

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1150/20-21
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of meeting by videoconferencing
on Monday, 8 February 2021, at 10:45 am**

Members present : Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon YIU Si-wing, BBS (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Starry LEE Wai-king, SBS, JP
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 LAU Kwok-fan, MH
Dr Hon CHENG Chung-tai
Hon Vincent CHENG Wing-shun, MH, JP

Public Officers attending : Items III and IV

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

Item III

Mr TAN Tick-yee
Acting Deputy Director (Services) / Assistant Director
of Social Welfare (Elderly)
Social Welfare Department

Miss Hannah YIP Hau-yu
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Rehabilitation
and Medical Social Services)
Social Welfare Department

Mrs Judy SHEK CHAN Lai-wah
Chief Social Work Officer (Licensing and Regulation) 3
Social Welfare Department

Item IV

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

Item V

Dr LAW Chi-kwong, GBS, JP
Secretary for Labour and Welfare

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

Ms PANG Kit-ling
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and
Child Welfare)
Social Welfare Department

**Clerk in
attendance** : Ms Maisie LAM
Chief Council Secretary (2) 3

**Staff in
attendance** : Ms Catherina YU
Senior Council Secretary (2) 3

Mr Roger CHUNG
Council Secretary (2) 3

Miss Alison HUI
Legislative Assistant (2) 3

I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

[LC Paper No. CB(2)651/20-21(01)]

Members noted that the Final Report on Comprehensive Review of the Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities provided by the Administration had been issued since the last meeting.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)736/20-21(01) and (02)]

2. The Chairman informed members that following her invitation of views on the proposed amendments to the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion, the list had been updated with the item "Charitable fund-raising activities" retained in the list as per the suggestion of the Deputy Chairman and six items deleted from the list as originally proposed.

3. Members agreed to discuss the item on "Long-term planning for provision of child care services" at the next regular meeting of the Panel scheduled for 8 March 2021 at 10:45 am.

(Post-meeting note: With the concurrence of the Chairman and the Administration, a new discussion item on "Support for victims of domestic violence and sexual violence" has been added to the agenda for the above meeting.)

III. Welfare services under the coronavirus disease 2019 epidemic

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)736/20-21(03), CB(2)736/20-21(04) and CB(2)762/20-21(01)]

4. At the invitation of the Chairman, Under Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("USLW") briefed members on the social welfare support provided to the elderly, persons with disabilities, children and the grass-roots, as well as relevant anti-epidemic measures adopted by the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") during the coronavirus disease 2019 ("COVID-19") epidemic, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)736/20-21(03)).

5. Members noted the updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council ("LegCo") Secretariat (LC Paper No. CB(2)736/20-21(04)) and the submission from 照顧照顧者平台

(LC Paper No. CB(2)762/20-21(01)) on the subject under discussion.

Provision of welfare services under the epidemic

6. Noting that some welfare service units had to scale down, suspend or terminate some services due to the COVID-19 epidemic, Mr POON Siu-ping enquired about the number of service users affected by the above arrangement. Mr Holden CHOW and Mr LUK Chung-hung were concerned about the scale of reduction in home-based community care services ("home-based CCS") during the epidemic. Expressing concern that the COVID-19 epidemic might protract, Mr Wilson OR asked whether the Administration had any plans to resume the capacity of service centres for the elderly progressively.

7. Acting Deputy Director (Services)/Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly) ("Atg DDSW(S)/AD(E)") advised that the provision of essential services had continued with some adjustments to the mode and frequency of services. A case in point was that day care centres for the elderly and persons with disabilities had scaled down their capacity by 50% in order to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 in the community. He assured members that service needs of service users could still be met despite these adjustments. SWD would keep in view the development of the epidemic and consider adjusting the service scale in a prudent manner with a view to striking a balance between prevention of the disease and addressing the service needs. Mr LUK Chung-hung was of the view that the Administration should take the opportunity to create more jobs for the provision of home-based CCS for the elderly and persons with disabilities in order to shorten the waiting time for these services on the one hand, and on the other hand increase employment opportunities.

8. Holding the view that the continued provision of home-based physiotherapy and cleaning services during the epidemic was essential for frail singleton elderly persons and elderly couples living alone, the Deputy Chairman was concerned about whether the Guidelines for Home-based Services for the Prevention of COVID-19 issued by the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health had restricted welfare service units to provide these services. Atg DDSW(S)/AD(E) advised that the Guidelines did not restrict the provision of home-based CCS but sought to set out the precautionary measures that service providers should take in order to protect themselves and service users from contracting COVID-19. Essential home-based CCS for the elderly which included delivery of meals, escort, nursing, administration of medicine, assistance with personal hygiene and procurement of necessities had continued during the epidemic.

