

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2649/10-11
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/MP

Panel on Manpower

Minutes of special meeting
held on Tuesday, 23 November 2010, at 9:00 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan (Chairman)
Hon LI Fung-ying, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon CHAN Kin-por, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
- Member attending** : Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
- Members absent** : Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, GBS, JP
Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, BBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou

**Public Officers
attending** : Item I

Mrs Cherry TSE LING Kit-ching, JP
Commissioner for Labour

Mr Franco KWOK Wai-fan
Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour & Welfare (Poverty)

Ms Betty NG Shuk-fong
Senior Labour Officer (Employment Services)
(Transport Support Scheme)
Labour Department

**Attendance
by invitation** : Item I

Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions

Mr LAM Cho-ming
Organizing Secretary

Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs

Miss LAW Pui-shan
Policy Research Officer

Hong Kong Domestic Workers General Union

Ms CHUNG Bik-mei
Committee member

The Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions

Mr LAM Chun-sing
Director of Social Affairs Committee

Lei Muk Shue Community Concern Group

Mr WONG Tak-chi
Convenor

The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions -
Rights & Benefits Committee

Miss Alice MAK Mei-kuen
Member

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr Peace WONG
Officer, Policy Research and Advocacy

The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan
Pastoral Centre for Workers (Kowloon)

Mr HO Tin-lok
Programme Officer

San Po Kong Workers' Group Alliance

Ms LEE Ka-fung
Vice Chairman

Civic Party

Mr Stanley CHAN
Vice-Chairman of KLE Branch

New Territories Evangelical Ambassador

Ms LAW Lai-ping
Group Member

The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan
Pastoral Centre for Workers (New Territories)

Mr YU Siu-po
Programme Officer

North District Employment Concern Group

Mr TSANG Chun-ching
Group Member

Beauty and Intellection House

Ms Venny KWOK
Group Member

Individual

Mr TANG Ka-piu
Islands District Council member

The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan
Pastoral Centre for Workers (Hong Kong Island)

Mr KONG Kwai-sang
Assistant Programme Officer

Friends of Yuen Long

Mr LEUNG Shek-lun
Committee Member

Individual

Ms TANG Wai-kuen

Youth Volunteer Team of the Hong Kong
Confederation of Trade Unions

Mr TAM Kin-chung
Representative

Labour-Welfare Policy Group of Democratic Party

Mr LO Kin-hei
Member

Hong Kong Buildings Management and Security
Workers General Union

Ms TAM Yuen-yan
Representative

Kwai Chung Estate Striving for the Poor Concern Group

Miss Vincci WONG
Representative

Tin Ching Community Service Centre

Mr Michael WONG Chun-tat
Community Worker

Kwai Fong Estate Striving for the Right Concern Group

Mr LAI Chi-po
Representative

Strive for the Transportation Allowance Concern Group

Ms TSANG Shui-ha
Representative

Kwai Chung Estate Labour Right Concern Group

Mr Simon LEUNG Kam-wai
Representative

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and
Progress of Hong Kong

Mr NGAN Man-yu
Manpower Deputy Spokesperson

Hong Kong Women Development Association Limited

Ms AU YEUNG Po-chun
Vice-Chairperson

Think Tank of New Territories Youth

Mr Benny NG
Deputy Convenor

Housing Rights Concern Group

Mr CHUI Hong-sang
Representative

Grassroot Workers Concern Group

Ms CHAN C
Representative

Society for Community Organization

Mr NG Wai-tung
Community Organizer

Singleton Concern Group

Mr LAM Chiu
Representative

Subsidy on Transport Fee Concern Alliance

Mr YAU Kin-man
Representative

Community Development Alliance

Mr CHAN Yu-cheung
Project Worker

Individual

Mr Ivan WONG Yun-tat
Kwai Tsing District Council member

Neighborhood and Worker's Service Centre

Mr LOONG Tsz-wai
Community Worker

Individual

Mr LI Sai-wing

Clerk in attendance : Mr Raymond LAM
Chief Council Secretary (2) 1

Staff in attendance : Miss Josephine SO
Senior Council Secretary (2) 1

Ms Kiwi NG
Legislative Assistant (2) 1

Ms Camy YOONG
Clerical Assistant (2) 1

Action

**I. Provision of employment-related transport subsidy
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)343/10-11(01) and (02))**

The Chairman reminded the deputations attending the meeting that they were not covered by the protection and immunity provided under the Legislative Council (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance (Cap. 382) when addressing the Panel. At the invitation of the Chairman, a total of 38 deputations and individuals presented their views on the subject matter.

