

**For discussion
on 23 October 2008**

LC Paper No. CB(2)15/08-09(01)

**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Policy Initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau for 2008-09**

Purpose

The Chief Executive delivered his 2008-09 Policy Address on 15 October 2008. This paper elaborates on the welfare initiatives in the 2008-09 Policy Address and Policy Agenda.

2008-09 Policy Address and Policy Agenda

2. The Government is fully committed to assisting people in need. Apart from financial assistance provided through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme, we also provide a wide range of preventive, developmental and remedial welfare services and coordinate efforts across the Government in poverty alleviation.

3. In the coming year, we will continue to strengthen our support for the needy. More specifically, we will enhance our services for victims of domestic violence, families and children in need, persons with disabilities and our elderly. We will also alleviate the pressure on low-income groups arising from high food prices. At the same time, we will press ahead with various on-going initiatives in pursuit of our policy objectives.

New Initiatives

Tackling Domestic Violence

Intensify direct support for victims of domestic violence and families in need

4. The Government is committed to combating domestic violence. In the coming year, we will devote additional resources to further strengthen direct support to victims of domestic violence and families in need, including intensifying manpower support, further developing the batterer intervention programme (BIP), enhancing support for various refuge and crisis centres, and continuing to strengthen public education.

(a) Intensify manpower support

5. On top of the additional manpower provided in the last few years, we will further strengthen the manpower of the Family and Child Protective Service Units and Clinical Psychology Units to enhance frontline professional support in handling domestic violence case and further develop the BIP.

(b) Further develop BIP

6. The two-year pilot BIP project launched by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) was completed in March 2008 and it had been proven to be effective in helping abusers change their abusive behaviour. SWD will further develop suitable treatment models to cater for different types of abusers, their spouses / partners and their children.

(c) Enhance support for refuge and crisis centres

7. The Multi-purpose Crisis Intervention and Support Centre was set up in March 2007 on a three-year pilot basis with funding from the Lotteries Fund to provide timely, professional and specialized services to victims of sexual violence and domestic violence and their family members. The services have proven to be essential, and the mode of delivery was considered effective. The Government will provide new recurrent resources to maintain its operation after the expiry of funding from the Lotteries Fund.

8. New resources will be allocated for the continuous operation of the Multi-purpose Crisis Intervention and Support Centre and for strengthening the manpower of the Family Crisis Support Centre, the

Suicide Crisis Intervention Centre, the four Refuge Centres for Women, and the Po Leung Kuk New Comers Ward to provide timely support to victims of domestic violence and vulnerable families, children in need, and survivors of suicides.

Rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities

Provide additional places for rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities

9. To meet the diverse needs of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in different stages of their lives, we will continue to enhance the whole range of rehabilitation services to strengthen the capabilities of the PWDs and facilitate their full integration into society. We will provide additional places for pre-school training, day training, vocational rehabilitation and residential care services, in accordance with the directions set out in the 2007 Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan.

Enhance medical social services for persons with mental health problems and chronic illness

10. The Government is mindful of the welfare needs of persons with mental and chronic illnesses and their family members, and has made continuous efforts to review the needs for, and the operation of, its medical social services in response to changing demands. In tandem with the Hospital Authority's enhancement in its psychiatric out-patient, rehabilitation and oncology services, the Government will provide additional manpower to enhance the medical social services in these areas in order to provide timely and appropriate welfare services to patients and their family members, thereby facilitating their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Short-term food assistance to individuals and families in need

11. The Government fully understands the pressure of high food prices on the low-income groups and has earmarked \$100 million for SWD to invite non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to render short-term food assistance to individuals and families in need. The proposed service will provide direct and immediate support to

individuals/families who are of low income or in poverty, be they new arrivals, single-parent families, individuals/families in need of emergency relief due to unexpected circumstances or those who have not benefited from any of the relief measures announced by the Government earlier this year. We will seek funding approval from the Legislative Council Finance Committee shortly to enable the expeditious implementation of this service.

Elderly Care

Provide additional subsidised residential care places for frail elders

12. The Government is providing about 26 000 subsidised places in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), representing about 46% of all elders staying in RCHEs throughout the territory. We will continue to increase the supply of subsidised residential care places in the coming years, including 249 places in four new contract homes scheduled to come on stream in 2008-09 and 2009-10, and additional places under the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme.

