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the Administration)

Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty

Minutes of meeting
held on Thursday, 19 May 2005 at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, JP (Chairman)
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon Margaret NG
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon KWONG Chi-kin

Members absent : Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG

Public officers attending : Item III
Mrs Cherry TSE, JP
Secretary to Commission on Poverty

Ms Edna WONG
Assistant Secretary to Commission on Poverty

Item IV

Mrs Cherry TSE, JP
Secretary to Commission on Poverty

Ms Edna WONG
Assistant Secretary to Commission on Poverty

Mr CHENG Yan-chee, JP
Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (4)

Mr CHAN Fu-man
Senior Education Officer (Extended Programmes)
Education and Manpower Bureau

Clerk in attendance : Mrs Constance LI
Chief Council Secretary (2)5

Staff in attendance : Mr Watson CHAN
Head, Research and Library Services

Mr Michael YU
Research Officer 7

Miss Betty MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)1

Ms Anna CHEUNG
Legislative Assistant (2)5

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Referring to the revised agenda tabled at the meeting, the Chairman said that the original agenda item IV “Meeting with Oxfam Hong Kong, Alliance concerning CSSA and Hong Kong Social Security Society on experience in combating poverty in other places” had been deleted from the agenda. The Chairman explained that these three organisations had yet to finalise the overall research findings, and were only able to present those findings relating to employment opportunities to single parent recipients under social security schemes. As the Subcommittee would discuss assistance to women with low income and support to single parent families at future meetings, it would be more appropriate for these organisations to be invited to attend the Subcommittee meeting when these issues were discussed.

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(*Post-meeting note* : Oxfam Hong Kong, Alliance concerning CSSA and Hong Kong Social Security Society subsequently presented their research findings at the meeting of the Subcommittee on Review of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme on 24 May 2005 vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 1644/04-05(06).)

I. Confirmation of minutes of meeting

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1509/04-05]

2. The minutes of the meeting on 22 March 2005 were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion

[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1555/04-05(01)]

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting on 23 June 2005 at 2:30 pm –

- (a) Work plan of the Commission on Poverty (CoP); and
- (b) Research report on “Benchmarks for granting subsidies or financial assistance to people in need in Hong Kong”.

4. Members also agreed that the Subcommittee would schedule a further meeting for 12 July 2005 at 10:45 am.

III. Research report on “Poverty Combating Strategies in Selected Places”

[LC Paper No. RP05/04-05]

5. With the aid of powerpoint, Head, Research and Library Services Division of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Secretariat (H(RL)) highlighted the salient points in the research report on “Poverty Combating Strategies in Selected Places”. The research report covered the various aspects of the poverty combating strategies adopted by the United Kingdom (UK), Ireland and Singapore, which were summarised below –

- (a) Definition and measurement of poverty

In UK and Ireland, the concept of poverty was accepted as encompassing not only income poverty, but also social exclusion which could trap people in a spiral of disadvantages through multiple deprivations. Both governments had developed a range of indicators to measure the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty. However, Singapore did not set out any definition or measurement of poverty;

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(b) Setting of anti-poverty targets

Both UK and Ireland had set out poverty reduction targets for different disadvantaged groups and policy areas. In contrast, Hong Kong and Singapore did not have any explicit targets for poverty reduction.

(c) Institutional arrangements to tackle poverty

Ireland had established comprehensive institutional structures specifically for tackling poverty and social exclusion. All government departments were required to assess the impact of their policies on poverty reduction under the process of “Poverty proofing”. In UK, the Social Exclusion Unit was established to co-ordinate policy making on specified topics of poverty and social exclusion. As for Singapore, no specific institutional structure for poverty reduction had been established, and different schemes were implemented by existing government ministries to help the needy.

(d) Key measures implemented to tackle poverty among people of different social groups

In Ireland, the voluntary and community sector participated in the Social Inclusion Consultative Group to monitor National Anti-Poverty Strategy. The views of the voluntary and community sector served as inputs to the social partnership agreements negotiated between the government and its social partners. In UK, similar arrangements were also made at the local level. In both UK and Ireland, the development of anti-poverty strategies involved the establishment of a formal and regular platform for the participation of people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion and those who represented them. Singapore adopted a “many helping hands” approach; in particular, families and various community groups were involved in providing assistance to needy people, with the government acting as the last resort.

