

**For information  
on 22 July 2005**

## **LEGCO PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES**

### **Subcommittee on Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme**

#### **Revised Proposals for Single Parent Recipients under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme**

#### **PURPOSE**

This paper briefs Members on the revised package of proposals for empowering CSSA single parents to achieve self-reliance and social integration in light of comments received.

#### **BACKGROUND**

2. We presented the findings of our single parent review, and a list of options and recommendations to Members of the Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Working Group on the CSSA Scheme and the Women's Commission in April 2005. We also briefed the Sub-Committee on Review of the CSSA Scheme of the LegCo's Panel on Welfare Services on 24 May 2005 and took note of the views expressed by concerned groups at the meeting. In light of the comments received from Members and various sectors, we have revised our proposals arising from the review of existing arrangements for single parents under the CSSA Scheme.

#### **REVISED PROPOSALS**

3. We propose **two changes** to the original proposals:
- (a) to require single parents and other child carers on CSSA with the youngest child aged **12 to 14** (instead of 6 to 14 as originally proposed), to seek at least part-time employment; and
  - (b) to put in abeyance the proposal to pay the single parent supplement only to single parent recipients earning at least \$1,430 a month and with at least one child aged below 15, pending the review on the implementation of the new arrangements.

4. We intend to implement the arrangements in April 2006 to allow time for Social Welfare Department (SWD) to put in place the employment assistance programme, and single parents to make the necessary adjustment.

#### **PROPOSED REQUIREMENT TO SEEK AT LEAST PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT**

5. While public response generally indicates that it is not unreasonable for single parents and child carers with the youngest child aged 6-14 to find part-time work, we have taken into account views expressed that it may be more appropriate to stagger the implementation, with single parents with older age children taking up employment first. In this connection, children aged 12-14 should be at senior primary school or junior secondary school already and could be more independent. We therefore propose that single parents on CSSA with the youngest child aged between **12 to 14** (instead of 6 to 14 as originally proposed) should be required to seek at least part-time employment (defined as a paid job entailing not less than 32 hours a month) during the initial stage of implementation. The same requirement should be applicable to other child carers (for example, the mother in a two-parent family) on CSSA.

6. We estimate that for 2006-07, about 54,000 single parents and child carers with youngest child aged 6-14 would be on CSSA. The figure for those with youngest child aged 12-14 is estimated to be 18,000.

#### **SELF-RELIANCE MEASURES**

7. To help single parents achieve self-reliance, SWD intends to implement a package of arrangements as follows:

- (a) a mandatory employment assistance programme specifically for single parents and other child carers on CSSA with the youngest child aged 12 to 14; and
- (b) intensive employment assistance including basic skills and skills-upgrading training programmes/courses for those with no or limited work experience.

#### **MANDATORY EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME**

8. The mandatory employment assistance programme for single parents and other child carers on CSSA with the youngest child aged 12 to 14 will make reference to the existing Active Employment Assistance (AEA) programme under the Support for Self-reliance Scheme for the unemployed and low-income CSSA recipients without a full-time job. Under this programme, staff of SWD will help participants overcome barriers to employment through various means including:

- conducting advice-focus interviews;
- assisting them to get access to up-to-date labour market information and other support services;

- helping them develop personalized action plans to actively find work;
- arranging direct job matching;
- referring them to join specialized employment assistance programme, as appropriate; and
- providing post-employment support.

9. For those with no or limited work experience, SWD will commission NGOs to provide intensive employment assistance and basic skills and skills upgrading training for these single parents and child carers. We intend to partner with NGOs who are already running Intensive Employment Assistance Projects (IEAPs) for other able-bodied CSSA recipients to capitalize on their experience.

#### **EXEMPTION FROM MANDATORY WORK REQUIREMENT**

10. Exemptions from the mandatory work requirement will be allowed where justified, for example, to temporarily exempt the recently bereaved, those who have recently been victims of domestic violence and those who have to care for disabled family members from participating in the programme.

#### **EXEMPTION FROM COMMUNITY WORK**

11. The single parents and child carers will not be required to undertake Community Work, which is required of other able-bodied recipients under the AEA programme.

#### **SINGLE PARENT SUPPLEMENT**

12. We have already noted in our review the Ombudsman's query on the rationale behind the payment of a monthly single parent supplement of \$225, in view of the already higher standard rate for single parents. International practice also suggests that in terms of income support, single parents should not be treated differently from partnered parents and provided with additional benefits. For example, Australia and the United Kingdom have abolished additional benefits for single parents. We have therefore proposed to turn the supplement into a work incentive. We have noted views expressed during the consultation that withholding the supplement to single parents failing to meet the prescribed work hours may bring hardship to the children and parents concerned. While we believe the proposed use of the supplement as a work incentive is along the right direction, we believe that the need for the change can be examined again when experience on the implementation of the new work requirement has been accumulated. We will therefore keep this proposal under review, and propose no change to the existing arrangements for the single parent supplement at this stage.