Provide additional subsidised day care places and enhance the service capacity of subsidised home-based services for frail elders

13. To further support frail elders who cannot be adequately taken care of by their family members in the daytime, we will continue to provide additional day care places in districts of high demand.

14. We will also enhance the home-based care services for frail elders. An additional 800 home-based care service places will be provided from December 2008.

Enhance the care for infirm and demented elders in RCHEs

15. Some RCHEs are taking care of elders requiring infirmary care or suffering from dementia. To enhance the support for these elders, we will provide additional funding to these RCHEs so that they can strengthen their manpower to take care of these frail elders.

Extend the District-based Trial Scheme on Carer Training

16. In October 2007, we launched the District-based Trial Scheme on Carer Training (the Scheme) in three districts, namely Eastern and Wanchai, Wong Tai Sin and Sai Kung, and Kowloon City and Yau Tsim Mong. Under the Scheme, we provided funding to 11 District Elderly Community Centres (DECCs) to organise elderly care training programmes and carer support services in collaboration with local organisations. As of September 2008, some 700 individuals had been trained and many of them have become helpers to provide stand-in services for carers or to volunteer in elderly centres. The number of elders served has exceeded 4 000. In view of the encouraging response, we will extend the Scheme in December 2008 to cover all DECCs in the territory. It is expected that an additional 1 500 individuals will be trained in a year's time.

Review on Old Age Allowance

17. We consider that we should target limited public resources to provide more assistance to those elders in need. In view of the ageing population trend, the Government must explore a feasible long-term option for the Old Age Allowance which can enhance the assistance to those elders in need (i.e. raising the level of OAA to \$1,000 per month), but also ensure the sustainability of the non-contributory social security system based on a simple tax system. As such, the Government needs to consider introducing a means test mechanism and also to ensure that the current OAA recipients will not be affected. The Government is working to complete the review on the OAA by year-end. In this context we will also explore whether there is scope to increase the absence period allowed under the OAA scheme.

Progress of Ongoing Initiatives

Poverty alleviation

Coordinating efforts through the Task Force on Poverty

18. The Government attaches great importance to poverty

alleviation. We are committed to providing a safety net and different support services to cater for the basic needs of the poor and improve their livelihood. We also seek to strengthen training and retraining to facilitate those who have the ability to work to join the labour market to achieve self-reliance and alleviate poverty. The Task Force on Poverty will continue to coordinate efforts across the Government in tackling poverty as well as monitor the progress of implementing the recommendations of the former Commission on Poverty (CoP).

Implementing the Child Development Fund pioneer projects

19. Some of the recommendations of the CoP have already been implemented while others are progressing according to the implementation plans. For example, we plan to implement the first batch of pioneer projects of the Child Development Fund in seven regions/districts in Hong Kong (i.e. Hong Kong Island, Kowloon East, Kowloon West, New Territories East, New Territories West, Tin Shui Wai and Tung Chung) in the next few months, with a view to trying out a new model for promoting the longer-term personal development of children from a disadvantaged background.

Social Security

Encouraging and helping able-bodied CSSA recipients to become self-reliant

20. Having regard to the capability and experience of NGOs in rendering employment assistance services, SWD has introduced the Integrated Employment Assistance Scheme in October 2008 and commissioned suitable NGOs to provide ordinary and intensive employment assistance services to unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients aged 15 to 59, so as to assist them to rejoin the workforce and achieve self-reliance. Sixty projects are being operated by NGOs with experience in providing employment assistance services for three years.

Welfare Planning

Studying long-term social welfare planning

21. We undertook in the 2007-08 Policy Agenda to study the long-term development planning for social welfare in Hong Kong through the Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC). SWAC commenced initial consultation in April 2008 by seeking initial views from various stakeholder groups on a number of key issues which are fundamental to the review. The initial consultation period has just ended on 30 September. Taking into account the comments received, SWAC will proceed with the next stage of the study.

Tackling Domestic Violence

Batterer intervention

22. Following the enactment of the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Ordinance 2008¹, SWD has launched a new anti-violence programme (AVP) as provided for under the Ordinance which seeks to change the abusers' attitude and behaviour. The AVP is psycho-educational in nature and suitable for different types of abusers. NGOs have been engaged in delivering the programme. So far, the Director of Social Welfare has approved seven proposals from the NGOs. SWD will coordinate the implementation of AVP, including liaison with the court and NGOs, matching of suitable programmes for the abusers, handling of referrals and reports and monitoring of the service quality and provisions.