All the overseas places under study had implemented measures to tackle poverty among different social groups, namely, people of working age, children and youth, and the elderly. A key feature of their anti-poverty measures was the implementation of specific programmes to facilitate participation in the labour market. This trend reflected the underlying importance of work to get people of working age out of poverty, and to guard against poverty in old age.

(e) Progress in poverty reduction

The progress made in achieving the various targets of reducing poverty was also described in the report.

(*Post-meeting note* : The powerpoint presentation materials were issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 1632/04-05 on 20 May 2005.)

6. Dr Fernando CHEUNG noted that in UK, the concept of poverty included not only poverty but also social exclusion, for which 58 indicators had been developed to measure the various dimensions of poverty. A tiered approach had also been adopted to measure the number of children living in poor families, based on absolute/relative low income and material deprivation. Moreover, the UK approach captured both the severity and duration of poverty. These indicators would help people better understand the characteristics and mobility of people in poverty. Dr CHEUNG further said that UK had adopted pragmatic employment strategies for people of working age, e.g. by “making work pay” through the national minimum wage and Working Tax Credit policies. Dr CHEUNG considered that UK experience had provided valuable reference for Hong Kong. Dr CHEUNG further said while CoP had adopted a set of 30 indicators to study poverty in Hong Kong, the scope of such indicators was relatively less comprehensive than those in UK. He asked whether CoP would formulate a poverty line and review Hong Kong’s employment strategy and taxation system to boost employment, having regard to overseas experience.

7. Secretary to CoP (Secy/CoP) said that while overseas experience in preventing and alleviating poverty could provide useful reference, the CoP Secretariat would need some time to study the research report and discuss with Government Economist and responsible bureaux what areas would merit further consideration or adaptation for application in Hong Kong. Secy/CoP pointed out that CoP had previously agreed that it was useful to adopt a multi-dimensional approach to define poverty, and a set of 30 indicators to reflect the poverty situation of three key social groups was developed. This reflected CoP shared the same spirit with UK and Ireland in measuring poverty.

8. Secy/CoP added that the set of poverty indicators in UK was developed in 1999, and had been refined over the past years. Secy/CoP further said that CoP was tasked to examine poverty issues which straddled different bureaux and departments. As regards the issue of minimum wage, CoP would first gauge the views of the Labour Advisory Board which was currently studying the matter. She stressed that social policies would need to evolve over time in line with social expectations.

9. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked whether CoP would formulate specific poverty reduction targets, for example, the number or percentage of low-income families to be reduced in two years’ time. Dr CHEUNG further asked whether CoP would review how the indicators of poverty would help track and monitor poverty situation in Hong Kong.

10. Secy/CoP said that the UK poverty reduction targets corresponded to its anti-poverty strategies. In Hong Kong, CoP was reviewing the current policies in alleviating poverty. It would be more appropriate for CoP to set specific poverty reduction targets after it had formulated measures to prevent and alleviate poverty.

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CoP had paid visits to various districts and was formulating measures to enhance district coordination in tackling poverty issues specific to these districts. Secy/CoP added that when introducing new measures, the relevant bureaux and departments would be required to indicate how the effectiveness of these measures could be assessed.

11. Referring to paragraph 2.2.8 of the research report, Mr Alan LEONG said that at the European Council meeting held in 2000, the European Union (EU) agreed on the need to take steps to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010. Starting from 2001 onwards, EU had required each member state to submit a biennial National Action Plan in this regard. Mr LEONG further said that according to paragraphs 2.4.6 and 3.4.6 of the research report, both UK and Ireland had established forums to collect views of those experiencing poverty and members of the voluntary and community groups, in order to prepare their biennial reports. Mr LEONG considered it worthwhile for the Subcommittee and CoP to study such practices. However, as the Financial Secretary (FS) had stated at previous Subcommittee meetings that the Administration had no intention to set up a similar consultative forum in Hong Kong, he requested the Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) to provide further information on the National Action Plans submitted by EU member states to EU, and the experience of UK and Ireland in the establishment and operation of these forums. H(RL) agreed to provide members with the supplementary information around July 2005.

