

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. FC149/00-01
(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration and cleared
with the Chairman)

Ref : CB1/F/1/2

Finance Committee of the Legislative Council

**Minutes of the 14th meeting
held at the Legislative Council Chamber
on Friday, 1 June 2001, at 2:30 pm**

Members present:

Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong (Chairman)
Hon NG Leung-sing (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Kenneth TING Woo-shou, JP
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, JP
Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP
Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Prof Hon NG Ching-fai
Hon Margaret NG
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon HUI Cheung-ching
Hon Bernard CHAN
Hon CHAN Kam-lam
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum

Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBS, JP
Hon Mrs Miriam LAU Kin-yee, JP
Hon Ambrose LAU Hon-chuen, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon SZETO Wah
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, SBS, JP
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, JP
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee
Hon IP Kwok-him, JP
Hon LAU Ping-cheung
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP

Members absent:

Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, JP
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon CHAN Yuen-han
Hon Howard YOUNG, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP

Public officers attending:

Miss Denise YUE, JP
Mr Stanley YING, JP
Mr K K LAM

Secretary for the Treasury
Deputy Secretary for the Treasury
Principal Executive Officer (General),
Finance Bureau

Mr Philip K F CHOK, JP	Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower
Ms Winnie SO	Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower
Mr Brian LO	Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport
Mr George LAI, JP	Deputy Commissioner for Transport
Mr Thomas THUMB	Assistant Commissioner for Transport
Mrs Lily YAM, JP	Secretary for the Environment and Food
Mrs Stella HUNG, JP	Deputy Secretary for the Environment and Food
Mrs Ingrid YEUNG	Principal Assistant Secretary for the Environment and Food
Mrs Rita LAU, JP	Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene
Mrs Lessie WEI, JP	Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
Mrs Jenny CHOR, JP	Assistant Commissioner for Labour
Mr C M CHENG	Chief Social Security Officer, Social Welfare Department

Clerk in attendance:

Ms Pauline NG	Assistant Secretary General 1
---------------	-------------------------------

Staff in attendance:

Miss Polly YEUNG	Chief Assistant Secretary (1)3
Mrs Eleanor CHOW	Senior Assistant Secretary (1)4

Item No. 1 - FCR(2001-02)6

HEAD 146 - GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT : EDUCATION AND MANPOWER BUREAU

**• Subhead 700 General other non-recurrent
New Item "Skills Upgrading Scheme"**

Members noted that the present proposal was deferred from the last Finance Committee meeting (FC) held on 25 May 2001. The proposal had been discussed by the Panel on Manpower at its meeting on 17 May 2001.

2. Miss Emily LAU pointed out that given the short duration of the courses to be offered under the Skills Upgrading Scheme (the Scheme), such courses

might not be able to achieve the intended purpose of upgrading the skills level of employees. She enquired whether there were any means to ensure active participation by employees, as many of them were already engaged in long hours of work.

3. The Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (DS(EM)) explained that to facilitate employees to take part in these courses without causing undue burden to employers, training packages were designed in modular form with short duration for each module. Taking the elementary courses planned for the printing industry as an example, classes for modules I and II would each be spread over a number of weeks for a total duration of 15 hours and 45 hours respectively. Those who had completed the elementary courses could proceed to the intermediate and advanced levels. As such, the total training hours on a particular subject would by no means be short. DS(EM) pointed out that the merit of the proposal was to enable employees to be equipped with the latest skills progressively over a period of time.

4. DS(EM) further advised that a Steering Committee on Skills Upgrading (Steering Committee) had been set up under the chairmanship of the Secretary for Education and Manpower, comprising representatives of employers, employees, training providers, academics and government officials. Having considered possible difficulties faced by employers and employees in attending day release programmes, the Steering Committee suggested that initially, courses would be held outside working hours while day release programmes would be considered in due course where appropriate.

5. Miss Emily LAU expressed concern that the sharing of 30% of the training cost between employers and their employees might be a disincentive and enquired whether the Administration would consider subsidizing the Scheme in full in order to encourage participation.

6. In response, DS(EM) considered that the 30% course fees to be borne by employees and employers was not necessarily a disincentive to active participation in the Scheme. He cited the example of the printing industry that 30% of the course fee would amount to an average of about \$500. Since some employees were already taking courses outside working hours at their own initiative, they would likely be prepared to pay a similar fee for courses offered under the Scheme. DS(EM) added that the cost sharing arrangement was flexible as the 30% course fees could be shared between the employer and employee or borne by either party in full.

7. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that Members of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU) supported skills upgrading in principle. He, however, considered that given the half-hearted support of the Government to spend only \$400 million to run the Scheme for a short period of two years and the difficulty of employees to spare time to attend training courses, the Scheme

would unlikely be successful. He urged the Government to consider providing subsidies to employers who released their employees to attend training courses during working hours.

8. In response, DS(EM) advised that \$400 million had been earmarked for the Scheme which would run for a period of two years at the end of which a review would be conducted. He assured members that the Government was committed to enhancing the employability and competitiveness of the workforce by investing in vocational training and retraining as well as encouraging lifelong learning amongst workers. However, the success of such initiatives would also require the readiness and commitment on the part of employers and employees. The Steering Committee had therefore come to the view that instead of the Government bearing the entire costs of the skills upgrading courses, the costs should be shared between the Government and the beneficiaries (namely the trainees and the employers) as a form of concerted effort. At present, only about 8% of employers had provided training to upgrade the skill of their employees. DS(EM) said that one of the objectives of the Scheme was to increase the awareness of both employers and employees of the pressing need for skills upgrading in a fast-changing knowledge-based economy.

9. Mr IP Kwok-him queried the cost-effectiveness of implementing the Scheme by the Education and Manpower Bureau instead of by the Employee Retraining Board (ERB). In response, DS(EM) pointed out that as the provision of up-to-date skills training for in-service workers was a new policy initiative, the question of duplication of work with the ERB would not arise. As regards administrative support, the Secretariat staff for the Scheme would be seconded from the Vocational Training Council (VTC) to administer the Scheme.

10. Mr Tommy CHEUNG opined that apart from subsidizing the cost of the training courses as proposed, consideration should also be given to subsidizing employers and employees for the time cost incurred for attending the training courses. DS(EM) responded that as the skills upgrading courses would ultimately benefit the employer and the employee, the Administration would not provide further subsidy for the time cost arising from attendance of training.

11. Mr Andrew CHENG suggested that the Administration should review the Scheme one year, instead of two years, after implementation. He also supported Mr Tommy CHEUNG's view and said that in reviewing the Scheme, data on the time cost incurred by employers whose employees were released to attend skills upgrading courses should be collected. DS(EM) noted Mr CHENG's suggestion and said that the Administration would report progress of the Scheme to the Manpower Panel on a periodic basis. At Mr. Andrew CHENG's request for data on the time cost incurred, DS(EM) agreed to try to

Admin provide some projections for members' consideration at future meetings of the Manpower Panel.

12. In response to Mr HUI Cheung-ching's question on providing skills upgrading programmes for in-service workers with secondary education or above, DS(EM) said that according to the "Manpower Projection 2005" conducted by the Government, there would be a mismatch between job requirements and qualification of workers by the year 2005. The projected demand for workers with post-secondary and university education was expected to outstrip supply by some 116 900. On the other hand, a surplus manpower supply of workers was expected at lower secondary education and below by 136 700. There was an obvious need for workers with low education level to upgrade their skill levels so as to take full advantage of the economic opportunities that were likely to arise in the next few years. Although the Scheme would mainly cater for local workers with Form 5 standard or below, the Government would allow some exceptions, for example, in the export/import sector, where some employees had higher qualifications but nonetheless required skills upgrading to meet market demand.

13. Mr James TIEN sought clarification on the training providers and how funding would be allocated to them. In reply, DS(EM) explained that the Steering Committee had initially identified six industries for the Scheme. Sector-specific industry working groups had been set up for the six industries to develop sector-specific training packages to meet the current needs of the respective industry. Once the training packages had been developed, they would invite applications from established training providers to run the training courses and selection would be made in accordance with the Government's procurement procedures. For quality assurance, the industry working groups would arrange for inspection of the training facilities of training providers, the trainers' qualification and the conduct of classes. DS(EM) further said that the Steering Committee would closely monitor progress of the pilot training packages for the six industries, and examine the need to include other industries under the Scheme.

14. Mr James TIEN considered that the Administration had not provided sufficient information such as the details of training providers and the priority in allocating funding to the industries. Miss Emily LAU shared his view and expressed concern about the monitoring mechanism for the Scheme.