23. As mentioned in paragraph 6 above, SWD will in parallel continue to provide BIP and develop suitable treatment models for different types of batterers as an integrated component of their counselling service.

¹ Under the amended Domestic Violence Ordinance, the court may, in granting a non-molestation order, require the abuser to attend a programme approved by the Director of Social Welfare that seeks to change the attitude and behaviour of the abuser.

Enhancing public education and training for professionals

24. SWD will continue to launch publicity campaign and public education initiatives to enhance public awareness of the problem of domestic violence, build up social capital and create a caring and more resilient community. To enhance the frontline professionals' knowledge and skills in handling different types of domestic violence and further promote multi-disciplinary collaboration, SWD will continue to strengthen the training programmes for the relevant frontline professionals.

Implementing the pilot Child Fatality Review Mechanism

25. SWD launched the two-year pilot project to review child death cases resulting from unnatural causes and a Review Panel was formed in February 2008. The review mechanism aims to examine the practice and service issues pertaining to child death cases, identify patterns and trends for formulation of prevention strategies, and promote multi-disciplinary and inter-agency cooperation in the prevention of child death.

26. The Review Panel is now in full operation and will review as many cases as possible within the two-year pilot period. It will publish annual reports with an overview of the cases reviewed but without disclosing the details of individual cases or the particulars of individuals involved. An evaluation will also be conducted at the end of the two-year pilot period with a view to shedding light on how the review mechanism can be improved.

Amendments to the Domestic Violence Ordinance

27. The Domestic Violence Ordinance (DVO) provides civil remedies in the form of injunctive orders to protect primarily individuals in certain specified familial relationships and their children against molestation by the other person. With the commencement of the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Ordinance on 1 August 2008, the scope of the DVO has been expanded, from covering molestation between married couples and heterosexual cohabitants, to cover also former spouse/cohabitants, as well as immediate and extended family members.

The Government will continue its publicity efforts to increase public awareness of the much-expanded protection of the new legislation, and to help victims of domestic violence understand their rights, protection provided by law and support services available in the community.

28. In moving the Resumption of Second Reading Debate of the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Bill in LegCo on 18 June 2008, the Secretary for Labour and Welfare undertook to further amend the DVO to extend its scope to cover same sex cohabitants. We are preparing the draft legislation and will aim to introduce the amendment bill into the Legislative Council within the 2008-09 legislative session.

Rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities

Enhancing transport services for persons with disabilities

29. In tandem with the Government's on-going efforts to improve the accessibility of public transport for persons with disabilities, Rehabus provides point-to-point scheduled and dial-a-ride transport services for persons with disabilities who have difficulties in using public transport. Having regard to service demand, the Rehabus service has been enhanced by the addition of eight new vehicles to the fleet and, within this year, 24 old vehicles will also be replaced. The Rehabus fleet now has 109 vehicles, running a total of 69 scheduled and feeder routes.

Enhancing district-based community support services

30. To help PWDs living in the community acquire their required support services, the Government has adopted a district-based approach to re-engineer the existing services to provide one-stop integrated community support services to PWDs and their family members and carers in their neighbourhood. The Government has earmarked \$34.7 million for setting up 16 district support centres to provide these services to all districts of the territory. These centres are expected to be in operation from January 2009.

Elderly Care

Promoting active ageing

31. Along with the Elderly Commission (EC), we have been promoting active ageing to encourage elders to lead a fruitful life. In this regard, the Elder Academy Scheme has been launched since early 2007 and there are currently 78 elder academies in primary and secondary schools. We have also gained support from seven tertiary institutions for organising elder academy programmes at their institutions. In addition, SWD will continue to work along the same direction through the Opportunities for the Elderly Project.

Upgrading subvented residential care places to provide long-term care for frail elders

32. Under the conversion programme launched in June 2005, a total of 10 700 subsidised residential places for the elderly which do not have long-term care (LTC) element or do not provide continuum of care will be upgraded to LTC places providing continuum of care. As at the end of September 2008, 8 294 places had been converted into 4 467 LTC places.

Continuing with outreaching efforts of elderly centres to singleton and hidden elders

33. In January 2008, we allocated additional annual funding of \$42 million to the 156 elderly centres throughout the territory to enhance their outreach programmes so as to encourage and assist more hidden and singleton elders to develop their social life, and to provide referral and supporting services to those in need. In view of the increasing workload of DECCs brought about by the ageing population and the above enhanced outreaching efforts, we further allocated additional annual funding of \$18 million to DECCs in June 2008 to strengthen their counselling and referral services and their processing of applications for subsidised long-term care services for the elderly. As of June 2008, the elderly centres had reached out to an additional 6 000 singleton and hidden elders, and provided referral and support services to those in need.