Action

Views of deputations

2. Mr LAM Cho-ming presented the views of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions ("HKCTU") as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(01)).
3. Miss LAW Pui-shan presented the views of the Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(02)).
4. Ms CHUNG Bik-mei presented the views of the Hong Kong Domestic Workers General Union as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(03)).
5. Mr LAM Chun-sing presented the views of the Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(04)).
6. Miss Alice MAK presented the views of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions - Rights & Benefits Committee as set out in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(06)).
7. Mr HO Tin-lok presented the views of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers (Kowloon) as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(08)).
8. Ms LEE Ka-fung presented the views of San Po Kong Workers' Group Alliance as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(09)).
9. Mr Stanley CHAN presented the views of the Civic Party as set out in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(10)).
10. Ms LAW Lai-ping presented the views of New Territories Evangelical Ambassador. She considered that the employment-related transport subsidy should be extended to cover people taking up voluntary part-time work.
11. Mr YU Siu-po presented the views of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers (New Territories) as set out in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(12)).

Action

12. Mr TSANG Chun-ching said that the North District Employment Concern Group welcomed the Administration's proposal to extend the employment-related transport subsidy scheme to cover all districts in the territory. The Group considered that the Administration should raise the ceiling of applicants' personal assets and the amount of allowance.

13. Ms Venny KWOK queried the rationale for the Administration's imposition of the personal asset limit requirement on people applying for employment-related transport subsidy.

14. Mr TANG Ka-piu, Islands District Council member, presented the views as detailed in his submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(16)).

15. Mr KONG Kwai-sang presented the views of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers (Hong Kong Island). He, in particular, requested the Administration to retain the individual-based mechanism for assessing applicants' income and assets, in implementing the newly proposed transport subsidy scheme.

16. Mr LEUNG Shek-lun presented the views of Friends of Yuen Long. He said that to encourage low-income workers to stay in employment and to apply for employment-related transport subsidy, the Administration should relax or drop the requirements on applicants' income, assets and working hours.

17. Ms TANG Wai-kuen shared the view that to enable more low-income earners to benefit from the scheme, the Administration should relax the eligibility and personal asset limit requirements, and consider turning the scheme into a long-term support measure.

18. Mr TAM Kin-chung presented the views of Youth Volunteer Team of HKCTU, as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(21)).

19. Mr LO Kin-hei presented the views of the Labour-Welfare Policy Group of Democratic Party as set out in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(22)).

20. Ms TAM Yuen-yan presented the views of the Hong Kong Buildings Management and Security Workers General Union. She said that the Union strongly requested that to allow more low-income employees to benefit from the scheme, the Administration should relax the eligibility criteria and raise the monthly income ceiling as well as the personal asset limit for applicants.

Action

21. Mr WONG Tak-chi presented the views of Lei Muk Shue Community Concern Group as set out in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(05)).

22. Mr Peace WONG presented the views of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(07)).

23. Miss Vincci WONG presented the views of Kwai Chung Estate Striving for the Poor Concern Group as detailed in its joint submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(23)).

24. Mr Michael WONG presented the views of Tin Ching Community Service Centre as detailed in its joint submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(23)). He strongly requested the Administration to retain the individual-based mechanism for assessment of eligibility for transport subsidy, in implementing the new Work Incentive Transport Subsidy ("WITS") Scheme.

25. Mr LAI Chi-po presented the views of Kwai Fong Estate Striving for the Right Concern Group as detailed in its joint submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(23)). He urged the Administration to consider further relaxing the eligibility criteria under the new WITS Scheme to make it operate on a long-term basis.

26. Ms TSANG Shui-ha presented the views of Strive for the Transportation Allowance Concern Group as detailed in its joint submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(23)). She, in particular, requested the Administration to raise the monthly income ceiling for a person to receive transport subsidy under the new scheme.

27. Mr Simon LEUNG presented the views of Kwai Chung Estate Labour Right Concern Group as detailed in its joint submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(23)). He considered that the scope of the new WITS Scheme should be relaxed to also include part-time workers. The amount of allowance for eligible persons should be calculated on the basis of 72 hours of work in every four weeks, and people who worked less than 72 hours in every four weeks might receive the allowance *pro-rata* according to the actual number of working hours, with a view to benefiting part-time employees.

