Dr LAW Chi-kwong, GBS, JP
Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Ms CHANG King-yiu, JP
Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr HO Kai-ming, JP
Under Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr David LEUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare
(Welfare)1
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr Johann WONG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare
(Welfare) 2
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Ms Manda CHAN, JP
Commissioner for Rehabilitation
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr LAM Ka-tai, JP
Acting Director of Social Welfare
Social Welfare Department

Mr KOK Che-leung
Deputy Director of Social Welfare
(Administration)
Social Welfare Department

Mr Donald NG, JP
Head, Working Family and Student Financial
Assistance Agency

Mr Jack CHAN, JP
Under Secretary for Home Affairs
Home Affairs Bureau

Ms Carmen KONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs
(Civic Affairs) 2
Home Affairs Bureau

Miss Vinci CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs
(Civic Affairs) 3
Home Affairs Bureau

Clerk in attendance : Miss Lilian MOK
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Ms Catherina YU
Senior Council Secretary (2) 4

Mr Roger CHUNG
Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Alison HUI
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

Action

Briefing by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare and the Secretary for Home Affairs on the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)504/20-21(03) and (04), The Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement]

(Index of proceedings of the meeting is attached at the **Appendix**.)

The Chairman reminded members that as this meeting was an informal meeting, the Rules of Procedure of the Legislative Council would not apply and the privileges and immunity provided by the Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance (Cap. 382) would not be available to the participants.

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") and Under Secretary for Home Affairs ("USHA") briefed members respectively on the major initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau ("LWB") and the Home Affairs Bureau ("HAB") in the 2020 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement as set out in the Administration's papers.

Services provided by the Community Geriatric Assessment Team of the Hospital Authority

3. Noting with concern that the multi-disciplinary services and rehabilitation programmes provided by the Community Geriatric Assessment Team ("CGAT") of the Hospital Authority ("HA") to residents of residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs") continued to be inadequate, members called on the Administration to further increase the funding for CGAT with the aim of achieving "zero-waiting time" within six months for RCHE residents to receive regular outreach medical and after-care services.

4. The Administration responded that due to resource constraint, residents of some private RCHEs might have experienced a longer waiting time for CGAT's services. LWB would explore ways with the Food and Health Bureau and HA to shorten the waiting time.

Infection control measures for residential care homes

5. In response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 ("COVID-19") pandemic, members noted that the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") had launched a Time-limited Programme on Enhancing Infection Control and Ventilation of Residential Care Homes to provide a special subsidy for non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") operating subvented or contract residential care homes ("RCHs") to conduct on-site ventilation assessments to minimize the risks of virus spreading. They enquired whether a similar subsidy scheme would be introduced to help these NGOs conduct inspection of the sewage systems in their RCHs in order to enhance infection control.

6. The Administration responded that based on the professional advice of the Expert Advisory Group appointed by the Chief Executive, RCHs might be exposed to higher risks of virus transmission caused by their ageing and poor ventilation systems. SWD had therefore accorded priority to assisting NGOs in conducting on-site assessment of their ventilation systems and carrying out the necessary enhancement works.

7. Members suggested that the Administration should consider requiring staff of RCHs to undergo compulsory COVID-19 testing ("compulsory testing") every 14 days and making it part of the on-going measures to control infection transmission. RCHE residents should also undergo COVID-19 testing when they were discharged from the hospital.

8. The Administration advised that in accordance with the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J), persons who were employed by and on duty at RCHs, nursing homes and day service units attached to the premises of RCHs were required to undergo compulsory testing during the period specified in respective compulsory testing notices issued by the Secretary for Food and Health. At present, staff members of the aforementioned premises were required to undergo compulsory testing once every 10 days and only those having a valid negative test result would be allowed to go back to work. The Administration would consider shortening the interval of testing to, say, seven days as and when necessary.

Measures to address manpower shortage of the care sector

9. To tackle the problem of manpower shortage in the care sector, members urged the Administration to enhance the "First-Hire-Then-Train" Scheme under the Employees Retraining Board ("ERB") and increase the training places of the Navigation Scheme for Young Persons in Care Services ("the Navigation Scheme") to encourage young people to join the elderly and rehabilitation care services.