Implementing the Integrated Discharge Support Trial Programme for Elderly Patients

34. With the \$96 million earmarked in the 2007-08 Budget, we launched the Integrated Discharge Support Trial Programme for Elderly Patients (the Programme) in March 2008. The Programme aims at enhancing the support to elderly hospital dischargees and their carers with a view to enhancing the quality of life of the elders and facilitating their stay in the community. The first two pilots under the Programme were launched in March and August 2008 in Kwun Tong and Kwai Tsing respectively. The third pilot will be launched in Tuen Mun in the third quarter of 2009. Each pilot will benefit about 3 000 elders and 1 000 carers each year.

Implementing the Home Environment Improvement Scheme for the Elderly

35. The 2008-09 Budget earmarked \$200 million to assist elders who live in dilapidated homes with poor fittings and lack financial means to improve their home conditions. With the funding, we launched the Home Environment Improvement Scheme for the Elderly (the Scheme) in June 2008. Under the Scheme, eligible elderly household can benefit from improvement works and/or fittings up to a maximum of \$5,000 per household. All 41 DECCs throughout the territory participate in the Scheme as delivery agencies. We estimate that a total of 40 000 elderly households will benefit from this five-year scheme.

Training additional enrolled nurses for the welfare sector

36. To alleviate the shortage of nurses in the welfare sector, SWD, in collaboration with the Hospital Authority, has launched a two-year full-time training programme to train enrolled nurses for the welfare sector since 2006. Four classes have been organised so far. Four more classes will be organised from now till 2011. These eight classes will provide 930 training places in total. Tuition fees are subsidised by the Government. Graduates are required to work in the welfare sector for at least two years after graduation. The trainees of the first class graduated in April 2008, and about 75% of them have joined the welfare sector.

Studying the long-term planning for subsidised residential care services for the elderly through a consultancy study led by the EC

37. We have been working with the EC on the long-term planning of elderly welfare services. Arising from the recommendations of the former Commission on Poverty regarding the waitlisting situation of subsidised residential care services, the EC has looked into the key issues involved and embarked on a consultancy study to explore the following aspects:

- (a) how to target subsidised residential care services at elders most in need; and
- (b) how to promote further development of quality self-financing / private residential care services and encourage shared responsibilities among individuals, their families and the society in meeting the LTC needs of the elderly.

The study is expected to be completed in early 2009.

Child Care Services

Promoting flexible child care services to meet the varying needs of families

38. Parents have the primary responsibility to look after their young children. To assist families who cannot take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons, we shall continue to strengthen the provision of flexible child care services in the community.

39. To meet the child care needs of different families, 15 new day small group home places were provided in December 2007, and the number of day foster care places was increased from 40 to 50 in July 2008. Separately, SWD has launched the Subsidy Scheme for Mutual Help Child Care Centres (MHCCCs) in January 2008 to provide incentive to MHCCC operators in strengthening service in the evenings, at weekends and on public holidays. Families with social and financial needs may receive fee subsidy. As at 30 September 2008, eight

MHCCCs have joined the subsidy scheme.

40. In 2008-09, SWD will launch the pilot Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP) in two phases. The project comprises two service components: (a) centre-based care group for children aged three to under six years old; and (b) home-based child care group for children aged under six. The operating hours of the two services will be more flexible, covering the evenings, some weekends and some public holidays. Families with proven social and financial needs will be granted fee subsidy.

41. In October 2008, the first batch of six NSCCP projects will be launched in six locations where the demand for flexible child care services is more pressing, including Tung Chung, Sham Shui Po, Kwai Chung, Tuen Mun, Yuen Long and Kwun Tong. Another five projects will be launched in Wong Tai Sin/Sai Kung, Kowloon City/Yau Tsim Mong, Tai Po/North, Shatin and Eastern/Wanchai in March 2009, thus covering all SWD's administrative districts. The projects will last until the end of March 2011.

42. Separately, we have pledged to provide 100 additional residential places in children's homes as well as boys' and girls' homes to assist families and children in need of out-of-home care in 2008-09. Sixty-four of these places will be in operation by the end of 2008.

Labour and Welfare Bureau

October 2008