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The Chairman remarked that the Administration should actively consider increasing the volume of home-based CCS or resuming such services, physiotherapy service in particular, for the elderly after the epidemic was mitigated. Mr Holden CHOW called on the Administration to continue with the provision of home cleaning and physiotherapy services during the epidemic so as to ease the anxiety of those elderly persons in need of these services.

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9. At the request of the Chairman, Mr Holden CHOW and Mr LUK Chung-hung, Atg DDSW(S)/AD(E) undertook to explore if there were available statistics on (a) the respective number of staff employed by welfare service units for providing home-based CCS for the elderly and persons with disabilities in 2019 and in 2020 (i.e. under the COVID-19 epidemic); and (b) the respective volume of various home-based CCS provided by welfare service units in 2019 and in 2020, with a breakdown by the service type. Dr CHENG Chung-tai remarked that the Panel had once discussed the provision of welfare services under the COVID-19 at its meeting on 9 March 2020. The Administration should have the relevant statistics on hand. The Chairman opined that the Administration should endeavour to provide the requisite information.

10. Given that no visiting at residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs") was allowed during the epidemic unless on compassionate grounds, the Deputy Chairman and Mr Wilson OR urged welfare service units and social workers to maintain frequent contact with elderly service users to understand their needs. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung considered that RCHEs should strengthen their communication with family members of the residents and brief them on the residents' conditions. The Chairman said that at the Panel meeting on 11 January 2021, members had urged the Administration to implement measures to facilitate visiting of RCHE residents by family members during the epidemic. She enquired about the progress in this regard. USLW assured members that welfare service units had maintained contact with and provided support to service users during the epidemic. Through the provision under the Anti-epidemic Fund, SWD had created 1 000 time-limited posts for elderly and rehabilitation service units subsidized by SWD to recruit young persons to, amongst others, assist them in implementing tele-practice as a supplement to the conventional mode of service delivery.

11. Pointing out that many welfare service users relied on the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") for a living, the Deputy Chairman considered that the Administration should provide them with special subsidies to supplement their expenses on procurement of

personal protective equipment (e.g. disposable face masks) and sanitizing items. USLW advised that the Administration had distributed two rounds of CuMask+™ to all holders of a valid Hong Kong Identity Card who had opted to receive CuMask+™ and delivered a pack of 10 disposable face masks to each residential household in 2020. The Administration would consider whether more face masks could be provided for persons in need.

Financial relief for affected welfare service units

12. Mr POON Siu-ping enquired whether the Administration would provide the service units concerned with financial relief to help them tide over the financial difficulties arising from reduction in the service volume, if any. Pointing out that many child care centres and service units providing day care services under the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly ("the Pilot Scheme") were in financial hardship due to service suspension during the epidemic, Dr CHENG Chung-tai was concerned that the suspension of services in these service units and centres would protract.

13. Atg DDSW(S)/AD(E) advised that since the majority of the affected services were subvented services, the reduction in the service volume had little impact on the operation of the service units concerned. It should also be noted that during service suspension period, child care centres had continued providing services to parents with special needs upon request. While day care services had been suspended at the early stage of the epidemic, many services under the Pilot Scheme had resumed gradually with the implementation of various anti-epidemic measures. Under the Anti-epidemic Fund, the Administration had provided three rounds of special grant for all child care centres and relief grants for interest class instructors who lost most of their income owing to the suspension of services of subvented welfare service units.

Priority participation in the vaccination programme

14. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung noted that a first batch of 10 RCHEs had participated in the COVID-19 outreach vaccination arrangement. He called on the Administration to enhance the transparency of the outreach vaccination arrangement and provide more information on the vaccine to be administered to ease the worries of family members of the RCHE residents concerned. Atg DDSW(S)/AD(E) advised that SWD was working with relevant policy bureaux and soliciting views of the RCHE sector on the arrangement. The Administration would inform family members of RCHE residents of the implementation details when finalized.

The Chairman called on the Administration to accord priority for COVID-19 vaccination to workers providing home-based CCS to facilitate earlier resumption of the service. USLW undertook to relay the view to the Civil Service Bureau and the Food and Health Bureau which were coordinating the vaccination programme.