H(RL)

12. Secy/CoP said that FS was not against the suggestion of establishing a consultative mechanism to gauge public views. However, as various target groups and districts had different needs, it would be more effective to gauge their views through representatives from these different sectors. Secy/CoP further said that CoP comprised members from different sectors of the community, and CoP also collected views from District Councils and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There was also feedback from major stakeholders and target groups on the proposed measures to reduce poverty.

13. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung noted from paragraph 5.1.26 of the research report that active labour market programmes facilitated participation in employment and helped improve the financial situation of needy families, thereby indirectly allowing children and youth in these families to escape from the cycle of poverty. Mr LEUNG asked about the implementation details of these active labour market programmes.

14. Research Officer 7/LegCo Secretariat (RO7) said that UK placed high priority on bringing about maximum participation in the labour market. The employment strategies included –

- (a) “making work possible” through the welfare-to-work policy which aimed at assisting the unemployed and economically inactive people to move from welfare to work as soon as possible;

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- (b) “making work pay” through the national minimum wage and Working Tax Credit (i.e. a payment to top up earnings of low-income working households so as to improve work incentives); and
- (c) “making worked skilled” through providing people with skills to meet the needs of their employers.

15. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked how the UK experience in implementing the active labour market programmes to reduce reliance on welfare could be adapted in Hong Kong, since the policy direction of alleviating poverty in Hong Kong was also to promote economic growth and create employment opportunities through market force. Mr LEUNG also asked about the details of the UK programmes, and requested RLSD to provide a comparison of the UK measures with that adopted in Hong Kong.

16. The Chairman said that both UK and Ireland attached great importance to the implementation of active labour market programmes to help the long-term unemployed back to work. Such programmes included direct employment schemes, employment subsidy schemes, job search assistance and training courses. The Chairman requested RLSD to provide more information on the details of such programmes, in particular the duration of programmes and government expenses for the purpose. The Chairman also requested RLSD to provide a comparison of these programmes with that of Hong Kong.

H(RL) 17. H(RL) responded that the research study examined the poverty combating strategies adopted in selected places, including the anti-poverty measures implemented to cope with the impact of economic restructuring. The scope of the research study did not include analysis on how the poverty combating strategies could be adapted in Hong Kong. H(RL) said that RLSD would provide more implementation details of the active labour market programmes in UK and a comparison with similar programmes in Hong Kong as far as practicable.

18. Secy/CoP said that CoP shared the view that promoting self-reliance was important to get people of working age out of poverty, and the UK experience provided useful reference in this respect. She further said that CoP was discussing with the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau how able-bodied Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients could be further encouraged to move towards self-reliance, e.g. through a review of the enhanced Disregarded Earnings.

19. Mr James TIEN pointed out that while Ireland had an unemployment rate of 12.3% in 1995, the Irish economy made significant improvement in recent years, which lowered the unemployment rate. Mr TIEN said that he noted from the research report that in combating poverty, the Irish government formulated social partnership agreements in order to involve the voluntary sector and the community. According to paragraph 3.5.1 of the research report, Ireland’s anti-poverty strategy focused on expanding the job market. He also noted that the National Minimum

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Wage Act 2000 came into effect in 2000, guaranteeing a national minimum wage for workers aged 18 or above. Given that the minimum wage policy had actually increased the wage level, he wondered why Ireland could make progress on consistent poverty, unemployment and income adequacy in the past decade. He asked whether there were other complementary measures such as re-training or incentives for employment in Ireland that contributed to its success. He requested RLSD to further elaborate on this.

20. RO7 said that in 1990s, an abundant supply of low-cost skilled and unskilled labour in Ireland attracted increased inflows of foreign direct investment into Ireland. In addition, many multinational firms used Ireland as an offshore production base, in order to gain access to the larger EU market. RO7 said that under the “Social Partnership” agreements beginning in 1987, the trade unions accepted relatively modest wage increases in return for the government’s promise to reduce tax burden and increase spending on social welfare benefits. The restraint in wage increases helped Ireland strengthen its international competitiveness and attractiveness to foreign investors. As a result, there was an influx of multinational firms establishing in Ireland, specializing in the production of high-tech goods for export to other EU member states, Asia and the United States. Apart from boosting economic growth and employment opportunities, the move of these multinational firms into Ireland had also created additional demand for intermediate goods produced by local companies, which in turn created employment for low-skill labour. Nevertheless, Ireland recently experienced labour shortage, and this had brought pressure on its wages.

