

**For discussion on
10 November 2008**

LC Paper No. CB(2)190/08-09(05)

**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Short-term Food Assistance**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on our proposal to provide short-term food assistance to individuals and families in need.

Background

2. The Government fully understands the pressure caused by inflation and has introduced a number of specific initiatives to help relieve inflationary pressure on the low-income groups in the past year. The Chief Executive announced in July 2008 that an amount of \$100 million would be earmarked for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to offer additional food assistance.

3. Pending consultation with stakeholders on the formulation of details on the provision of food assistance with the sum earmarked, SWD already allocated through redeployment of internal resources \$1.2 million to strengthen short-term food assistance currently provided by two NGOs in August 2008.

Project proposal

4. Having considered the views collected (including the views expressed by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, NGOs currently providing short-term food assistance and other NGOs) on the implementation of short-term food assistance projects (including service coverage, target service users, operational mode etc), the Government proposes to set up a total of five service projects over the territory to provide immediate and direct food assistance to individuals and families in need. The number of projects to be commissioned is determined after

due consideration of various factors, including the need to maximise the utilisation of resources for the direct benefits of service users by keeping administrative cost at a minimum yet reasonable level; the need to facilitate effective management and delivery of the service; economy of scale in bulk purchase of food and other items; as well as establishment of efficient partnership and network for identification of those in need and prompt distribution of in-kind assistance. Details of the proposed service projects are set out in the following paragraphs.

Service coverage

5. There will be a total of five service projects covering the territory with one project in each of the following areas –

- (i) Tsuen Wan, Kwai Tsing, Hong Kong Island and other Islands (including Tung Chung);
- (ii) Sham Shui Po, Kowloon City and Yau Tsim Mong;
- (iii) Kwun Tong, Wong Tai Sin and Sai Kung;
- (iv) Shatin, Tai Po and North; and
- (v) Tuen Mun and Yuen Long.

Target service users

6. The target service users are individuals or families who have proven difficulties in coping with daily food expenditure, including those who are unemployed, those from low-income groups, new arrivals, street sleepers, as well as individuals or families encountering sudden changes and facing immediate financial hardship etc. The target service users also include those who have not benefited from any of the relief measures announced by the Government earlier this year, including but not limited to those who –

- (i) have been living in rented rooms / bedspace / roof-top accommodation in private tenement buildings in the six months prior to the date of application for short-term food assistance;

- (ii) do not have separate electricity accounts under their own names;
- (iii) are not recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance / Disability Allowance / Old Age Allowance; and
- (iv) have a monthly income of less than \$10,000.

Scope of service

7. The operating NGOs will be given flexibility in drawing up the operational details of individual service projects in accordance with the general parameters set by the Government, so as to address directly the needs of the respective areas served. Each service project will benefit at least 10 000 persons. In other words, a minimum of 50 000 persons will benefit from this proposal. Each service user will receive food assistance, mainly in the form of dry rations, for a maximum of six weeks. To meet the direct and special needs of the service users, appropriate fresh / frozen food, hot meals, hot meal coupons, baby food, baby formula etc. may also be provided as part of the six-week food assistance. Subject to the review of individual case merits, provision of further short-term food assistance after six weeks may be considered. In exceptional circumstances where the operating NGOs have difficulties meeting the special needs of the clients, food coupons will be issued.

8. The operating NGOs will assess the eligibility and needs of target service users as well as the level and type of assistance to be provided, so as to ensure that the food rendered will be proper and adequate to meet the basic needs of service users. If individual service users have long-term welfare needs and require service other than short-term food assistance, the operating NGOs will refer them to other service units for appropriate welfare service.

9. In line with the Government's continuing effort in promoting tripartite collaboration among the community, the business sector and the Government, the operating NGOs will be required to promote and develop partnership with local communities and corporations in operating short-term food assistance as far as possible. The operating NGOs should also provide effective measures to publicise the service among the target service users, and encourage community groups / district networks to proactively identify as well as refer the target service users to them for

assistance. In particular, the operating NGOs should, in collaboration with the Government and other district organisations, proactively get in touch with needy individuals who have not benefited from the relief measures announced by the Government over the past year and publicise the food assistance initiative among this group, especially tenants of bedspace apartments, cubicle apartments and rooftop structures.

Measures to support other NGOs in operating short-term food assistance

10. Apart from setting up five service projects as detailed above, the Government will continue to support other NGOs in operating short-term food assistance. If these organisations need to identify suitable premises for providing the service, SWD will assist as appropriate. SWD will also provide assistance when these organisations apply for premises managed by the Housing Department at concessionary rent for operating food assistance service. Relevant organisations may apply to SWD for rent and rate subsidy on condition that they meet the eligibility criteria and pass the financial and service assessment. In addition, the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged may also provide funding support for NGOs running such services in partnership with the business sector. SWD will also refer donors to relevant NGOs for donations of food and other daily necessities.

Financial Implications

11. We propose to create a new commitment of \$100 million for setting up service projects over the territory to provide short-term food assistance for individuals and families in need. Out of the total amount of \$100 million, \$60 million will be allocated to meet the operational expenses of the service projects (i.e. \$12 million for each project) including expenses for food and administration. Besides, if required by individual operating NGOs, a maximum of \$2.5 million for each project will be provided for the one-off set up cost to cover expenses for fitting out of premises, purchase of food storage / processing equipment as well as minor furniture and equipment items, transportation arrangement for food collection and delivery etc. The remaining amount of \$27.5 million will be reserved for meeting future service demand which cannot be estimated at the present stage.

Way Forward

12. Subject to Members' comments, we plan to submit the proposal to the Finance Committee for consideration at its meeting in December 2008.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
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