10. The Administration responded that it would consider adjusting the training and working hour arrangements under the "First-Hire-Then-Train" Scheme to attract more job seekers to join the sector. Moreover, various enhancement measures for the Navigation Scheme, including reducing the working hours per week for trainees and raising their salaries and training subsidies, had been rolled out in 2020-2021 to attract more young people to develop their career in the social welfare care sector. The Administration would further discuss with RCHE operators about the working hour arrangements for care workers.

One-off ex-gratia cash allowance for local citizens confirmed infected with the Coronavirus Disease 2019

11. Referring to the one-off ex-gratia cash allowance provided by the Administration to Hong Kong residents who were currently employed but not entitled to paid sick leave or were self-employed and confirmed infected with COVID-19 locally on or after 22 November 2020, members sought information on the numbers of applications received and approved as well as the total amount of cash allowance granted so far. The Administration advised that as at 29 December 2020, 332 applications had been received. Of the 232 cases processed, 99 were approved while one was rejected as the applicant was not a Hong Kong resident.

Temporary cold shelters operated by the Home Affairs Department

12. Members opined that temporary cold shelters operated by the Home Affairs Department ("HAD") should be open for people taking refuge during cold spells and effective infection control measures should be implemented in the shelters to contain the spread of COVID-19 in the community. The Administration assured members that HAD would open 18 temporary cold shelters for people in need of the service after the issue of cold weather warning by the Hong Kong Observatory and infection control measures would be adopted in these shelters.

"iAM Smart" mobile app

13. Members considered that the Administration should step up the promotion of "iAM Smart" mobile app to facilitate digital transformation of the entire community. The Administration advised that "iAM Smart" mobile app was a one-stop personalized digital services platform for the public to access various on-line services of the Government and public utilities. It was expected that the number of public services accessible through the platform would progressively increase and dedicated effort would be made to assist the public, in particular the elderly, in downloading and registering on the mobile app.

Strengthening support for the unemployed and grass-root families

14. Noting that the increasing unemployment rate since the outbreak of COVID-19 had not brought about a noticeable increase in the number of successful applications for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA"), members expressed grave concern that the stringent criteria of CSSA might have rendered many people in need not eligible for the assistance. They enquired about the reasons for rejecting CSSA applications and whether the Administration would consider relaxing the eligibility criteria for CSSA applications.

15. The Administration responded that the unemployment rate for the quarter September-November 2020 had showed some marginal improvement and the number of CSSA unemployment applications remained steady. To meet the unprecedented COVID-19 challenge, the "Special Scheme of Assistance to the Unemployed" ("Special Assistance Scheme") under the CSSA Scheme was launched on 1 June 2020 for one year to temporarily relax the asset limits for able-bodied persons to give targeted support for the unemployed and their families. Under the Special Assistance Scheme, a time-limited arrangement was implemented during the six-month period from 1 April to 30 September 2021 to disregard the cash value of insurance policies of able-bodied CSSA applicants as assets in a grace period of one year. It was projected that the Special Assistance Scheme would reach thousands of beneficiaries facing financial difficulties. The Administration would keep in view the trend of unemployed CSSA applications and provide timely assistance to those in need.

16. Members called on the Administration to consider introducing similar arrangements to the recurrent CSSA Scheme to disregard the cash value of insurance policies under applicants' names in the calculation of the total value of assets. The Administration responded that unlike the Special Assistance Scheme which was a transitional arrangement, the CSSA Scheme served as a social security safety net for families or individuals who could not support

themselves financially. CSSA recipients who were currently unemployed were encouraged to look for jobs and leave the safety net as early as possible. The Labour Department and ERB had been offering employment services and training courses to assist the unemployed in re-entering the employment market.

17. On the poverty alleviation front, members were of the view that the Commission on Poverty should strengthen cross-sector collaboration in combating poverty, upgrade the overall economic structure of Hong Kong and enhance support for the grass-roots and underprivileged communities ranging from employment, training, education to daily living. The Administration should also look into other effective means, say, establishing an unemployment assistance fund, further relaxing the eligibility criteria for CSSA and allowing CSSA applications on individual basis, to help various needy groups.