21. H(RL) said that RLSD had separately prepared a fact sheet on unemployment in Ireland for the Panel on Manpower. The fact sheet provided information on the macroeconomic developments underlying the turnaround in the Irish labour market since the mid-1990s, and the active labour market programmes adopted by the Irish government to help the unemployed back to work. The Chairman requested that the fact sheet be provided to the Subcommittee.

(Post-meeting note : The fact sheet on unemployment in Ireland was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 1632/04-05 on 20 May 2005.)

22. Assistant Secretary to CoP said that the Administration was aware of the progress made by Ireland in combating poverty, and some Bureau Secretaries had visited Ireland to study its successful experience. She further said that while Ireland had made progress on several fronts in implementing anti-poverty strategies, the marked improvement in Irish labour market was largely due to the fact that multinational firms had made use of Ireland for gaining access to the EU market. In addition, the relatively young population in Ireland provided a large labour reserve for the high-tech industry.

23. The Chairman commented that Hong Kong should also be able to attract investment with the implementation of the Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) and the liberalization measures of CEPA II.

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24. Ms LI Fung-ying said that in UK and Ireland, material deprivation was adopted as a measure of poverty. She asked whether UK and Ireland had conducted periodic reviews to update the list of items used for measuring this aspect of poverty.

25. RO7 said that annual review of items for measuring material deprivation was conducted in accordance with socio-economic changes. Updated information on essential goods and services were collected through household surveys. RO7 further said that in Ireland, the voluntary sector and the community were involved in the review mechanism through participation in the Social Inclusion Forum.

26. Mr Albert HO said that the Administration had given him the impression that the success of Ireland in combating poverty was due to its unique circumstances, which were not applicable to Hong Kong. Mr HO expressed reservation about such an attitude. He considered that Hong Kong and Ireland shared a lot of similarities in terms of population size and stage of economic development, and both of them had a hinterland. Mr HO further said that with vision and determination of the Irish government, Ireland had made swift development in economy, specialising in the production of high-tech goods. Moreover, the Irish government had implemented active labour market programmes to help the long-term unemployed back to work. Irish government had also adopted concrete and quantifiable poverty reduction targets, and provided a forum for the community to participate in the formulation and review of such targets. He commented that Hong Kong government lacked determination in combating poverty, and had not formulated any poverty reduction targets or timetable.

H(RL)

27. To facilitate consideration of how Hong Kong could mirror Ireland's experience, Mr Albert HO requested RLSD to provide more information on the macroeconomic developments in Ireland, such as the population profile, socio-economic situation, education programmes as well as incentive schemes for investment. H(RL) said that RLSD would provide the supplementary information around July 2005.

28. Secy/CoP clarified that the Administration agreed that the experience of Ireland in combating poverty was worthy for further study, and she had only wanted to point out the differences between Hong Kong and Ireland. For example, the wage level in Ireland was lower than other EU member states in 1990s, and the low-cost labour in Ireland had attracted increased inflows of foreign investment. On the contrary, the wage level in Hong Kong was higher than that in the Mainland before and after the implementation of CEPA.

29. The Chairman asked whether CoP had any timetable for progress to be made in combating poverty.

30. Secy/CoP responded that CoP had first to identify the problem areas before setting specific targets or timetable. She stressed that CoP was actively considering drawing up a set of indicators. She pointed out that Government introduced the

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performance indicators in the Controlling Officers' Reports only in the 1990s, and the absence of such indicators before 1990s did not mean that no achievements had been made by various departments in providing service to the community.

31. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed disappointment that CoP had not yet formulated any indicators to enable the public to evaluate the progress made in alleviating poverty. He hoped CoP would formulate these indicators as soon as possible. While he was glad to learn that CoP was studying the UK experience of "making work pay" through the national minimum wage and Working Tax Credit, he was concerned that CoP would take unduly long time to study the matter. Mr LEE pointed out that for many years he had urged for setting a minimum wage and providing subsidy for low-income working households in order to help people get away from poverty. Mr LEE asked about CoP's work plan in this regard.

