

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1319/08-09

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PS/3/08

Panel on Welfare Services

Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation

**Minutes of the second meeting
held on Thursday, 5 March 2009, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon WONG Sing-chi

Members absent : Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS

Public Officers attending : Items I and II

Mr D C CHEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 4

Miss Crystal LAM
Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 4A

Mr Henry LAI
Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 4B

Ms LEUNG Kwai-ling
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security)

Mr NG Wai-kuen
Chief Social Security Officer 1
Social Welfare Department

Mr Kenneth NG Wing-cheung
Senior Statistician (Social Welfare)
Social Welfare Department

**Deputations
by invitation**

: Item II

Society for Community Organization

Miss SZE Lai-shan
Community Organizer

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

Ms LIU Ngan-fung
Chairperson

亞妹

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr CHUA Hoi-wai
Business Director, Policy Advocacy and International Networks

港島單親互助社

Ms FUNG Hoi-yee
Spokesman

The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong

Mr WONG Kwai-yau
Supervisor

Concerning Group for Women Poverty

Ms HUI Yee-lai

Concerning CSSA Review Alliance

Ms TSE Yuk-man
Community Organizer

Rights for Basic Living Security Association

Ms SZE Choi-lei
Member

Internet Society Hong Kong

Mr Charles MOK
Chairman

Oxfam Hong Kong

Mr CHOI Man-kit

理工大學關注基層組

Mr CHAN Chi-shing

Clerk in attendance : Miss Betty MA
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Miss Florence WONG
Senior Council Secretary (2) 5

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. The Administration's response to the Report of the Subcommittee on Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme [LC Paper Nos. CB(2)974/08-09(01) and (02)]

The Subcommittee deliberated (index of proceedings attached at **Annex**).

2. Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 4 (PAS(W)4) briefed members on the follow-up actions taken by the Administration in response to the Report of the Subcommittee on Review of the Comprehensive

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Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme as detailed in the Administration's paper.

3. Members expressed the following views –
 - (a) pointing out that the last comprehensive review of the CSSA Scheme was conducted in 1996, the basic items covered under the Scheme were not compatible with the present needs. The Administration was urged to conduct a comprehensive review on the CSSA Scheme and keep pace with present needs in determining the items and their relative importance covered by the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices (SSAIP); and
 - (b) as an incentive to encourage CSSA recipients to work and become self-reliant, the Administration should consider further raising the maximum limit of monthly disregarded earnings (DE) and the no-deduction limit for DE under the CSSA Scheme as well as abolishing the rule of allowing no DE for CSSA recipients in cases which had been on CSSA for less than two months.

4. PAS(W)4 made the following responses –
 - (a) the CSSA standard payment rates were adjusted according to the movement of SSAIP annually in order to maintain the purchasing power of payments. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) had started the preparatory work for conducting a new round of the Household Expenditure Survey (HES) on CSSA households in 2009-2010 to update the latest expenditure patterns of CSSA households and the weighting of SSAIP;
 - (b) the CSSA Scheme, which was non-contributory, aimed to provide a safety net for those who could not support themselves financially to meet their basic needs. Apart from payments under CSSA, there were other Government social services covering education, housing, health and welfare available to those in need;
 - (c) at present, a four-member CSSA family without any income could receive on average a monthly CSSA payment of \$9,920. CSSA recipients could flexibly deploy their CSSA monthly payments to procure goods and services according to their own circumstances and needs. Under the new DE arrangements since 1 December 2007, CSSA recipients could retain the first \$800 of their monthly earnings from employment and half of the remaining monthly earnings until the total amount of DE reached the maximum limit of \$2,500. The household income for a four-member CSSA family with two employed adults enjoying maximum DE would be \$14,920.

Action

During the period from April 2008 to January 2009, the financial implications of the DE arrangements was \$709 million; and

- (d) the DE arrangements aimed to encourage CSSA recipients to find and remain in employment. The proposal of abolishing the rule of no DE for recipients in cases which had been on CSSA for less than two months would mean that it would be possible for those who were in employment and at income level higher than those currently eligible for CSSA to come under the CSSA safety net.

Admin 5. The Administration was requested to -

- (a) provide information on the goods and services covered by SSAIP, the basis for inclusion and for determining the relative weighting of the items as well as the review mechanism of SSAIP;
- (b) provide an update of the implementation of the new DE arrangements under the CSSA Scheme since 1 December 2007; and
- (c) consider further raising the maximum limit of monthly DE and the no-deduction limit for DE as well as relaxing the rule of allowing no DE for CSSA recipients in cases which had been on CSSA for less than two months.