18. The Administration responded that the COVID-19 pandemic caused a profound impact on Hong Kong's economy and the grass-roots had been comparatively hard hit. Relevant policy bureaux/departments had been formulating policies and measures to alleviate poverty and relieve people's burden. Under the CSSA Scheme, an applicant living with any other household members had to submit his/her application on a household basis. The requirement was premised on the principle that families were the core units of society and family members should render assistance and support each other. Allowing CSSA applications on individual basis might undermine the mutual help spirit among family members and have a profound impact on the structures and functions of families. As such, the Administration should be prudent in taking forward any change to the CSSA Scheme and thorough discussion on the issue was required.

Admin 19. To help grassroots families, members noted that the Transport and Housing Bureau ("THB") would provide a cash allowance under the new Cash Allowance Trial Scheme ("the Trial Scheme") to families neither living in public housing nor receiving CSSA while waiting for public rental housing ("PRH") for more than three years without a first flat offer. They requested for the following information on the Trial Scheme:

- (a) the number of eligible low-income households who had been waiting for PRH allocation for three years or more;
- (b) the implementation details including timetable, progress and trial period, etc.; and
- (c) the estimated number of applications annually.

(Post-meeting note: THB's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)705/20-21(01) on 25 January 2021.)

20. In response to members' enquiries about raising the income limits for other eligible non-PRH households under the Working Family Allowance Scheme, the Administration explained that as the initiative was to complement the Trial Scheme, LWB would work with THB on the arrangements having regard to the implementation of the Trial Scheme.

21. As regards members' concerns about the adequacy of the funding allocation of \$415 million per annum for the Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects which would be made permanent from August 2021 to help individuals and families to cope with their daily food expenditure, the Administration affirmed that the funding earmarked should be adequate.

22. Members enquired whether any assistance programmes would be launched under the Community Care Fund ("CCF") to help those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic but not supported by the CSSA Scheme. The Administration responded that a series of relief measures had been launched under the Anti-epidemic Fund to help various sectors tide over the difficult times and CCF had no plan to launch any assistance programmes in the interim.

23. In anticipation that the COVID-19 pandemic might have long-term negative effects on the economy and people's livelihood, members expressed concern about the assistance programmes in the pipeline for the needy groups and whether the Administration had assessed the impact of the spending on various relief measures on public finance. They further enquired about the enhancements to the Old Age Living Allowance ("OALA") Scheme including combining the Normal OALA (currently at \$2,770 per month) and the Higher OALA (currently at \$3,715 per month) and adopting the monthly allowance at the Higher OALA rate.

24. The Administration responded that the expenditure projections for the measures to boost the economy and relieve people's hardship amid the COVID-19 pandemic would be set out in the 2021-2022 Budget. A significant increase in the overall expenditure on CSSA was not anticipated as the increase in the expenditure on CSSA unemployment cases might be offset by a decrease in the number of CSSA applications under other categories. Meanwhile, in light of the financial implications of the OALA enhancements, the timing of implementing this measure would be reassessed.

Pilot Scheme on Social Work Services for Pre-primary Institutions

25. Members sought information on the amount of allocation for the Pilot Scheme on Social Work Services for Pre-primary Institutions ("the Pilot Scheme") and the relevant evaluation study on the current mode of service operation as well as the service performance and service outputs/outcomes of the Pilot Scheme.

26. The Administration responded that for early identification of and providing assistance to pre-primary children and their families with welfare needs, the Government had launched a three-year Pilot Scheme in three phases since the 2018-2019 school year. An assessment study for the pilot scheme was being conducted to evaluate the way forward of the service.

Support for social enterprises

27. Members opined that the Administration should encourage and facilitate the establishment of more social enterprises ("SEs") and review from time to time its support for SEs such as provision of financial assistance. They enquired about the overall implementation and effectiveness of the Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme ("the ESR Programme").

28. The Administration responded that since the launch of the ESR Programme in 2006, it had approved grants of around \$330 million for 238 SE projects. Each approved project would be funded up to three years at a maximum amount of \$3 million for initial capital expenditure or operating expenses. Over 6 000 persons had been employed by the funded SEs and about 80% of them were socially disadvantaged. The Administration further advised that around 80% of the funded SEs remained in operation after the funding period had come to an end and around 60% of them had reached a budget breakeven or made a profit.