15. In response, DS(EM) advised that each industry working group had its own list of reputable training providers and it might not be practicable to specify each and every potential training provider. As regards concerns about the use of the \$400 million, he affirmed that the \$400 million was not for the benefit of the training providers but was for the purpose of developing sector-specific training packages to meet the current needs of the industries.

Admin

16. On the monitoring mechanism, DS(EM) advised that a Secretariat for the Scheme would be set up to assist the work of the various industry working groups including quality assurance. Feedback from the trainees and their employers on the content and usefulness of the courses would be collated. An investigation and assessment report would be submitted to the respective industry working group for assessing the effectiveness of the courses. DS(EM) assured members that the Secretariat staff, with their experience gained from VTC, would be competent in conducting evaluation on the training programmes. Miss Emily LAU remained concerned about the quality of the institutions and the viability of the checking mechanism. At Miss LAU's request, DS(EM) undertook to provide a paper on the implementation, including the monitoring mechanism, of the Scheme in due course.

(Post-meeting note: Miss Emily LAU has subsequently written to the Secretary for Education and Manpower requesting the Administration to provide a report on the Scheme once every six months.)

17. The Committee approved the proposal.

Item No. 2 - FCR(2001-02)7

CAPITAL WORKS RESERVE FUND

HEAD 710 - COMPUTERISATION

Transport Department

• New Subhead "Transport Information System"

HEAD 708 - CAPITAL SUBVENTIONS AND MAJOR SYSTEMS AND EQUIPMENT

Transport Department

• New Subhead "Journey Time Indication System"

18. Members noted that the present proposal was also deferred from the last FC meeting held on 25 May 2001. The proposal had been discussed by Panel on Transport at its meeting on 18 May 2001.

19. Mr Andrew CHENG said that Members of the Democratic Party (DP) were in support of the proposal but they saw the need to assess whether the proposal was value for money. Referring to Note 2 of Enclosure 1 to FCR(2001-02)7, Mr CHENG enquired how the weighted average of Value of Time of motorists on non-regular trips (\$1.7/minute) and the weighted average of Value of Time of public transport passengers on non-regular trips (\$1.13/minute) were derived. In response, the Deputy Commissioner for Transport (DC for T) advised that the figures were based on the values of time adopted in the Third Comprehensive Transport Study which had been completed in 1999. In the Study, motorists and public transport passengers

Admin

had been asked to indicate the additional amount of money they were willing to pay in return for shortening the travelling time. At the request of members, DC for T agreed to provide more information on the detailed calculation after the meeting.

20. Mr LAU Kong-wah queried the cost-effectiveness of the Transport Information System (TIS), given that in Hong Kong, there were very limited alternative route(s) available in congested areas. He also considered that the economic benefits brought about by the TIS and Journey Time Indication System (JTIS) were limited. His views were shared by Mr CHAN Kam-lam.

21. In response, the Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport (PAS(T)) explained that the economic benefits as set out in paragraphs 17 to 19 of the discussion paper were based on conservative estimates assuming a low usage rate of only 5% of the non-regular trip driver using the route guidance function and some 5% of public transport passengers using the public transport inquiry service under the TIS. With the provision of value-added services developed by the private sector based on the information and intelligent road network obtainable from the TIS, the benefits accrued were expected to be much greater. However, it was difficult to quantify the actual benefits at this stage as the provision of value-added services such as vehicle navigation, parking reservation, real-time public transport information, etc, would depend on the demand for such services and the response of the market. Nevertheless, overseas experience had shown that the private sector took a very active role in providing personalized services to road users, and the competition among companies had brought the prices for the services to an attractive level which would benefit consumers.

Admin

22. Mr James TIEN said that Members of the Liberal Party (LP) supported the proposal and enquired about the price of an in-vehicle navigation unit. PAS(T) said that according to his knowledge, the price of such products in overseas countries ranged from a few thousand to over ten thousand dollars, depending on the functions and quality. He would provide further available information to members after the meeting.

23. Mr LAU Kong-wah expressed concern that despite the substantial investment by the Government to provide the basic infrastructure to support TIS, the private sector might not be interested in developing the related value-added services. In response, PAS(T) informed members that at least 14 companies had expressed interest in the provision of ITS Services and had requested the Administration to provide the relevant transport data and data infrastructure. These included two car park operators, two fleet management service companies, four public transport operators, three telecommunications companies, two electronic payment service providers, and one car manufacturing company. With the value-added transport applications developed by the private sector, TIS would provide accurate, reliable and

timely traffic information to road users who could make better and more informed choice on their transport needs.