Testing for staff and residents of welfare service units

15. Mr POON Siu-ping noted that staff of residential care homes ("RCHs"), nursing homes and day service units attached to the premises of RCHs were required under the compulsory testing notices issued by the Secretary for Food and Health to undergo rounds of compulsory testing. For those RCHs which chose to arrange a healthcare professional or a trained personnel to collect the specimens from their staff members for testing by government-recognized laboratories, SWD would provide a special subsidy capped at \$240 per test for the RCHs concerned on reimbursement basis. He enquired about the number of RCH staff who had undergone compulsory testing and the total amount of subsidy disbursed so far. USLW advised that around 10 000 RCH staff had undergone testing under the arrangement of RCH operators, whereas some 30 000 RCH staff had undergone the test in the community testing centres in each of the recent rounds of testing.

16. Mr LUK Chung-hung held the view that all staff of welfare service units, particularly the subvented ones, should undergo compulsory testing on a regular basis in order to set the service users' mind at rest. The Administration should also facilitate service users to undergo compulsory testing. USLW explained that since RCH staff needed to provide bathing and meal feeding services which involved close contact with residents, they were required to undergo compulsory testing. The Administration would assess the need for staff of other welfare service units to undergo compulsory testing taking into account factors, e.g. whether close contact with service users was required in service delivery. He further said that with the strengthening of the testing capacity in recent months, voluntary testing had been arranged for certain RCH residents. .

17. Noting that SWD had also provided free-of-charge voluntary testing service for staff of welfare service units with a higher risk, Mr LUK Chung-hung enquired about the percentage of staff of subvented welfare service units taking voluntary testing and the reasons why some staff of these service units did not take the test. USLW said that the Administration did not have the requisite information.

18. Dr CHENG Chung-tai was of the view that the Administration should provide concrete advice on the actions RCHs should take when there were COVID-19 confirmed cases involving RCH staff. USLW advised that guidelines for handling confirmed cases in RCHs had been issued to all RCHs on 30 October 2020. At present, RCH staff were required to undergo regular compulsory testing once every 10 days. The Administration would consider additional measures, if necessary, to further strengthen the protection of residents and staff of RCHs.

Ex-gratia cash allowance for locally confirmed cases

19. Mr Wilson OR noted that as at 24 January 2021, SWD had only completed processing 348 out of 625 applications for the one-off ex-gratia cash allowance for eligible Hong Kong residents who had contracted COVID-19 locally on or after 22 November 2020. He called on the Administration to speed up the processing of the applications. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Rehabilitation and Medical Social Services) responded that given the rise in the number of locally confirmed cases, there was a noticeable increase in the number of applications for the ex-gratia cash allowance since January 2021. As at 4 February 2021, a total of 778 applications were received by SWD and 412 of them were made in January 2021. SWD had deployed extra manpower to expedite the processing of applications. As of the date of the meeting, 651 applications had been approved.

20. In response to Mr Wilson OR's view that assistance should be provided for persons who were under quarantine for keeping their jobs, USLW took note of the suggestion.

IV. Proposal of retaining one supernumerary post of Assistant Director of Social Welfare

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)736/20-21(05) and (06)]

21. The Chairman reminded members that in accordance with Rule 83A of the Rules of Procedure, they should disclose the nature of any direct or indirect pecuniary interests relating to this financial proposal before they spoke on the subject.

22. At the invitation of the Chairman, USLW briefed members on the Administration's proposal of retaining one supernumerary post of Assistant Director of Social Welfare, with the post title of Assistant

Director (Licensing and Regulation) ("AD(LR)"), with effect from 1 April 2021 or upon approval of the Finance Committee (whichever was later) for a period of three years to continue to head the Licensing and Regulation Branch ("LR Branch") of SWD ("the staffing proposal"), details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)736/20-21(05)).

23. Members noted the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat on the subject under discussion (LC Paper No. CB(2)736/20-21(06)).

24. While expressing support for the staffing proposal, Mr POON Siu-ping enquired whether the tasks of the time-limited supernumerary AD(LR) post had any deadline for completion. The Deputy Chairman said that he did not object to the staffing proposal. Noting that a main duty of AD(LR) was to plan and develop measures for enhancing the management and service quality of RCHEs and residential care homes for persons with disabilities ("RCHDs"), he sought details on the work done so far and the work targets for the next three years. Expressing concern about the effectiveness of creating the post of AD(LR) in 2017 in enhancing the monitoring of RCHs and whether the retention of the post was value-for-money, Mr Wilson OR raised a similar question. He said that he had reservation about the staffing proposal and requested the Administration to include a Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat Analysis in relation to the staffing proposal in its paper for submission to the Establishment Committee ("ESC").