Action

28. Mr NGAN Man-yu presented the views of Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(24)).

29. Mr Benny NG presented the views of Think Tank of New Territories Youth as outlined in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(27)).

30. Mr CHUI Hong-sang presented the views of Housing Rights Concern Group as detailed in its joint submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(28)).

31. Ms C CHAN presented the views of Grassroot Workers Concern Group as detailed in its joint submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(28)).

32. Mr NG Wai-tung presented the views of Society for Community Organization ("SoCO") as detailed in its joint submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(28)). He said that the Administration should consider raising the monthly income limit for eligible applicants and allowing them to choose to be means-tested either on an individual or household basis.

33. Mr LAM Chiu presented the views of Singleton Concern Group as detailed in its joint submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(28)).

34. Mr YAU Kin-man presented the views of Subsidy on Transport Fee Concern Alliance as detailed in its joint submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(28)). He supported the proposal that applicants should be allowed to choose to be means-tested either on an individual or household basis.

35. Mr CHAN Yu-cheung presented the views of Community Development Alliance as follows -

- (a) the Administration should raise the monthly income limit for receiving transport subsidy and set it at a level higher than the existing \$6,500 under the Transport Support Scheme ("TSS"), by making reference to the income threshold for one-member households to apply for public rental housing;
- (b) applicants who worked less than 72 hours per month should be eligible for transport subsidy calculated on a *pro-rata* basis;

Action

- (c) applicants should be given the choice of undergoing a means test on a household basis or individual basis; and
- (d) the amount of subsidy provided for eligible applicants under the new WITS Scheme should be reviewed and adjusted on an annual basis.

36. Mr Ivan WONG, Kwai Tsing District Council member, presented the views as detailed in his submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(35)).

37. Mr LOONG Tsz-wai presented the views of Neighborhood and Worker's Service Centre as detailed in its joint submission with several other organizations (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(23)).

38. Mr LI Sai-wing shared the views of certain deputations that the Administration should introduce relaxation measures in implementing the new WITS Scheme, and put it into implementation as early as possible.

39. Ms AU YEUNG Po-chun presented the views of Hong Kong Women Development Association Limited as set out in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)358/10-11(25)).

Administration's responses to the deputations' views

40. Commissioner for Labour ("C for L") made the following responses -

- (a) on the recommendation of the former Commission on Poverty ("CoP"), the Government had, since June 2007, introduced TSS on a pilot basis to provide time-limited transport subsidy for needy job-seekers and low-income employees residing in four designated remote districts, namely Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, North and Islands. The former CoP chose these four districts because the labour supply far outstripped the job opportunities available locally, making cross-district employment inevitable. As the subsidy was just provided for a period of 12 months, TSS was essentially a short-term incentive for residents in the remote districts to encourage them to "go out" and seek jobs or work across districts;

Action

- (b) when relaxation measures were introduced to TSS in July 2008, the Administration undertook to conduct an overall review of TSS one year after the implementation of the relaxation measures. Among other things, the review was aimed at evaluating whether the policy objective of TSS had been achieved. It also assessed the overall effectiveness of TSS, the case processing procedures and practices of the non-government organizations that had been enlisted as service providers, the *modus operandi* and control and monitoring measures of TSS. According to a telephone survey conducted on TSS recipients in 2009 ("the survey"), 99% of admitted applicants were already in employment before they were admitted to TSS and 94.3% continued employment after exhaustion of the 12-month entitlement. As at September 2010, out of the 36 158 admitted applicants with approved Cross-district or On-the-job Transport Allowance, only 17 068, representing 47.2%, involved inter-district travels;
- (c) in the light of the changes in public expectation on the purpose and objective of providing transport subsidy for the low-income group and as announced by the Chief Executive in his 2010-2011 Policy Address, the Administration had decided that a new WITS Scheme should be introduced to replace TSS. The new scheme would aim at relieving low-income earners' burden of travelling expenses arising from commuting to and from work;
- (d) the new WITS Scheme was at the planning stage. The Administration was at the moment drawing up the operational details of the scheme. During the process, the Administration would continue to facilitate sustained employment by job seekers and consider carefully views on the WITS Scheme taking into account the twin policy objectives of helping needy job seekers and employees and ensuring prudent use of public funds;
- (e) regarding the amount of transport subsidy to be provided under the proposed WITS Scheme, the Administration would make reference to available statistical data. A General Household Survey conducted by the Census and Statistics Department in the second quarter of 2010 suggested that the average monthly expense of the target beneficiaries on public transport for travelling to and from