24. Mr CHAN Kam-lam noted that the average time saving for using the route guidance function and the public transport inquiry service under the ITS were merely 5 minutes and 3 minutes per trip respectively, and that of the travelling time saved under the JTIS was merely 3 minutes per trip. He had reservations about the Government's huge investment in the proposed systems and considered that an alternative was for the private sector to develop the intelligent transport systems.

25. In response, PAS(T) pointed out that the Government had all along provided basic transport and traffic information to road users through its single-purpose systems such as Area Traffic Control System, Traffic Control Surveillance Facilities, etc. The Administration considered it appropriate to take up the responsibility for the development of TIS, which was a centralized data warehouse for the collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of comprehensive transport information. In addition, it was necessary to ensure that the different systems developed were compatible and that seamless integrated services would be provided to all road users effectively and efficiently.

26. Mr LAU Kong-wah and Mr CHAN Kam-lam remained unconvinced of the Administration's explanation. They said that Members of the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong (DAB) would abstain from voting on the present proposal.

27. Mr Andrew WONG opined that it should be a responsibility of the Government to provide the necessary infrastructure for intelligent transport systems as certain functions, such as traffic diversion measures, could only be decided and implemented by the Transport Department. He did not consider it appropriate for the private sector to take up the project. Mr WONG expressed support for the proposal and urged for its early implementation.

28. Mrs Miriam LAU also expressed support for the proposal as Hong Kong already lagged behind other countries as far as intelligent transport facilities were concerned. As regards the benefits of TIS and JTIS, Mrs LAU considered that once the Government had provided the basic infrastructure, the private sector would develop related value-added applications for the benefits of users. She added that with a growing population and an increasing number of vehicles on the road, Hong Kong needed a more sophisticated system to alleviate the existing transport problems.

29. Miss Emily LAU considered the JTIS extremely useful, as it would convey to motorists real-time traffic conditions of different cross-harbour routes from Hong Kong Island to Kowloon. She urged that the system be

brought into service as soon as practicable. She also expressed concern about the privacy implications of the proposed TIS and JTIS.

30. In reply, PAS(T) advised that the JTIS could only be implemented in phases and the earliest completion of the initial phase would be early 2003. Meanwhile, the Administration would continue to use television and radio to alert the public of congested routes. PAS(T) further assured members that both the TIS and the JTIS would not impact on privacy as neither road users' identity nor vehicles' identity would be displayed. The TIS sought to digitize transport and traffic data for access by the public via the Internet, while the JTIS would only indicate, by digital displays installed ahead of critical traffic diversion points, to motorists the average journey time of travelling from these points to selected destinations.

31. The Committee approved the proposal.

Item No. 3 - FCR(2001-02)10

GENERAL REVENUE ACCOUNT

HEAD 22 - AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT

♦ Subhead 700 General other non-recurrent

New item "Compensation and ex-gratia payment to poultry operators affected by avian flu"

LOAN FUND

HEAD 262 - PRIMARY PRODUCTS

♦ New Subhead "Loans to poultry wholesalers and retailers affected by avian flu"

32. Members noted that the present proposal was in relation to a previous paper withdrawn by the Administration at the FC meeting held on 25 May 2001. The subject was discussed by the Panel on Food Safety and Environmental Hygiene on 21 May 2001.

33. Mrs Selina CHOW informed members that she and Mr Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan had met the industry and discussed the Government's proposal. The following concerns had been raised -

- (a) The maximum level of low-interest loan at \$150,000 was grossly inadequate for wholesalers to tide over their cashflow problems as they were not yet able to receive payments from retailers and other parties. A higher level of loan should be provided to cater for their special needs.

- (b) Duck wholesalers had incurred heavy losses resulting from the suspension of the import of ducks into Hong Kong and therefore urged the Administration to take active steps to resume the early import of ducks.

34. In response, the Secretary for the Environment and Food (SEF) assured members that the Administration was fully aware of the hardship caused by the outbreak of the avian flu and in devising the compensation package, had tried its best to cater for the needs of the affected parties. As far as the low-interest unsecured loan was concerned, its level was the same as that offered in the last package approved by FC on 9 January 1998 (the 1998 package) although on this occasion, wholesalers and retailers would not be required to replace or procure major items for their business, and that they had not suffered a sharp reduction in sales before the closure of the outlets. SEF added that the number of applications for secured loans received under the 1998 package was below 30.

