

立法會
Legislative Council

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seen by the Administration)

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Panel on Welfare Services

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

**Minutes of the 9th meeting
held on Tuesday, 22 November 2005 at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung (Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Public Officers attending : Items I and II
Mr D C CHEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security) 2

Mr Albert AU
Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security) 3

Miss Cherie YEUNG
Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security) 4

Miss Nancy LAW, JP
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)

Mrs Rachel CARTLAND, JP
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security)

Item I

Miss YEUNG Kok-wah
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 4
Social Welfare Department

Item II

Mr CHENG Chok-man
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 1
Social Welfare Department

Mr LAI Shiu-bor
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 2
Social Welfare Department

Mr LUI Hon-kwong
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 3
Social Welfare Department

Mr Kenneth NG Wing Cheung
Senior Statistician (Social Welfare)
Social Welfare Department

**Deputations
by invitation** : Item I

Grassroot Women Poverty Concern Group

Ms CHAN Wai-fong
Member

Ms WONG Shui-ling
Chairman

Concerning CSSA Review Alliance

Ms WONG Shek-hung
Community Organizer

Mr AU YEUNG Tat-chor
Assistant Community Organizer

Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse
(Kwan Fook)

Ms LIU Ngan-fung
Chairman

Ling

May

Women's Committee, Hong Kong Confederation of Trade
Unions

Ms IP Pui-yu
Organizing Secretary

Hong Kong Domestic Workers General Union

Ms PO Lai-wan
Chairperson

Mutual Aid Association for Single Parent Families (HK
Island)

Ms FUNG Kan-ho

Mrs LAU FU Wai-ming

Workers' Association for Professional Domestic Helper

Ms LI Yu-ling

Clerk in attendance : Ms Doris CHAN
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Miss Mary SO
Senior Council Secretary (2) 8

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. Further discussion on new Dawn Project - revised proposals for single parent recipients under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)175/05-06(01) and CB(2)397/05-06(01) to (05))

Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food ((Elderly Services and Social Security) 2 (PAS/HWF(ES&SS)2) briefed members on the supplementary information on the New Dawn (ND) Project for single parents and family carers under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper tabled at the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)473/05-06(01) issued on 22 November 2005).

Views of deputations

2. All deputations opposed the proposal of requiring single parent and family carer CSSA recipients with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 to seek employment for the reason that there were not enough jobs in the labour market suitable for them. Other major views expressed by deputations were summarised as follows -

- (a) single parents/family carers should be encouraged, rather than forced, to seek employment, i.e. no sanction should be imposed for not seeking employment;
- (b) case management support should be provided to help single parents/family carers overcome barriers to employment, having regard to their special circumstances;
- (c) participation in voluntary work and training should be regarded as reasons for exemption to seek employment;
- (d) subsidies, such as transportation and clothing subsidies, should be

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provided to single parents/family carers to facilitate their job-seeking efforts; alternatively, consideration should be given to allowing these recipients to claim money spent on job-seeking from the Social Welfare Department (SWD);

- (e) financial incentive in the form of providing an additional \$150,000 to the operating agencies of Intensive Employment Assistance Projects (IEAPs) under the ND Project which had successfully assisted at least 48 participants to secure an employment with no less than 32 hours and earnings of no less than \$1,600 per month and to stay in employment for at least three months should be scrapped, so as to avoid conflict of interests with the participants; and
- (f) an independent body to consider the views of single parents/family carers aggrieved by the decisions made by SWD concerning the work requirement should be set up outside the Government.

Discussion

3. Mr Frederick FUNG expressed disappointment that the Administration still insisted on requiring single parent/family carer CSSA recipients with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 to seek employment, despite repeated calls from members and deputations alike to scrap it for the reasons already stated at the three previous meetings. Mr FUNG asked the Administration the reason for such insistence.

4. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration) (DDSW(A)) responded that although single parents/family carers with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 would be subject to mandatory work requirement commencing from April 2006, no sanction would be imposed on them for failing to seek employment if genuine efforts had been made. Moreover, exemptions would be granted if there were justified reasons, including if going out to work would have an adverse impact on the families concerned. Although seeking employment was mandatory, these recipients would not be asked to seek jobs in the first instance. SWD staff would invite them to meeting sessions to find out what they could do to help them overcome barriers to employment through various means, such as helping them develop personalised action plans to actively find jobs and referring them to join specialised employment assistance programme. The purpose of the programme was to give a hand to help single parents/family carers achieve self-reliance by taking up paid employment where practicable. DDSW(A) further said that the implementation of the now defunct Ending Exclusion Programme revealed that participation of single parents was low if the programme was made voluntary.

5. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that if the Administration truly wanted to help

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single parents/family carers with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 to move towards self-reliance, the best way was to raise their educational qualifications. Mr LEE pointed out that many entry level jobs nowadays required at least Form Five qualification. Mr LEE asked the Administration whether it was willing to subsidise these recipients, the great majority of whom had low educational attainment, to complete secondary school education or to attend such educational programmes as Project Yi Jin.

6. DDSW(A) responded that the 20 ND IEAPs to be launched in April 2006 were intended to provide intensive employment assistance and basic skills and skills upgrading for those single parents/family carers who required extra help to find jobs because of their lack of work experience. Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security)⁴ supplemented that the Employment Assistance Coordinators of SWD would also refer those single parents/family carers with little or no work experience to other agencies or organisations for training to improve their employability, other than referring them to NGOs running the ND IEAPs. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan remarked that the types of training referred to by the Administration could not replace formal education, which most of these recipients required to truly help them upgrade themselves.

7. The Chairman expressed concern that pushing some 18 000 single parents/family carers with the youngest child between 12 to 14 to seek employment would worsen the existing difficulty in finding menial or casual jobs.