#### **MEASURE TO ENCOURAGE COMPLIANCE**

13. Under the current AEA programme for able-bodied CSSA recipients, those who

fail to meet obligations such as attending Work Plan Interviews or participating in an IEAP without good reasons will face sanctions of having two weeks' deduction of CSSA payment for the entire family. We intend to introduce a similar sanction for single parents by deducting \$200 from the CSSA payable to any individual CSSA single parent or family carer who fails to meet similar obligations. This is in line with established practice under the AEA programme for other able-bodied CSSA recipients<sup>1</sup>, but the deduction of \$200 of the single parent's CSSA payment is much less than that applicable to other able-bodied recipients. For reference, the average monthly CSSA payment of single parent cases is \$7214.

## **OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES**

14. Under the new arrangements, only single parents and child carers on CSSA with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 would be required to seek part-time employment under the revised proposal initially. Although children under the age of 12 would not be affected by the proposal, the Government provides a full range of services to support single parent families. Services to assist single parents include:

- (a) for children aged 6-12, single parents/family carers together with other low income parents can make use of the after school-care places provided by NGOs with SWD's subsidy. Starting from 2005-06, full fee-waiving places have been increased from 830 to 1 250;
- (b) the Education and Manpower Bureau has launched the school-based after-school learning and support programme in 2005-06 with an amount of \$75 million for junior primary to senior secondary students to increase the students' learning effectiveness, broaden their learning experiences outside the classroom, and raise their understanding of the community and sense of belonging;
- (c) for children aged 0-6, single parents/family carers can make use of about 29,000 aided nursery places and 950 day crèche places to meet their childcare needs. They can also make use of the occasional and extended hours child care service; and
- (d) single parents/family carers can also obtain counseling and support from an extensive network of 61 Integrated Family Services Centres to help them build up self-confidence, enhance their parenting skills, and strengthen their problem-solving and stress management skills.

## **JOB AVAILABILITY AND COMMUNITY BASED INITIATIVES**

15. For the purpose of providing more proactive employment assistance to unemployed CSSA recipients, since April 2003 district staff of SWD have been mustering job openings within the district through their local network for direct job matching for

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<sup>1</sup> Including single parents with the youngest child aged above 15.

unemployed CSSA recipients to facilitate their returning to the workforce. These staff, namely, Job Developers, will liaise with organizations such as welfare agencies, Kai-fong Associations, shops, schools, firms in the community who have job vacancies or new jobs anticipated to be created.

16. Where appropriate, SWD's Job Developers would also collect feedback from employers to help those recipients who failed in the job selection interview to evaluate their performance so that they can make improvements and be better prepared for future interviews.

17. In the meantime, some NGOs, through the assistance of, for example, the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund and other charitable foundations, have started projects developing training and job opportunities for child-minding and elderly home-help services which should also be suitable for single parents and child-carers to take up as part-time work.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

18. A preliminary estimate indicates that the total cost of running the package for eighteen months from 1 April 2006 to September 2007 would be \$26 million. SWD will approach the Lotteries Fund Advisory Committee and the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust with the aim of re-creating the 50:50 funding model used for existing IEAPs. It is not possible to make an informed estimate of the net financial implications at this stage as it would be difficult to forecast the change in single parent CSSA expenditure with the implementation of the new package.

## **TIMETABLE**

19. Subject to funds being available and to allow time for single parents and family carers to adjust, we intend to implement the revised proposals from April 2006.

## **SUMMARY OF REVISED PROPOSALS ON SINGLE PARENT RECIPIENTS**

20. A summary of the revised proposals is provided below. To recap, our proposals are aimed at helping single parents on CSSA to build up their capacity for self-help, and to integrate with the community as early as possible

- (a) single parents on CSSA with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 will be required to seek at least part-time employment (defined as a paid job entailing not less than 32 hours a month);
- (b) a package of arrangements consisting of a mandatory employment assistance programme specifically for single parents and other child carers on CSSA with the youngest child aged 12 to 14, and intensive employment assistance and basic skills and skills upgrading training in the form of IEAPs for those single parents

and child carers with no or limited work experience will be launched by SWD;  
and

- (c) there will be no change to the existing arrangements for the single parent supplement at this stage.

**ADVICE SOUGHT**

- 21. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

**Health, Welfare and Food Bureau/  
Social Welfare Department  
July 2005**