32. Secy/CoP said that CoP was seriously studying the matter with the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau. She stressed that a holistic approach should be adopted in reviewing the anti-poverty strategies (such as minimum wage, low-income families subsidies, CSSA, etc.) as they were inter-related. Secy/CoP added that as CoP was set up on 18 February 2005 and she only assumed the post in April 2005, she hoped members would appreciate that CoP would need some time to draw up a set of poverty indicators and performance targets. She hoped that an initial plan would be available by the end of 2005.

33. Miss CHAN Yuen-han asked about the time taken by Irish government to formulate and implement the employment strategies.

34. RO7 said that the 3-year "Social Partnership" agreements had been introduced since 1987. A review was carried out at the end of such agreement, following which a new 3-year agreement would be signed. Because of the leap in economic development in Ireland in 1990s, the employment strategies had been fully implemented in 2000.

35. Miss CHAN Yuen-han said that she was impressed that the Irish government was able to seize the golden opportunity when many multinational firms invested in Ireland for gaining access to the EU market, and had introduced measures to improve the employment situation. Miss CHAN pointed out that the implementation of CEPA also provided an opportunity for Hong Kong to recover from the sluggish economy. She asked whether the Government had any concrete plan to maximize the opportunities provided by CEPA.

36. Secy/CoP said that she fully agreed that CoP could make reference to the Irish experience, in considering how to make the best use of the opportunities brought about by CEPA to revive the economy and reduce poverty. However, she pointed out that there were contextual differences between Hong Kong and Ireland. In the case of Ireland, foreign investors engaged in production industry in Ireland and this improved the employment situation in Ireland. However, in Hong Kong, the

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production process was mainly carried out in the Mainland. Secy/CoP stressed that CoP had determination to prevent and alleviate poverty, and would certainly give consideration to making use of the opportunities provided by CEPA to boost economy which could in turn help reduce poverty.

37. Miss CHAN Yuen-han pointed out that many small and medium-sized enterprises had indicated that they wished to relocate their production from the Mainland back to Hong Kong. She urged the Administration to draw on Ireland's experience of making use of inflows of direct investment to boost the local labour market. Miss CHAN expressed concern that as FS was responsible for containing the public expenditure, this would have conflict with his role as Chairman of CoP, and he might not fully implement active labour market programmes in Hong Kong. She hoped that Secy/CoP would convey her concern to FS.

38. The Chairman said that as CoP was tasked to prevent and alleviate poverty, he could not accept that CoP had not formulated indicators to measure poverty. He was disappointed that CoP was still exploring its way and there was no action plan for alleviating poverty. The Chairman pointed out that it took Ireland almost 10 years to demonstrate the effectiveness of the three-year "Social Partnership" agreements. However, the Administration had only planned to set up the CoP Secretariat for two years. He wondered how the work to alleviate poverty could be completed in two years. He agreed with Mr Albert HO that the Government lacked determination in alleviating the poverty problem. The Chairman stressed that given the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the Government should demonstrate its determination to combat poverty by adopting specific performance targets. He expressed concern that Government had relied too much on revival of economy as the only means for combating poverty. He pointed out that the disparity between the rich and the poor had worsened even during the boom in the 1990s.

39. Secy/CoP responded that the Government was sincere in preventing and alleviating poverty, otherwise there was no need to set up CoP. Secy/CoP further said that although there was no official poverty line in Hong Kong, the eligibility criteria for CSSA provided the basis for identifying the needy. Given the wide spectrum of work related to poverty, it was necessary to set priority in tackling poverty.

40. Regarding the staffing of the CoP Secretariat, Secy/CoP said that as she had explained to members at the last meeting, a review would be conducted in two years' time on how the work on poverty alleviation should further proceed. A fresh staffing proposal would be submitted to LegCo if there was a continued need for the posts in the CoP Secretariat. Secy/CoP further said that as CoP was to study the poverty problem from a macro perspective, and not to implement measures to prevent and alleviate poverty, she personally had reservations about making the posts in the CoP Secretariat permanent.

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41. The Chairman said that some members had proposed at an earlier meeting that an overseas duty visit should be conducted to better understand the anti-poverty policies and strategies adopted by other countries after studying the research report. The Chairman suggested that a circular be issued to seek members' view on the proposal. Members agreed.