II. Provision of Internet access charges under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)974/08-09(03) to (06), CB(2)1019/08-09(01) and CB(2)1029/08-09(01) to (04)]

6. The Subcommittee received views from 11 deputations on the provision of Internet access charges under the CSSA Scheme. The major views were summarized below –

- (a) access to computer facilities and the Internet were necessary for school attending child recipients of CSSA as it was now very common for students to use the Internet for learning purpose. The lack of access to the Internet would impede the learning and development of CSSA children, which would result in inter-generation poverty;
- (b) some CSSA households could not afford to own a computer and pay the recurrent Internet access charges, and some other CSSA recipients had to meet the expenses within the standard rates by cutting other daily expenses; and

Action

- (c) while free computers and Internet facilities were available to students in schools, public libraries and youth centres, students encountered a number of difficulties in using the facilities due to the limited opening hours, long waiting time, short time slots and so on. Instead of relying on Internet service providers to provide free access services, the Administration should review the CSSA Scheme with a view to meeting the expenses by CSSA.

7. PAS(W)4 made the following responses –

- (a) recognising computers and Internet access were useful learning tools, the Education Bureau (EDB) had partnered with the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) to launch a Computer Recycling Programme (CRP) in February 2009. Under CRP, EPD would provide recycled computers to needy students while EDB would arrange for one-year free Internet access service for successful applicants. A review on CRP would be conducted in due course;
- (b) free computers and Internet facilities were also available to students at various locations across the territory. Schools were encouraged to open computer rooms and facilities for the use of needy students after school. Students could also have free access to these facilities at public libraries and Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres even in evenings or during weekends. In addition, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department would standardise the opening days of their major and district libraries to seven days a week from 1 April 2009 with opening hours increased by about 10 hours to 71 hours a week; and
- (c) the Digital Inclusion Task Force (DITF) had advised the Government on the formulation of relevant strategies and initiatives for addressing digital inclusion issues and agreed to give priority to the needy groups, as detailed in the Administration's paper.

8. Members were of the views that –

- (a) the Administration should recognise that access to computer facilities and the Internet was necessary and basic items for students irrespective of whether they were on CSSA, and therefore the relevant expenses should be provided for in the CSSA Scheme;
- (b) given that only one-year free Internet access service was provided to successful applicants under CRP, members were concerned whether the CSSA households could afford the subsequent Internet access

Action

charges although a favourable Internet access service plan would be offered; and

- (c) according to the survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department between July and September 2008, about 2.9% of children aged 10 or above did not have computers at home. Some members cast doubt as to whether the number was underestimated. Given that the number of recycled computers available was limited and the programme was not exclusive for school attending child recipients of CSSA, members were concerned whether the programme could fully meet the demand from children on CSSA.

9. PAS(W)4 reiterated that the CSSA Scheme aimed to meet the basic needs of those who could not support themselves financially and it had taken special care of children through the provision of higher standard rates and various special grants. Considering computer and Internet access were useful learning tools, EDB had partnered with EPD and launched a CRP for primary and secondary students. Based on past experience, the Administration hoped that the programme could meet the demand from needy students, including school attending child recipients of CSSA.

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10. The Administration was requested to provide –

- (a) further information on CRP, such as the estimated number of beneficiaries and the basis for the projection, and whether students on CSSA would be guaranteed to be provided with a computer and free Internet access service under the programme; and
- (b) information on whether and how the Administration could look into the aspect of Internet access charges when conducting the next round of HES on CSSA households in 2009-2010.

III. Any other business

Discussion items for the next meeting

11. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting to be held on 6 April 2009 –

- (a) follow-up discussion on the provision of Internet access charges under the CSSA Scheme; and
- (b) DE arrangements under the CSSA Scheme.

Action

12. In view that the discussion on the assistance for needy students to gain access to computer facilities was also related to issues that were under the purview of EDB, members agreed that representatives of EDB and members of the Panel on Education should be invited to attend the next meeting to discuss the item.

13. The Chairman suggested that the Administration be invited to provide a response to the Report of the Subcommittee on Elderly Services relating to the provision of residential care services for the elderly at the next meeting. Members agreed.

(Post-meeting note : On the advice of the Administration and with the concurrence of the Chairman, the Administration would brief the Subcommittee at the next meeting on the improvement measures to residential care services for the elderly under the 2009-2010 Budget.)

14. Members further agreed that the Subcommittee would discuss the following issues at future meetings –

- (a) review of SSAIP; and
- (b) operation of discretionary mechanism under the CSSA Scheme.

15. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:57 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
14 April 2009

**Proceedings of the second meeting of the
Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation
on Thursday, 5 March 2009, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
<i>Agenda item I – The Administration's response to the Report of the Subcommittee on Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme</i>			
000000 – 000216	Chairman	Opening Remarks	
000217 – 000504	Administration	Follow-up actions taken by the Administration in response to the Report of the Subcommittee on Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistant (CSSA) Scheme	
000505 – 000730	Chairman Administration	An update of the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices (SSAIP) movements	
000731 – 002342	Mr LEE Cheuk-yan Administration Chairman	<p>Views of Mr LEE Cheuk-yan that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) a comprehensive review on SSAIP should be carried out to assess whether the basic items and CSSA payment levels were adequate to meet the basic needs of CSSA recipients; (b) a new category of unemployment assistance should be introduced; (c) separate statistics should be kept in respect of single elderly CSSA recipients; and (d) the rule of allowing no disregarded earnings (DE) for CSSA recipients in cases which had been on CSSA for less than two months should be relaxed to alleviate the difficulties faced by low-income families <p>The Administration's response that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the average monthly CSSA payments for a 4-member family without any income was \$9,920, which was higher than the average monthly income of a 4-member non-CSSA family in the lowest 20% income group; (b) special grants were provided for elderly CSSA recipients to meet their specific needs at old age. At present, the average monthly CSSA payment for a singleton elderly recipient was \$4,049; and (c) it was the Government's policy to encourage CSSA recipients to work and become self-reliant. As the CSSA Scheme was non-contributory, the Administration had to strike a balance between providing CSSA recipients with more financial incentives through the provision of DE to find and remain in employment, and maintaining DE at a level which would not attract entry into the CSSA net. 	

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
002343 – 003220	Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che Administration Chairman	<p>Views of Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che that the Administration should conduct a comprehensive review of the CSSA Scheme expeditiously as the last review was conducted in 1996</p> <p>The Administration's response that the Household Expenditure Survey (HES) on CSSA households would be conducted every five years. The CSSA standard rates would be adjusted annually according to the movement of SSAIP in order to maintain the purchasing power of the CSSA payments</p> <p>The Administration was requested to provide information on the components of SSAIP and review the items of goods and services consumed by CSSA recipients</p>	Admin to provide information
003221 – 004014	Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung Chairman Administration	<p>Views of Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung that –</p> <p>(a) a comprehensive review on the CSSA Scheme conducted to ensure that the CSSA payments could keep pace with the present needs and were adequate to meet the essential needs, e.g. access to the Internet for learning purpose; and</p> <p>(b) instead of requiring CSSA recipients to submit applications to different bureaux/departments for various subsidies and social services, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) should coordinate the applications and provide one-stop service</p> <p>The Administration's response that –</p> <p>(a) the objective of CSSA was to provide a safety net of last resort for those who could not support themselves financially. School children might receive various kinds of special grants to cover school-related expenses. Apart from payments under CSSA, there were also other Government social services available to those in need; and</p> <p>(b) concerted efforts had been made by various bureaux and departments to promote access to information technology for students in low-income families</p>	
004015 – 004729	Mr Alan LEONG Administration	<p>Views of Mr Alan LEONG that instead of taking fragmented measures by different bureaux, the Administration should conduct a comprehensive review of the meaning of basic needs items under the CSSA Scheme</p> <p>The Administration's response that –</p> <p>(a) concerted efforts had been made by different bureaux to provide a series of support measures for those in need as appropriate; and</p> <p>(b) the CSSA Scheme had taken care of the special needs of children. Students in low-income families could also apply for various forms of subsidies to meet their development needs,</p>	

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		including access to the Internet. In addition, CSSA recipients could flexibly deploy their CSSA monthly payments to procure goods and services according to their own circumstances and needs.	
004730 – 004803	Mr WONG Sing-chi Chairman	Concern about the access to the Internet by children on CSSA	
004804 – 005529	Chairman Administration	Discussion on the implementation of the new DE arrangements since 1 December 2007 and the viability of further raising the no-deduction limit for DE	Admin to provide information
005530 – 005730	Mr LEE Cheuk-yan	Proposed issues for future discussion – (a) review of the DE arrangements (in particular the rule of allowing no DE for recipients who had been on CSSA for less than two months) so as to encourage the unemployed to work or low-income earners to remain in employment, instead of relying on CSSA; and (b) operation of discretionary mechanism under the CSSA Scheme	
005731 - 005747	Mr Ronny TONG Chairman	Proposal to further discuss the DE arrangements under the CSSA Scheme	
005748 – 005948	Chairman Administration	Outstanding items for future discussion	
<i>Agenda item II – Provision of Internet access charges under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme</i>			
005949 – 010257	Chairman	Welcoming remarks	
010258 – 010553	Society for Community Organization	Presentation of views [LC Paper No. CB(2)1019/08-09(01)]	
010554 – 010920	Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse (Kwan Fook)	Presentation of views [LC Paper No. CB(2)1029/08-09(01)]	
010921 – 011235	The Hong Kong Council of Social Service	Presentation of views [LC Paper No. CB(2)1029/08-09(02)]	
011236 - 011547	港島單親互助社	Presentation of views [LC Paper No. CB(2)974/08-09(05)]	
011548 – 011922	The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong Chairman	Presentation of views [LC Paper No. CB(2)974/08-09(06)]	
011923 – 012145	Concerning Group for Women Poverty	Presentation of views	
012146 – 012513	Concerning CSSA Review Alliance	Presentation of views	