35. SEF further confirmed that cleansing and disinfection of all wholesale and retail outlets had been completed on 29 May 2001. The Administration had all along maintained close liaison with the relevant Mainland authorities with a view to facilitating the early resumption of the import of ducks to Hong Kong.

36. While appreciating that the Administration had accepted some of his suggestions relating to extension of rental waiver and increasing the amount of loan, Mr Tommy CHEUNG nevertheless highlighted the inadequacy of the loan for wholesalers and the hardship of fresh provision shops in private premises which would not be entitled to any rental waiver. Notwithstanding, he said that Members of LP would support the present proposal. On whether Housing Authority (HA) would be prepared to waive the rent and related charges for operators in HA markets, SEF informed members that the Housing Department would recommend to HA the proposed rental waiver arrangements.

37. Mr NG Leung-sing expressed support for the present proposal. However, given the enormous resources required in dealing with the incident, Mr NG stressed the importance of identifying the source of the virus in order to prevent future outbreaks. He also urged that a comprehensive report on the implementation of the compensation package, including the arrangements to safeguard workers' interest, be prepared for future reference.

38. In response, SEF highlighted the difficulty in identifying a single cause and source for the virus. Nevertheless, the Government was working closely with the experts with a view to providing information on possible causes. Meanwhile, a number of preventive measures, such as suspending business on designated days, were being discussed with the trade. SEF advised that the Administration was conducting a review of the incident and would report the

Admin findings to the relevant Panel in due course. In this connection, members noted that a Motion Debate on the subject would take place at the meeting of the Legislative Council on 6 June 2001.

39. Mr Fred LI recapitulated that at the last meeting held on 25 May 2001, Members of DP had suggested that compensation should be paid to the operators in two stages, i.e. with two-thirds of the amount to be paid first and the remainder released to operators subject to there being no complaint from employees. Mr LI noted that the Administration had not accepted their suggestion. Instead, it had proposed to introduce a two-month extension of the waiver of rents and charges for wholesalers, retailers and transport operators in Government and HA markets. Mr LI considered that although the present proposal was an improvement, it was not entirely satisfactory as the proposed waiver would not benefit the 160 or so fresh provision shops in private premises.

40. In response, SEF advised that having considered members' views expressed at the last meeting, the Administration had modified its proposal to provide some safeguard for workers, but it must maintain the principle of not interfering with any arrangements relating to employer-employee relationship.

41. Dr YEUNG Sum stated that Members of DP would support the present proposal on account of its improvements. In reply to his enquiry about the Government's position on central slaughtering, SEF assured members that the Administration would consider views from all parties concerned before making a decision.

42. Mr Fred LI pointed out that the most urgent task ahead was to enable the affected parties to resume business as early as practicable. Mr Tommy CHEUNG expressed similar concern and asked whether there would be any problem in the supply of live chicken.

43. On the re-opening of the retail outlets, SEF said that after cleansing and disinfection, live chicken had been placed at the outlets for testing purposes. Subject to satisfactory results, the Administration would re-open the poultry retail outlets in mid June 2001. She assured members that every effort had been made to keep the closure period as short as possible. She did not envisage any major problem with the supply of live chicken

44. In this connection, Mr Fred LI referred to a letter tabled at the meeting (subsequently issued to members vide FC116/00-01) by Members of DP and recalled that from time to time, members had been requested to approve funding for ex-gratia payments. In view of considerable concerns raised over issues related to ex-gratia payments, it would be desirable to set up a subcommittee under FC to examine the subject in its entirety. He requested and the Chairman agreed that his suggestion would be considered at the next

meeting.

45. Mr TSANG Yok-sing said that Members of DAB were seriously concerned about the interest of workers. They had come to the view that except for the fresh provision shops in private premises which would not be entitled to the rental waiver, the present proposal had provided improved safeguards. Having consulted operators and workers of the trade, he said that Members of DAB would support the present proposal. Mr TSANG also shared members' concern about early re-opening of the retail outlets.

46. Mr WONG Yung-kan informed members that he and Miss CHAN Yuen-han had held more than five joint meetings with affected parties of the poultry trade. He reiterated the need for early re-opening of the retail outlets and acknowledged the Administration's effort in this regard. To improve assistance, Mr WONG enquired whether consideration would be given to granting a higher loan to fresh provision licensees operating in private premises and other affected parties if the approved commitment was not exhausted.