8. DDSW(A) responded that there was no cause for the expressed concern by the Chairman for the two reasons. First, not all single parents/family carers with the youngest child between 12 to 14 would seek employment in one go. SWD Social Security Field Units would invite these recipients to meeting sessions for conducting focused interviews to help them overcome barriers to employment by phases, which would take some time to complete. Those assessed to require more intensive assistance would be referred to undergo training to improve their employability. Second, it was expected that some of these recipients would be exempted from participating in the programme due to justified reasons, such as those who had recently been victims of family violence and those who had to care for disabled family members.

9. Ms LI Fung-ying and the Chairman expressed great disappointment that the Administration continued to turn a deaf ear to the repeated calls for the following by members and deputations -

- (a) participation in voluntary work and training should be regarded as reasons for exemption to seek employment;
- (b) transportation subsidies should be provided to single parents/family

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carers to facilitate their job-seeking efforts;

- (c) single parents/family carers should be encouraged, rather than forced, to seek employment;
- (d) case management support should be provided to help single parents/family carers overcome barriers to employment, having regard to their special circumstances; and
- (e) financial incentive should not be provided to operating agencies of ND IEAPs, to avoid conflict of interests with the participants.

10. DDSW(A) responded that the Administration had fully responded to the views/suggestions set out in paragraph 9 above in its paper for the meeting. DDSW(A) hoped that members could look at the ND Project positively, as it was meant to help single parents/family carers with the youngest child aged between 12 to 14 to achieve self-reliance and social integration and nothing else. DDSW(A) added that a review of the Project would be conducted at the end of the 18-month implementation period.

11. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung moved the following motion which was supported by all members present at the meeting -

“本小組委員會譴責政府當局漠視檢討綜合社會保障援助計劃小組委員會的意見，一意孤行，繞過立法會推行‘欣曉計劃’，罔顧單親家庭的利益和福祉；本小組委員會重申，政府必須撤銷‘欣曉計劃’。”

(Translation)

“That this Subcommittee condemns the Administration for ignoring the views of the Subcommittee on Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme, insisting on bypassing the Legislative Council in the implementation of the ‘New Dawn’ Project, and disregarding the interests and well-being of single parent families; this Subcommittee also reiterates that the Government must abort the ‘New Dawn’ Project.”

12. Mr LEE Cheuk yan requested the Administration to provide a response in writing to the above motion, as well as the suggestions set out in paragraph 9(d) and (e) above, so that a report on the deliberations of the arrangements for single parent/family carers under the CSSA Scheme could be submitted to the Panel. Members expressed support.

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II. Annual adjustment of the standard payment rates under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme and the Social Security Allowance Scheme
(LC Paper No. CB(2)397/05-06(06))

13. PAS/HWF(ES&SS)2 introduced the Administration's paper which provided further information on the recent development of the adjustment mechanism of the standard payment rates under the CSSA and the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Schemes.

14. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan noted from the November 2005 Guide to CSSA that the domestic removal grant had been adjusted downwards by some 20% to 30%. Mr LEE asked whether any consultation had been made on the aforesaid adjustment and what was the adjustment mechanism for such grant.

15. Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security)1 (CSSO(SS)1) responded that the domestic removal grant under the CSSA Scheme was pegged to the Re-accommodation Grant under the Emergency Relief Fund, and the various grants under the Emergency Relief Fund were adjusted every year in April. CSSO(SS)1 however pointed out that the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices (SSAIP), on which the annual adjustment of the standard payment rates under the CSSA Scheme was based, excluded the items which were covered by the special grants under the CSSA Scheme.

Admin 16. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan further asked about the basis on which the domestic removal grant for cases moving to public housing were adjusted annually. CSSO(SS)1 undertook to provide a response in writing after the meeting.

17. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung urged the Administration to adopt a forecast methodology in adjusting the standard payment rates under the CSSA and SSA Schemes, as these Schemes were the only safety net for the needy.

18. PAS/HWF(ES&SS)2 responded that the Administration agreed that if recent movements in the SSAIP and other economic indicators pointed to likely high inflation, consideration could be given to seeking approval for any inflationary adjustments to the standard payment rates ahead of the new annual adjustment cycle.

19. Mr Frederick FUNG said that in order to ensure that the standard payment rates under the CSSA and SSA Schemes would be able to follow the inflation reflected by the SSAIP as closely as possible, one way was to set a ceiling on the inflationary movement of the SSAIP for adjusting these rates.

20. DDSW(A) responded that she did not see the need for Mr FUNG's

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suggestion, as the existing adjustment mechanism of the standard payment rates under the CSSA and SSA Scheme was very transparent and the Administration stood ready to discuss the issue of adjusting these rates ahead of the annual adjustment cycle as requested by members.

21. Mr Frederick FUNG maintained his view that it was necessary to have an objective criterion for adjusting the standard payment rates under the CSSA and SSA Schemes upwards to reflect the inflationary movements in the SSAIP ahead of the annual adjustment cycle, in order to ensure that the basic needs of the needy were met. Ms LI Fung-ying concurred. In response, DDSW(A) said that the Administration was prepared to consider any proposal from members.

22. The Chairman doubted if it was technically feasible to adjust the standard payment rates under the CSSA and SSA Schemes, say, at six months' intervals as he knew that SWD needed a long holiday to launch the new programmes while there were just a few such long holidays in a year.

23. In closing, members agreed to hold a closed meeting to discuss among themselves on the drawing up of a proposal on adjusting the standard payment rates under the CSSA and SSA Schemes upwards to reflect the inflationary movements in the SSAIP ahead of the annual adjustment cycle. Members further agreed to invite representatives from NGOs and academics to give views on the matter.

24. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:36 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
20 December 2005