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LABOUR AND WELFARE BUREAU
GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT

Central Government Offices
Lower Albert Road
Hong Kong

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30 June 2008

Clerk to Panel
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Attn : Ms Annette LAM)

Dear Ms Lam,

Panel on Financial Affairs

Follow-up to meeting on 10 June 2008

Thank you for your letter of 12 June 2008 on the above issue. I set out below the information on the inter-bureau/departmental Task Force on Poverty (the Task Force) for Members' information please.

The Task Force, established in October 2007, is headed by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, with senior officials from relevant bureaux/departments as members. The Task Force is responsible for monitoring the progress on implementing the recommendations of the former Commission on Poverty (CoP); co-ordinating the Government's efforts in tackling poverty, in particular poverty-related issues which have been cross policy implications; promoting community engagement to tackle poverty and promote self-reliance; and considering studies, researches and analyses for enhancing the understanding of poverty, assessing the impact of poverty alleviation measures and providing input for policy formulation.

One key task of the Task Force is to co-ordinate the Government's efforts in implementing the 53 recommendations made by the former CoP and monitor the progress of implementation. Some of the recommendations of the former CoP have already been implemented (e.g. the Pilot Transport Support Scheme), while others are in progress according to schedule (e.g. the Child Development Fund). A report on this submitted to the Establishment Subcommittee of Finance Committee in January 2008 is attached at **Annex**.

Yours sincerely,



(Miss Helen TANG)
for Secretary for Labour and Welfare

cc Director of Administration (Attn : Mr Tommy POON)
Administrative Assistant to Financial Secretary (Attn : Mr Eric CHENG)

Recommendations of the Commission on Poverty

(I) Understanding Poverty

<i>No.</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Progress</i>
1	Monitor and track the indicators of poverty, and where appropriate, improve them by taking into account the changing needs of the society.	The next update to be conducted in mid-2008.
2	Draw reference to the indicators of poverty as well as other relevant data and information during policy formulation and implementation, and consider the impact of public policies on the different disadvantaged groups and communities.	Ongoing.
3	Conduct and encourage relevant institutions to conduct further poverty researches and analysis in order to facilitate a more informed public policy discourse on the subject.	Ongoing.
4	Conduct evaluative studies on poverty alleviation measures.	Evaluative studies on the Child Development Fund (CDF) to be conducted after the completion of the first batch of pilot projects.
5	Track the impact of taxation and social benefits on household income, in particular on the lower-income group.	The next update to be conducted in 2009.
6	Track the situation of social and earnings mobility in Hong Kong, and carry out longitudinal studies on children and other major vulnerable groups.	Ongoing.
7	Develop indicators or conduct studies to reflect the strength of community networks.	Evaluative study on the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund to be commissioned in the second quarter of 2008.
8	Facilitate the collection of data and statistics to enhance poverty researches and analysis systematically, e.g. the collection of health data or statistics to be taken into account in the long-term development of a territory-wide health record infrastructure	A Steering Committee on e-Health Record Sharing has been set up. Regular international studies on education performance of Hong Kong student to cover, inter alia, correlation between Hong Kong students' social economic status and their achievements.

(II) The Unemployed and the Working Poor

<i>No.</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Progress</i>
9	Review the provision of training, retraining, skills upgrading and life-long learning holistically to ensure that they are market-oriented and have taken into account the needs of the unemployed and the working poor.	A strategic review of the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) being conducted and to be completed in early 2008.
10	Further strengthen training and retraining efforts, including making use of the levies collected from employers of foreign domestic helpers when the resources could be used.	ERB has started drawing down the levy from 1 December 2007 to support its existing operation and services. ERB to increase the number of training places to be provided in 2007-08 by 10 000. ERB to increase the number of training places to 150 000 and 200 000 in 2008-09 and 2009-10 respectively.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Progress</i>
11	Adopt an integrated approach in the delivery of training and employment assistance in order to make the best use of the resources available and provide more targeted assistance to the “difficult-to-employ”.	Study on how to streamline and integrate existing training and employment related services commenced. Completion of Phase 1 study by mid 2008.
12	Review holistically how to achieve the target of “one-stop shop” in the provision of employment assistance, so that able-bodied persons, especially those who are “difficult-to-employ”, can access relevant training and employment assistance more easily.	ERB to launch the first pilot centre in late 2008.
13	Promote economic development, with particular attention to sectors which provide job opportunities for low-skilled workers.	Ongoing.
14	Support the development of social enterprises to assist those who are “difficult-to-employ” to integrate into the job market and capture job opportunities.	The Summit on Social Enterprises was held on 20 December 2007. A support unit in Home Affairs Department (HAD) would be set up in 2008-09 to coordinate and implement measures to promote the development of social enterprises.
15	Strengthen employment support at the district level, particularly in those districts with stronger needs for more targeted support, coupled with local economy and social enterprise development as well as investment in public works and infrastructural projects.	Inviting application for the third phase of the Enhancing Self-Reliance through District Partnership Programme, which will end on 31 January 2008.
16	Give more attention to social and demographic considerations such as population, employment, supporting facilities and other people-based issues during the planning process.	Ongoing.
17	Monitor and review the implementation of the pilot Transport Support Scheme, and consider the appropriate form of incentives to encourage work.	Advanced and commenced the review on the Scheme which was originally scheduled to be conducted in June 2008. The review will be completed in Q1 2008.
18	Consider how to provide suitable support to the able-bodied unemployed and the working poor so that the system will provide the necessary incentives for those who have the ability to work to springboard to employment and achieve self-reliance.	To take into account experience of the one-stop centre to be launched by ERB in 2008.