47. In this regard, SEF pointed out that since fresh provision shops in private premises would not be entitled to any rental waiver, a higher rate of ex-gratia payment at \$60,000 had been put forward. According to the Administration's findings, the average rent for the majority of these fresh provision shops would be around \$20,000 per month. In view of the relatively short closure period, the proposed level of assistance should be sufficient to help the operators tide over their cashflow problems. After approval by FC, operators would be given a period of three months to apply for the loan. SEF confirmed that there was no plan to further modify the current package, including arrangements for the loan, as the Administration considered the present proposal reasonable.

48. On Mr WONG Yung-kan's concerns about the arrangements for casual workers, the Assistant Commissioner for Labour (AC for L) advised that under the Employment Ordinance, no distinction was made between casual and permanent workers. A worker would qualify for protection under the Ordinance as long as he could fulfil the requirements for continuous employment. She believed that the majority of employers in the trade were responsible employers and would work out suitable arrangements with their workers. The Labour Department (LD) had also designated staff to handle enquiries and complaints arising from the current incident.

49. Miss Emily LAU acknowledged the Administration's effort in dealing with the aftermath of the avian flu and hoped that the matter could be satisfactorily concluded. She nevertheless enquired about the number of workers who might not be able to receive any assistance and sought assurance that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and LD would render prompt assistance. Miss LAU also called upon workers to come forward and seek

assistance if they were deprived of their entitlements.

50. In reply, SEF advised that according to the Administration's estimate, about 200 casual workers in the poultry trade were not covered by the Employment Ordinance. Up to 29 May 2001, LD had handled about 20 enquires from its hotline service. Regarding the assistance rendered by SWD, the Chief Social Security Officer, SWD confirmed that subject to all eligibility requirements being satisfied, financial assistance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme could be disbursed to applicants in about three to four days. Special consideration would also be given to exempting the applicants from participating in the Support for Self-reliance Scheme.

51. On behalf of Members of CTU, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan maintained their objection to the present proposal for the following reasons -

- (a) Members of CTU had received complaints from workers in the last outbreak of avian flu in 1997 that they had not received compensation from their employers. Relying on workers to lodge complaints with LD was far from adequate as workers might not do so for fear of losing their jobs. As such, an effective mechanism should be built into the proposed package to ensure that workers would also be able to receive assistance.
- (b) The Administration's argument that it would not interfere into any employer-employee relationship was untenable. By proposing to extend for two months the rental waiver subject to their being no unresolved complaints from workers, the Administration was in effect interfering into employer-employee relationship, though in a different way.

52. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung shared Mr LEE's views and doubted whether workers could benefit from the compensation package. He further queried the fairness of waiving the rent for Government and HA markets only.

53. Mr Frederick FUNG Kin-kee queried the inequity of the present proposal as further assistance would be made available to operators in Government and HA markets but not to the small number of operators in private markets. He considered that the extension of the rental waiver might not be a sufficient incentive for employers to discharge their obligations and workers might not seek help for fear of losing their jobs. Mr FUNG said that he would not support the present proposal. On the efficacy of the complaint mechanism, SEF stressed that aggrieved workers must not yield to employers' pressure and must come forward to lodge complaints if they were deprived of their entitlements.

54. SEF also pointed out that as the Government was not the landlord, it was not in a position to waive the rent for fresh provision shops in private premises. She stressed that the present proposal was a pragmatic package which had addressed members' concerns while preserving the Government's policy stance.

Admin

55. As to whether financial assistance could be made available under the Brewin Trust Fund for disbursement to casual workers in the poultry trade who might not be qualified for protection under the Employment Ordinance, SEF advised that under section 4(1) of the Brewin Trust Fund Ordinance, workers affected by the avian flu did not fall within the scope of the Fund. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan however pointed out that according to past minutes of meetings which he had perused, payment from the Brewin Trust Fund had been made to assist needy families. He therefore urged the Administration to exercise discretion and extend assistance to the affected workers on compassionate grounds. The Administration noted his view.

56. Dr LO Wing-lok urged the Administration to strengthen its work on all fronts so as to avert another mass slaughter of poultry. He also stressed that in the interest of the community at large, the Administration should uphold and implement the right policies.

57. The Committee approved the proposal.

58. The Committee was adjourned at 4:35 pm.