Work of the Family Council

29. Members enquired how the Family Council would assist families affected by the social incidents in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic in maintaining mental wellness and harmonious relationships amongst their members and whether HAB would make use of the additional resources of \$300 million allocated to the Beat Drugs Fund to better promote and protect the mental health of the affected families.

30. The Administration responded that the Family Council had been serving as a cross-sector and cross-bureau platform for examining family-related

policies and promoting a culture of loving families in the community. The Family Council had been providing its advice and recommendations on policies or measures with family implications. In June 2020, the Family Council launched the Thematic Sponsorship Scheme to Support Family-related Initiatives to provide one-off sponsorship in the form of a matching fund to support non-profit making and worthwhile family-related initiatives under three specific themes. It also conducted a meeting on 12 September 2019 to discuss the impact of the social incidents on families and received a briefing by relevant government bureaux/departments on their support for affected families.

31. In response to members' further enquiries about the implementation of family-friendly employment policies and practices such as flexible working hours, the Administration advised that the Family Council had also held the "Family-Friendly Employers Award Scheme" ("the Award Scheme") to give recognition to organizations which attached importance to family-friendly spirit. The fourth edition of the Award Scheme received a record-high number of enrollments with 3 534 organizations involving 67 000 employees, representing a 30% increase compared with the third edition. Employees' feedback on the family-friendly employment policies and practices of their companies was one of the assessment criteria.

Support for ethnic minorities

32. Members expressed concern that people from ethnic minorities ("EMs") residing in Hong Kong might not be aware of the support services provided by the Administration due to language barriers. They urged the Administration to enhance the dissemination of information on infection control to EMs and enhance their awareness about COVID-19. Members also considered that the Administration should give allowance to EMs who were CSSA applicants/recipients as they might not be able to meet the residence requirements or reside in Hong Kong while receiving CSSA owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

33. The Administration responded that information on prevention and control of COVID-19 produced in various EM languages had been disseminated to EMs in a timely manner and it would consider exercising discretion to disregard the absences of CSSA applicants/recipients from Hong Kong owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. SWD had also commissioned three NGOs to set up three outreaching teams since March 2020 to proactively reach out to EMs and connect those in need with mainstream welfare services.

34. The meeting ended at 12:00 noon.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
7 May 2021

Appendix

Proceedings of the informal meeting for policy briefing by videoconferencing of the Panel on Welfare Services on Wednesday, 30 December 2020, at 10:30 am

Time Marker	Speaker	Subject(s)	Action Required
Briefing by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare and the Secretary for Home Affairs on the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address			
000022 – 000257	Chairman	Meeting arrangements	
000258 – 001540	Chairman Administration	Briefing by the Administration	
001541 – 002336	Chairman Mr Michael TIEN Administration	Services provided by the Community Geriatric Assessment Team ("CGAT") of the Hospital Authority ("HA") Infection control measures for residential care homes ("RCHs") One-off ex-gratia cash allowance for local citizens confirmed infected with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 ("COVID-19")	
002337 – 003816	Chairman Mr Vincent CHENG Deputy Chairman Administration	Temporary cold shelters operated by the Home Affairs Department Promoting the mobile app "iAM Smart" Strengthening support for the unemployed and grass-root families Infection control measures for RCHs Pilot Scheme on Social Work Services for Pre-primary Institutions	
003817 – 010046	Chairman Mr LUK Chung-hung Mr POON Siu-ping Mr KWOK Wai-keung Administration	Strengthening support for the unemployed and grass-root families Measures to address manpower shortage of the care sector	
010047– 010510	Chairman Administration	Support for social enterprises	

Time Marker	Speaker	Subject(s)	Action Required
010511– 011041	Chairman Mr Michael TIEN Administration	Services provided by CGAT of HA Measures to address manpower shortage of the care sector	
011042 – 011903	Chairman Mr Vincent CHENG Administration	Work of the Family Council Support for the ethnic minorities	
011904 – 012348	Chairman Mr LUK Chung-hung Administration	Measures to address manpower shortage of the care sector	
012349 – 013021	Chairman Mr Holden CHOW Administration	Work of the Family Council	
013022 – 013135	Chairman Administration	One-off ex-gratia cash allowance for local citizens confirmed infected with COVID-19 Closing remarks	