(III) Children and Youth

<i>No.</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Progress</i>
19	Adopt a holistic and family perspective in policies and measures in assisting children and youth, with particular emphasis on early identification and intervention, evidence-based policy making and intersectoral collaboration.	The Family Council was established in December 2007.
20	Implement the Child Development Fund (CDF) and try out an asset-based model (including a targeted savings element and a mentoring scheme) which encourages longer-term personal development of children from a disadvantaged background.	Will consult the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services at its meeting in January 2008 on the pilot scheme.
21	Further develop the CDF into a longer-term model to promote child development in Hong Kong after the trial stage, and consolidate different resources and funding sources in order to promote a more child-based, asset-based and family-based model.	To conduct a review on completion of the first batch of CDF pilot projects.
22	Improve the impact assessment of existing efforts on the development of children from a disadvantaged background.	Ongoing.

<i>No.</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Progress</i>
23	Make appropriate use of schools as a platform to help address the developmental needs of the disadvantaged children, particularly for the “hidden cases”, through collaboration between the social service and the education sectors.	Some of the 3 000 three-year positions for secondary school leavers will be employed as Programme Workers to support social workers stationed in schools, starting from 2008-09.
24	The work of the Family Commission, if set up, should take into account the needs of children and families from a disadvantaged background.	To be considered by the newly established Family Council.
25	Extend the Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) to all districts in phases and strengthen follow-up social services support to children and families at risk.	CCDS to be fully extended to Kwun Tong in 2007-08 and further extended in 2008-09.
26	Strengthen parent education, with particular focus on the needs of the disadvantaged and hard-to-reach families.	Ongoing.
27	Ensure the education system provides opportunities for children to learn and excel regardless of their socio-economic background, and to provide additional assistance to students with weak family support where appropriate.	Pre-primary Education Voucher Scheme (PEVS), a non-means tested scheme commenced in 2007-08 school year, provides direct fee subsidy to all eligible parents with children attending kindergartens regardless of their socio-economic background. Needy families may apply for additional fee assistance through the existing Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme.
28	Promote school-based and community-based after school programmes for primary and secondary students from disadvantaged families, through promoting intersectoral collaboration among schools and non-governmental/local community organizations.	Ongoing.
29	Strengthen efforts to tackle the problem of non-engaged youths and take into account the assessment conducted by the Task Force on Continuing Development and Employment-related Training for Youth.	Report of the Task Force expected to be available in early-mid 2008.
30	Provide a more intensified form of assistance to youths who have remained on CSSA for a long period and cannot benefit from existing programmes, and evaluate their needs in order to provide targeted and timely assistance.	Commenced the second phase of MY STEP in October 2007.

(IV) The Elderly

<i>No.</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Progress</i>
31	Promote active and healthy ageing as an integral part of the elderly policy to enhance their quality of life and to enable the elderly to live with dignity.	Ongoing.
32	Further improve our support systems for the elderly based on shared responsibility and financial sustainability, and consider more vigorous targeting in using public resources to take care of the elderly most in need of assistance.	Eligibility criteria for elderly families under the Rent Assistance Scheme relaxed from August 2007.
33	Enhance understanding of the problem of the elderly in poverty, including exploring ways to facilitate further poverty researches and analysis, e.g. the collection of health data or statistics to be taken into account in the longer-term development of a territory-wide health record infrastructure.	A Steering Committee on e-Health Record Sharing has been set up.
34	Strengthen efforts to reach out and identify “hidden” and singleton elders, bring them out of isolation, and	Additional resources provided to District Elderly Community Centres (DECCs) and Neighbourhood