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25. USLW advised that the bought place schemes and the Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly ("the RCSV Pilot Scheme") were some of the measures in place to encourage private RCHs to improve the overall quality of their services. Starting from 2019-2020, SWD would purchase an additional 5 000 EA1 places under the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme over five consecutive years. Separately, an evaluation of the RCSV Pilot Scheme would be conducted. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration) ("DDSW(A)") supplemented that the LR Branch had been implementing measures covering different aspects on an on-going basis to enhance the service quality of RCHs. These included measures to enhance transparency, and strengthen training and promote professionalism of the service, as well as the launching of an accreditation subsidy scheme for private RCHEs and the visiting medical practitioner service for RCHs.

26. USLW and DDSW(A) further advised that one of the key tasks of AD(LR) was to follow up on the implementation of recommendations put forward by the Working Group on the Review of Ordinances and Codes of Practice for Residential Care Homes . Those recommendations relating to the two Codes of Practice for RCHs had been implemented through amending the two Codes in January 2020. In the next three years, AD(LR) would have to provide full support to the legislative exercise to amend the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance (Cap. 459) and the Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) Ordinance (Cap. 613) to implement the relevant recommendations of the Working Group, such as setting up a new registration system and renewal mechanism for home managers, and introducing a renewal mechanism in the existing registration system for health workers. The Chairman and the Deputy Chairman suggested that the Administration should arrange a visit to RCHs after the epidemic was mitigated to enable members to better understand their service quality.

27. Mr Holden CHOW said that while he had no objection to the submission of the staffing proposal to ESC for consideration, he considered that the Administration should provide more details on the justifications for the post in its paper for submission to ESC. In his view, AD(LR) should formulate a long-term plan to engage members of the community to provide timely feedback on the services of RCHEs and assist in the monitoring of RCHEs through the community platforms, say, Area Committees. The follow-up actions taken by the LR Branch should then be made public to enhance transparency.

28. USLW advised that the Labour and Welfare Bureau would communicate with the Home Affairs Bureau on the suggestion. DDSW(A) supplemented that at present, arrangements were made under the Service Quality Group ("SQG") Scheme for different community stakeholders (including district leaders, healthcare personnel, service users, etc.) to conduct visits to participating RCHs and collect views on the facilities and services from the residents, their relatives and staff members. Members of the community could also relay their views on the services of RCHs to District Social Welfare Officers for follow-up.

29. Mr LUK Chung-hung said that according to his understanding, some RCH operators would arrange "on-the-run staff" to impersonate their staff members during inspections. Noting that a main duty of AD(LR) was to formulate strategies and objectives on regulatory control in respect of RCHs, he asked how the Administration would address the problem. DDSW(A) advised that the LR Branch would strategically conduct

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surprise inspections to monitor, among others, whether individual RCHs had complied with the statutory minimum staffing requirements. This apart, RCHs were required to submit regularly staff records (including relief staff) with clear information on the staffing situation and duty roster to facilitate inspection and checking by SWD. Warnings would be issued to RCHs on items of non-compliance depending on their nature and severity. To enhance transparency and to facilitate public access to the information of individual RCHs, warning records of non-compliant cases of RCHs had been uploaded to SWD's websites. At the request of Mr LUK Chung-hung, DDSW(A) undertook to provide, in its paper for submission to ESC, information on the number of non-compliance cases identified by the LR Branch during its inspections to RCHs in the past three years, with a breakdown by follow-up actions taken by the LR Branch.

30. The Chairman suggested that apart from making public the conviction and warning records of RCHs, the Administration should openly commend those RCHs with quality service. DDSW(A) advised that the information on whether an RCH had participated in the SQG Scheme for improving its service quality, which was currently available on SWD's websites, could serve as a reference for members of the public.

31. Expressing concern that some private RCHE operators had used various means such as arrears of wages and working overtime without compensation to exploit imported workers, Mr LUK Chung-hung asked whether the LR Branch could help identifying such irregularities during their inspections to RCHs. USLW advised that the Labour Department would conduct workplace inspections to safeguard the rights and benefits of imported workers.

32. Mr POON Siu-ping expressed concern about whether the existing manpower of the LR Branch, which had an establishment of 157 staff, was sufficient to cope with the workload if there would be a period of recruitment freeze in the civil service. In response to Mr POON's enquiry about the arrangement if the staffing proposal was not supported by Members, DDSW(A) advised that if this was the case, the duties of AD(LR) had to be shared out by the Chief Social Work Officers of the LR Branch. This would, however, be highly undesirable.

