

**For information  
on 27 April 2006**

## **LEGCO PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES**

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

#### **Release of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance to Discharged Offenders**

#### **PURPOSE**

This paper briefs Members on the arrangements for discharged offenders applying for assistance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme.

#### **BACKGROUND**

2. The CSSA Scheme is designed to provide assistance to Hong Kong residents who suffer financial hardship for various reasons such as old age, disability, illness, unemployment and low earnings to meet their basic needs. The scheme is non-contributory but means-tested.

#### **APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

3. For due-to-be discharged offenders who wish to apply for CSSA immediately on release, they can either make an application by post before their release or through referrals by Welfare Officers of the Correctional Services Department (CSD) or other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Upon receipt of an application, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will process it as soon as possible upon the applicant's release from prison. SWD will arrange office interview and home visit to verify the applicant's circumstances and the information provided. Upon completion of investigation and subject to eligibility being established, SWD will arrange CSSA payment to the discharged offenders. To be eligible for CSSA, able-bodied unemployed applicants aged 15 to 59 are required to participate in the Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme.

## **STARTING DATE OF CSSA PAYMENT**

4. For able-bodied unemployed adults aged 15 to 59 (including discharged offenders) who meet the eligibility criteria for CSSA, they will start receiving their monthly payment one month after the date of application. However, in case of genuine hardship, the Director of Social Welfare may, at his discretion, waive the one month waiting period. For CSSA applicants who are old, disabled or medically certified to be in ill health (including discharged offenders), they normally start receiving their monthly payment from the date of application, subject to eligibility being established.

5. For discharged offenders who have completed drug withdrawal treatment in addiction treatment centres under the CSD, such as the Hei Ling Chau Addiction Treatment Centre, they will be regarded as temporarily unfit for work in the first three months after discharge in the context of CSSA. Subject to eligibility being established, the one month waiting period does not apply and they will receive payment from the date of application. Moreover, these applicants are not required to join the SFS Scheme in the first three months.

## **STREAMLINING OF REFERRAL PROCEDURES**

6. To facilitate discharged offenders in financial difficulties to apply for CSSA, the SWD and the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong, (SRACP) has streamlined the referral procedures from SRACP to the Social Security Field Units (SSFUs) since 2001. Under this arrangement, the SRACP uses a standard referral form to refer discharged offenders who are considered as genuinely in need of urgent financial assistance to SSFUs. Moreover, SWD has also agreed to allow the Society for Community Organisation (SOCO) to adopt similar referral procedures since March 2006.

## **EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE FOR DISCHARGED OFFENDERS**

7. The SFS Scheme consists of two components: the Active Employment Assistance (AEA) Programme and the Community Work (CW) Programme. It aims to provide active assistance to encourage and help unemployed CSSA recipients including discharged offenders rejoin the workforce and move towards self-reliance. Under the AEA Programme, SWD will act as a source of information and facilitator to enable participants to obtain up-to-date labour market information and other support services to overcome barriers to work. They will also help participants develop personalised action plans to find work, monitor progress and render assistance to enhance their employability. The CW Programme aims at helping participants develop a work habit, improve socialisation, increase self-esteem and confidence, paving the way for paid employment. It also provides an opportunity

for them to contribute to society whilst on welfare benefits.

8. Under the AEA Programme, SWD has commissioned NGOs to run Intensive Employment Assistance Projects (IEAPs) with the objective of providing appropriate employment assistance to help CSSA recipients and near-CSSA recipients, including discharged offenders, seek paid employment and achieve self-reliance. As one of the project organizers, the SRACP has launched four projects in the following districts: Wong Tai Sin and Sai Kung, Yau Tsim Wong, Kwun Tong, and Shum Shui Po. The SRACP provides employment-related counseling and training services to discharged offenders and other project participants, including seminars on employment market, employment projects, interview techniques, vocational training for electrical services, construction, security, logistics and retail services, job matching and follow-up services for the employed participants. As with other IEAP projects, short-term financial assistance is also provided for those participants in need to help them cover expenses at the stage of seeking employment or in the initial stage of their employment.

9. Members are invited to note the contents of the paper.

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