<i>No.</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Progress</i>
	refer those in need to the existing public support network, and better leverage on the existing resources including volunteers to address the needs of the hidden elderly.	Elderly Centres (NECs) to enhance the outreaching work.
35	Encourage social inclusion and participation of the elderly in society, and mobilise healthy retirees who are a valuable pool of human resources to help those who are needy in the community.	Additional resources provided to DECCs and NECs to mobilize volunteers, including “young-olds”, for the outreaching work.
36	Ensure equitable and affordable access to health care services and provide a safety net for the poor and vulnerable by putting in place sustainable health care financing arrangements as soon as possible.	To initiate public consultation on health care reform and financing in 2008.
37	Strengthen primary healthcare service for the elderly at the community level, including health promotion and preventive care, and make use of the private doctor network at the community level.	To initiate public consultation on health care reform and financing in 2008.
38	Improve the accessibility of subsidised medical service for non-CSSA recipients, in particular the elderly, through further improving the medical fee waiver mechanism, e.g. further simplify the procedures and lengthen the period waivers of the medical fee waiver mechanism.	To extend the coverage of period waiver for the elderly to include services of the General Out-Patient Clinics without pre-scheduled appointment in around the first quarter of 2008.
39	Provide greater relief on medical fees for needy elders, whether they are on CSSA or not.	To initiate public consultation on health care reform and financing in 2008. The question of safety net would be considered in the context of health care reform and financing.
40	Facilitate elderly applicants to apply for public rental housing, and assist those living in private old buildings who are owner-occupiers but with low income.	The minimum waiting time for family applicants with elderly persons under the Housing Authority’s Families with Elderly Persons Priority Scheme and the Special Scheme for Families with Elderly Persons shortened from 24 months to 18 months with effect from October 2007.
41	Provide better long term planning on the provision of subsidised residential care places for the elderly as well as community care services in the light of increasing demand from an ageing population.	Started discussion with the Elderly Commission on key issues relating to residential care services.
42	<p>Increase the choices of quality residential care places and community care services through a combination of measures –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - consider whether the subsidised residential care service should be means-tested; - examine means to enable a greater extent of co-payment of fees among individuals, their families and the Government, including a means-tested voucher system and assistance to the needy in selecting different services; and - encourage a more robust market comprising quality self-financing and private residential care homes for the elderly providing different services, as well as multiple sources of financing from the individuals and their families. 	Started discussion with the Elderly Commission on key issues relating to residential care services.
43	Encourage further social enterprise development in the provision of elderly services.	The Summit on Social Enterprises was held on 20 December 2007. A support unit in HAD would be set up in 2008-09 to coordinate and implement measures to promote the development of social

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		enterprises.
44	Consider a more relaxed asset limit for elderly CSSA recipients on compassionate grounds, without changing the nature of CSSA as a scheme of last resort for those genuinely in need.	To study this issue within 2007-08.
45	Consider how to provide financial security for the future elderly generations as soon as possible, taking into account the outcome of the on-going study on the sustainability of the three pillars of retirement protection for Hong Kong, viz. the publicly funded CSSA and Old Age Allowance, the Mandatory Provident Fund schemes, and voluntary private savings.	Studies to be completed within 2007-08.

(V) District-based Approach

<i>No.</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Progress</i>
46	Enhance understanding of characteristics and needs of districts, and take them into account in formulating and implementing policies at the district level.	Ongoing.
47	Provide more opportunities to less well-off districts, including physical infrastructure (community facilities), economic and employment opportunities, and enhanced measures.	The Hospital Authority allocated additional provision to the New Territories West Cluster in 2007-08 for service enhancement. Leisure, cultural and community hall facilities will be provided in less well-off districts in the coming years.
48	Encourage district-based initiatives as necessary supplements to formal services provision through providing additional funding sources, better information dissemination of existing funding sources, as well as rationalising and streamlining different funding sources in the longer-run.	Will examine ways to promote greater involvement of Estate Management Advisory Committees in local community building activities and social services.
49	Put in place suitable institutional structure for districts to escalate problems which cannot be dealt with at the district level to the Government so that policy barriers could be removed in a timely manner.	Under consideration.
50	Strengthen the role of District Officers to enhance cross-sector collaboration to address district needs; this should be complemented by central policy support.	In the 2007-08 Policy Address, the Chief Executive pledged to strengthen the role of District Officers.
51	Give District Officers a clearer mandate to coordinate inter-departmental efforts at the district level on key concern areas relating to poverty alleviation and prevention, in order to better respond to local needs, remove local barriers and achieve greater impact.	In the 2007-08 Policy Address, the Chief Executive pledged to strengthen the role of District Officers.
52	Encourage districts to strengthen their capacities through taking the essential steps in analysing and identifying genuine and unmet local needs, mapping out clear and longer-term directions, engaging stakeholders and encouraging cross-sector collaboration, and evaluating effectiveness of poverty alleviation and prevention programmes.	Ongoing.
53	Encourage the establishment of district-based platforms or mechanisms to identify district needs and responses, comprising Government officials, NGOs and district leaders.	Ongoing.