V. Additional measures to assist financial needy individuals and families

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)750/20-21(01) and CB(2)762/20-21(02)]

33. The Chairman reminded members that in accordance with Rule 83A of the Rules of Procedure, they should disclose the nature of any direct or indirect pecuniary interests relating to this financial proposal before they spoke on the subject.

34. At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") briefed members on the two sets of proposals on additional support for individuals and families with financial difficulties (i.e. the one-year time-limited reduction of working hour requirements for the Working Family Allowance Scheme ("the time-limited relaxed WFA Scheme") and the one-year time-limited relaxation of the asset limits of the Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects ("STFASPs")), details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)750/20-21(01)).

35. Members noted the submission on the study of the profile of unemployment and underemployment provided by The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (LC Paper No. 762/20-21(02)).

The Working Family Allowance

36. Mr Holden CHOW said that the time-limited relaxed WFA Scheme could enable low-income non-single-parent households to apply for Working Family Allowance ("WFA") amid decrease in their working hours owing to the COVID-19 epidemic. Mr LUK Chung-hung opined that while the time-limited relaxed WFA Scheme had addressed some concerns of the labour sector by lowering the working hour requirements for the Basic and the Medium Allowances, the Administration should consider lowering also the working hour requirement for the Higher Allowance from 192 hours to 176 hours per month. The latter was calculated on the basis of a weekly working hours of 44 hours and four weeks per month.

37. SLW explained that the working hour requirement of 192 hours per month for the Higher Allowance was calculated on the basis of eight working hours per day and 4.3 weeks per month, which was tantamount to 44 working hours per week. Given that the majority of people working full time would be able to meet the threshold of 192 hours per month, the Administration considered it reasonable to maintain the existing working hour requirement for the Higher Allowance, as the fundamental policy

objective of the WFA Scheme was to promote full-time employment. Pointing out that the additional expenditure incurred would not be substantial as there was only a \$200 difference between the full-rate Medium Allowance and Higher Allowance, Mr LUK Chung-hung maintained the view that the working hour requirement for the Higher Allowance should be lowered to 176 hours per month.

38. The Deputy Chairman suggested that the Administration should consider providing a time-limited elderly allowance to WFA recipients who were living with elderly family members to alleviate their financial burden further under the COVID-19 epidemic. SLW explained that a Child Allowance was provided under the WFA Scheme for each eligible child in the household as the Scheme aimed to encourage self-reliance as well as ease intergenerational poverty. Unlike the CSSA Scheme where standard CSSA rates were calculated based on the number of eligible family members living in a household to help them meet their basic needs, the WFA Scheme was mainly to supplement working income. The Deputy Chairman remarked that under the current exceptional circumstances whereby the COVID-19 epidemic had presented unprecedented challenges to the local economy, the Administration should make exceptional time-limited arrangements.

39. Mr POON Siu-ping sought elaboration on how the Working Family Allowance Office under the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency ("WFSFAA") would deploy more resources to process applications for WFA with a view to disbursing the allowance to eligible households expeditiously and the target processing time in this regard. SLW advised that under the proposal, the Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy ("I-WITS") Scheme would be abolished to enable the redeployment of resources for implementing the time-limited relaxed WFA Scheme and handling the continued surge in WFA applications. Head, WFSFAA supplemented that there had been a significant increase in the number of WFA applications in the past years and for the purpose of financial planning, it was crudely estimated that the time-limited relaxed WFA Scheme would benefit an additional 24 000 households. To handle the increased workload, all the staff currently handling I-WITS applications would be redeployed for processing WFA applications with a view to shortening the processing time. Mr Michael TIEN expressed support for the time-limited relaxed of the WFA Scheme and the proposal of abolishing the I-WITS Scheme for redeploying the resources to the time-limited relaxed WFA Scheme which, in his view, enabled proper use of public money.

40. To enable applicants of the WFA Scheme to receive the allowance earlier, the Deputy Chairman proposed that the Administration should consider disbursing the allowance to them first and vetting their applications afterwards. SLW advised that it would be difficult to do so as there was a need to ensure that public money was used properly.