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
012514 – 012836	Rights for Basic Living Security Association	Presentation of views	
012837 – 013144	Internet Society Hong Kong	Presentation of views [LC Paper No. CB(2)1029/08-09(03)]	
013145 – 013451	Oxfam Hong Kong	Presentation of views	
013452 – 013805	理工大學關注基層組	Presentation of views [LC Paper No. CB(2)1029/08-09(04)]	
013806 – 013916	Chairman Administration	The Administration's advice on the various measures taken to promote access to information technology for students in low-income families, such as the setting up of the Digital Inclusion Task Force (DITF) and the implementation of the Computer Recycling Programme (CRP) jointly by the Education Bureau (EDB) and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD)	
013917 – 014241	Mr LEE Cheuk-yan Administration	Concerns raised about – (a) the justifications for not providing Internet access charges under the CSSA Scheme; (b) the way forward for providing free Internet service for successful applicants under CRP, as the programme lasted for one year only; and (c) representativeness of the representative from SWD in DITF The Administration's clarification that SWD's representative in DITF was a Principal Social Work Officer responsible for information technology development and services in SWD. Efforts as detailed in paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper had been taken to assist students to gain access to the Internet	
014242 – 014721	Mr Ronny TONG Chairman Administration	Views of Mr Ronny TONG that the \$63 million earmarked for education programme for Internet users under the 2009-2010 Budget did not address the problem of lacking access to the Internet by children on CSSA The Administration's response that CRP had just been implemented and its effectiveness would be reviewed in due course. Needy students could apply for CRP to gain immediate access to computer facilities The Administration was requested to provide the estimated number of beneficiaries under CRP and the basis for projection, and whether all students on CSSA would be provided with computers and free Internet access service upon application for the programme	Admin to provide information
014722 – 015042	Mr WONG Sing-chi Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse (Kwan Fook) Administration	Whether CRP could adequately meet the need for computer facilities and Internet access by school attending child recipients of CSSA According to the survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department between July and September 2008,	

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
		about 2.9% of children aged 10 or above did not have computers at home. Although the number of recycled computers available was limited, based on past experience, it was hoped that the demand for computer facilities by needy students could be met under CRP.	
015043 – 015605	Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che Administration Chairman The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong	Basis for the projection on the estimated number of beneficiaries of CRP Concern about how CSSA students could meet the Internet access charges after expiry of the one-year free service plan	
015606 – 015928	Chairman Administration	Computers and Internet access were basic needs items to be covered under the CSSA Scheme The Administration's response that the CSSA Scheme provided a safety net to meet basic needs. Computers and Internet access were ideal learning tools. To help needy students gain access to computer facilities, EDB had partnered with EPD to launch a CRP for needy students in February 2009	
015929 – 020243	Mr LEE Cheuk-yan Administration	Whether and how the Administration could look into the aspect of Internet access charges when conducting the next round of HES on CSSA households in 2009-2010	
020244 – 020349	Chairman	Invitation of deputations to give further views	
020350 – 020420	Concerning Group for Women Poverty	Rights of children on CSSA should be safeguarded	
020421 – 020507	理工大學關注基層組	Internet access was basic needs of school attending child recipients of CSSA	
020508 – 020620	Internet Society Hong Kong	Concern about meeting the recurrent charges of Internet access by CSSA recipients	
020621 – 020715	Concerning CSSA Review Alliance	Difficulties faced by CSSA recipients in cutting daily expenses to meet the Internet access charges within the CSSA standard payment rates	
020716 – 020804	Society for Community Organization	Basis for the projection on the number of target beneficiaries under CRP and justifications for not including Internet access charges as basic needs items covered by the CSSA Scheme	
020805 – 021205	Administration Chairman Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che	Discussion items for the next and future meetings	