(Post-meeting note : A circular was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 1641/04-05 on 23 May 2005.)

IV. School-based After-school Learning and Support Programmes
[LC Paper No. CB(2) 1306/04-05(01)]

42. Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower (DS(EM)) said that additional provision had been earmarked to enable schools to provide school-based after-school learning and support programmes (the programmes), in collaboration with NGOs where necessary, to students from disadvantaged families. School councils, district school heads associations and NGOs had been consulted on the arrangements for the programmes. DS(EM) further said that a circular had been issued to schools in April 2005 inviting them to apply for the grant for launching the programmes from August 2005. A vetting committee had been set up to examine and approve the applications.

43. Noting that a provision of \$75 million had been earmarked to implement the programmes, Mr WONG Kwok-hing asked about the number of target students and whether the provision was sufficient to meet the needs of these students. Mr WONG also asked whether the grant could be used for providing uniforms to students for participating after-school programmes, such as scout programmes.

44. DS(EM) responded that as different subsidies were being provided to schools and NGOs for organising various programmes for students including those from disadvantaged families, the Administration had set the maximum subsidy per eligible student to \$3,600 per annum for the programmes. It was estimated that at least 20 000 students would benefit from the programmes. The Administration had not set a ceiling on the amount of subsidy for each programme, because the number of disadvantaged students and the capabilities to absorb the additional workload differed from school to school. DS(EM) said that the provision of the subsidy was not to replace existing subsidies/services, but to supplement subsidies/services currently provided by Government and other agencies for helping students from disadvantaged families. DS(EM) further said that the grant was for organizing the programmes and should not be used for providing material assistance to students. If there was a need to provide material support for disadvantaged students in order to encourage them to participate in certain after-school programmes, the school could consider using other available funding or seek sponsorship as appropriate. DS(EM) added that if the response to the scheme was encouraging, the Administration would not rule out the possibility of seeking additional provision for the programmes.

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45. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed concern that the amount of subsidy was insufficient, if the schools were expected to make use of other existing resources to organize after-school programmes.

46. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that to his knowledge, there were about 200 000 children aged between six and 14 living in poverty. According to the Administration's estimate, the allocation was barely sufficient to meet the needs of about 10% of these students. Dr CHEUNG expressed concern that the scope of the scheme was too narrow, and schools would still need to seek other funding or assistance for organizing life-wide learning activities for students.

47. DS(EM) advised that the grant could be used for conducting life-wide learning activities for students. However, such activities were already covered by the Jockey Club Life-wide Learning Fund. He reiterated that the grant was to supplement the existing subsidies so that more needy students could be assisted to participate in after-school programmes, for example, by further reducing the charges for participating in these programmes.

48. Ms LI Fung-ying expressed concern that the target students could not benefit if their schools did not apply for the grant. Ms LI also asked whether schools would be required to set a limit or objective standard on the administrative cost for organising after-school programmes, so that the grant could be used directly on the needy students.

49. DS(EM) said that the circular issued to schools had explained the target groups to benefit from the programmes, and teachers should be able to identify the target students in schools. In addition, Regional Education Offices would also approach schools which had a large number of disadvantaged students and invite them to apply for the grant. DS(EM) further said that while a limit had not been set on the administrative cost for organising these programmes, the vetting committee would examine the details of each application, to ensure that the grant would be used on the needy students.

50. Mr LEE Chuek-yan expressed concern that the programmes would give rise to additional workload in schools and therefore they would not apply for the grant. He asked whether the Administration would encourage NGOs to provide support to schools in organizing the programmes. Mr LEE also asked how Government could ensure that the grant was actually used to subsidise the needy students in participating in after-school learning and support programmes, and was not used to subsidise activities which already received other grants/assistance.

51. DS(EM) clarified that the after-school programmes were open to all students, but the grant would be paid to assist needy students such as those students receiving CSSA or fee reduction. Other students would be expected to pay the normal fee for participating in the after-school programmes. DS(EM) further said that the Administration was aware that the programmes might give rise to additional workload

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on teachers, and schools were encouraged to work in partnership with NGOs which had rich experience in running these programmes.

52. Responding to Dr Fernando CHEUNG, DS(EM) said that the provision of \$75 million for the scheme was a recurrent allocation.

53. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:32 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
14 September 2005