41. Mr LUK Chung-hung suggested that the claim period of WFA applications should be reduced to cover the immediate past three calendar months instead of the immediate past six calendar months before submission. SLW advised that the manpower required for processing the applications would be doubled if the claim period were to be reduced as suggested. Additional office space would also be required to accommodate the extra manpower. Hence, the Administration had no plan to change the current arrangement. Mr LUK Chung-hung remarked that the additional manpower so required could be met by creation of time-limited posts.

(At 12:40 pm, the Chairman informed members of her decision to extend the meeting for five minutes beyond its appointed time to allow more time for discussion.)

42. The Chairman was concerned that a household would not be eligible for WFA if both parents were unemployed. SLW said that if the working hours of a non-single-parent household were less than 72 hours per month (i.e. the working hour requirement for the Basic Allowance under the time-limited relaxed WFA Scheme), the income of the household might not be sufficient to meet their basic needs. The CSSA Scheme might then come into play for those who could not support themselves financially for meeting their basic needs. It should also be noted that the maximum level of monthly earnings from employment that could be disregarded for eligible recipients under the CSSA Scheme had now been raised to \$4,000.

43. In response to the Chairman's enquiry about the increase in the number of CSSA cases during the 12-month period from January 2020, SLW advised that the figure was not yet available. As regards the 12-month period from December 2019, the number of CSSA unemployment cases had recorded a 55% increase whereas some other categories of CSSA cases had dropped. More elderly persons applied for the Higher Old Age Living Allowance instead of CSSA.

Food assistance services

44. Mr Michael TIEN expressed support for the time-limited relaxation of the asset limits of STFASPs. Mr POON Siu-ping enquired whether the Administration would allocate additional financial and manpower resources to STFASPs in order to strengthen the services before STFASPs were regularized starting from August 2021. SLW advised that the relevant financial proposal had covered an increase in the commitment and a supplementary provision to meet the respective funding requirements for the period from June to July 2021 (i.e. before the regularization of STFASPs) and the period from August 2021 to March 2022 (i.e. upon the regularization of STFASPs). Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child Welfare) ("AD(FCW)") supplemented that at present, operators of STFASPs would be provided with additional funding to cover the administrative fee for meeting service demand in excess of the provisions allocated and the manpower requirement so arose. The original and the supplementary provisions for STFASPs for 2021-2022 had respectively taken into account the financial and manpower resources required to meet the service demand upon regularization of STFASPs and the increase in demand arising from the proposed time-limited measure.

45. The Chairman suggested that the Administration should consider providing fresh food under STFASPs. In response to the Chairman's enquiry about the rate of increase in the utilization of food assistance service under STFASPs, AD(FCW) said that the number of service users and the meal-day consumption had increased by 45% and 47% respectively during the 12-month period from January 2020.

Other issues of concern

46. Mr POON Siu-ping said that while the COVID-19 epidemic had put the labour market under immense pressure, the Administration had turned a deaf ear to the suggestion of some labour groups that a time-limited emergency relief fund should be set up to provide financial assistance for the unemployed. He urged the Administration to re-consider the suggestion. Holding the view that the integrated skills enhancement training offered by the Love Upgrading Special Scheme ("the Special Scheme") of the Employees Retraining Board ("ERB") could facilitate the trainees affected by economic downturn to seek job opportunities in new fields, Mr Michael TIEN opined that the quota for the third tranche of the Special Scheme which commenced in January 2021 should be increased from 20 000 to 50 000. He enquired about the enrolment situation so far and whether

additional quota would be provided if there was an overwhelming response.

47. SLW advised that apart from the Special Scheme, ERB had continued to provide around 140 000 training places a year through its regular training courses, of which around 60 000 were placement-tied. Same as trainees of the Special Scheme, trainees of these courses would receive a training allowance of up to \$5,800 per month. The Administration would keep in view the training demand in considering the way forward in this regard.

48. Referring to the Job Creation Scheme under the Anti-epidemic Fund to create around 30 000 time-limited jobs with a view to relieving the prevailing unemployment situation, Mr Holden CHOW enquired about the implementation progress and whether more jobs would be created. SLW advised that around 31 000 jobs had already been created as at 31 December 2020 under the Job Creation Scheme. Among these jobs, around 14 000 jobs had been filled while the recruitment of the remaining 17 000 jobs had already commenced or would commence shortly. The Government would consider creating additional time-limited jobs having regard to the implementation progress of the Job Creation Scheme and the impact of the protracted COVID-19 epidemic on the labour market.

Conclusion

49. In closing, the Chairman concluded that the Panel did not object to the submission of the financial proposals to the Finance Committee for consideration.

VI. Any other business

50. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:50 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 June 2021