Action

work amounted to about \$420 and that for those who needed to work across districts was \$460. A transport subsidy at \$600 per eligible person per month should therefore provide sufficient support to most people in need; and

- (f) the Administration noted the difficulties of some people in getting employment. The Labour Department ("LD") would do its best to assist the unemployed to enter the labour market. Those having difficulties in securing employment were encouraged to approach LD for assistance.

41. C for L advised that there had been strong demands in recent months for the Government to subsidize low-income earners' transport expenses on a recurrent and territory-wide basis. While the suggestion went beyond the policy intent of TSS, which was to provide a springboard to those who had the ability to work to seek employment and achieve self-reliance, the Administration had undertaken to look into the need for a more general form of transport subsidy. The Administration was drawing up the operational details of the WITS Scheme and would brief the Panel at its meeting on 16 December 2010.

Discussions

Eligibility criteria and the means test requirement

42. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that since the statutory minimum wage ("SMW") would be implemented soon in Hong Kong, it was expected that low-income workers would have a wage increase after the implementation of SMW. If the monthly income limit under the new WITS Scheme was set to the same level as that under TSS, i.e. \$6,500, the number of low-income employees eligible for applying for transport subsidy would unlikely be high. He called on the Administration to raise the income limit so as to benefit more low-income employees.

43. Echoing Mr WONG Kwok-hing's view, Mr Frederick FUNG queried whether it was the Administration's deliberate intention to set the initial SMW rate at \$28 per hour and to subsidize the low-income workers by granting them a monthly transport subsidy of \$600.

44. C for L responded that the initial SMW rate of \$28 per hour was recommended by the Provisional Minimum Wage Commission, having regard to a basket of indicators and relevant statistical data. The income threshold for TSS was determined separately by the Administration.

Action

45. Mr WONG Kwok-hing sought clarification on how the means test was to be conducted under the new WITS Scheme. He enquired whether applicants would be allowed to choose to be means-tested either on an individual or household basis.

46. C for L responded that there had all along been opinions in the community calling for the expansion of the existing TSS to all districts in Hong Kong. In planning the introduction of the new WITS Scheme, the Administration aimed at subsidizing eligible low-income employees throughout the territory in meeting their travelling expenses on commuting to and from work so as to relieve their burden and encourage them to remain in employment. The Administration had conducted a study and would take into consideration public views collected during the process in formulating the implementation details of the new WITS Scheme, with a view to finalizing a detailed proposal for consideration by the Panel in December 2010.

47. Mr Frederick FUNG said that he objected to the adoption of a household-based approach for conducting means test, as the harmony of the family would be adversely affected.

48. The Deputy Chairman said that if the new scheme was intended as a work incentive to help relieve the low-income earners' burden of travelling expenses arising from commuting to and from work and to encourage them to remain in employment, the Administration should retain the individual-based mechanism for applying transport subsidy under the new WITS Scheme. Her view was echoed by the Chairman.

49. Mr IP Wai-ming and Mr Frederick FUNG asked whether the Administration would consider setting the ceiling of the total value of applicants' personal assets at a level higher than \$44,000 as prescribed under the existing TSS, and disregarding the dividend payments from savings insurance for the purpose of assessing the applicants' eligibility.

50. C for L said that the Administration had not yet decided on the mode of assessment and the income and asset limits for applying WITS. The Administration would consider carefully the concerns, views and suggestions raised at the meeting when finalizing the implementation details of the new WITS Scheme.

51. The Deputy Chairman said that the need to pass a restrictive income and assets assessment would discourage needy low-income employees from submitting applications. She held the view that the

Action

Administration should drop the means test requirement, in particular the asset threshold requirement, in implementing the WITS Scheme.

52. The Chairman shared a similar view and opined that the Administration should consider relaxing the thresholds for a person to become eligible for receiving transport subsidy, if it aimed at subsidizing low-income employees in meeting their travelling expenses commuting to and from work.

53. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung echoed with the view that the Administration should drop the means test requirement, adding that the high administrative cost incurred for conducting the assessment should be re-channelled to assist more low-income workers.

54. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung considered that minimum wage protection was the ultimate solution to the problem of working poverty. In his view, had the Administration strived for better town planning in the four designated remote districts to make them self-sufficient with adequate infrastructural support and job opportunities and had the initial SMW rate been fixed at a level higher than \$28 per hour, a transport subsidy scheme to relieve the burden of travelling expenses on low-income employees would not be required. He expressed strong dissatisfaction that the Administration had distorted the relevant policy by coming up with a conceptually flawed proposal to address the problem.

55. Mr CHAN Kin-por considered that the income and asset limits should be raised in order to benefit more low-income employees. He agreed to the view that cash value of insurance policies or dividend payments from savings insurance should be disregarded for the purpose of assessing the applicants' eligibility for transport subsidy. He called on the Administration to give serious consideration to these suggestions of Members and to revert to the Panel on its consideration of the suggestions at the meeting on 16 December 2010.

56. Mr IP Wai-ming noted with concern that an applicant must work a minimum of 72 hours a month in order to be eligible for transport subsidy. He said that Members belonging to the Federation of Trade Unions considered that applicants who worked less than 72 hours per month should also be eligible for receiving transport subsidy calculated on a *pro-rata* basis. Since employers would be required to keep records of the total number of hours worked for employees whose wages payable in respect of the wage period were less than \$11,500 per month upon the implementation of SMW, the Government could make use of the records

Action

kept by employers to assess whether an applicant met the working hour requirement and calculate the amount of transport subsidy to be granted.

57. In response, C for L said that the record keeping requirement as referred to by Mr IP Wai-ming sought to facilitate compliance and enforcement of the Minimum Wage Ordinance ("MWO"). The minimum working hour requirement under TSS or the proposed WITS Scheme was a separate issue falling outside the remit of MWO.

58. C for L further said that providing subsidy on a *pro-rata* basis according to the actual number of working hours was not practicable, since it would increase substantially the workload for verification and result in disproportionately high administrative costs. She said that it was the intention of the Administration to keep the WITS Scheme simple and user-friendly and the administrative costs at a relatively low level. To this end, the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the Audit Commission would be invited to give views on how to improve the workflow in processing applications for WITS, once the implementation details were finalized.

59. Mr Ronny TONG and Mr WONG Sing-chi held the view that the transport subsidy to be provided under the WITS Scheme was no longer an "ordinary" subsidy but a "living supplement" for the working poor. Mr TONG said that given the continued existence of working poverty and the gravity of the problem, the Civic Party was supportive of the proposed introduction of the WITS Scheme. Expressing concern about the arbitrariness in determining the thresholds for the WITS Scheme, he asked about the basis adopted for determining the income and asset limits under the new scheme.

60. In response, C for L advised that for the purpose of implementing TSS, reference had been made to the prevailing thresholds for comparable Government-administered financial assistance schemes, such as the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme. For example, the asset limit of applying for transport subsidy under TSS could not be said to be too stringent as it was two times that for an able-bodied adult under the CSSA Scheme.

61. Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour & Welfare (Poverty) supplemented that the primary purpose of the means test was to identify the persons who had genuine financial need. As a matter of fact, there were means tests for other standing Government financial assistance schemes, such as medical fee waiver, public rental housing, legal aid and student travel subsidy for tertiary students.

Action

62. Regarding the suggestion made by the Deputy Chairman that the Administration should introduce an hourly wage rate as income limit for the purpose of implementing the new WITS Scheme, C for L said that since it was a completely new idea, the Administration would consider the suggestion when finalizing the details of the new scheme.

63. Notwithstanding the Administration's explanation in paragraphs 60 and 61 above, Mr Ronny TONG remained of the view that the income and asset limits for applying employment-related transport subsidy should be raised in order to benefit more low-income employees.

64. Mr Frederick FUNG pointed out that the Cross-district or On-the-job Transport Allowance under TSS was set some years ago at a fixed rate of \$600 per month. He said that to reflect changes in the cost of living over time, the Administration should consider enhancing its support to the low-income earners by increasing the amount of transport subsidy prescribed under the WITS Scheme.

65. The Chairman asked whether the Administration had any plan to extend the scope of the WITS Scheme to cover all low-income workers in the territory, including self-employed persons.

66. C for L said that the Administration would consider the suggestion of Members and deputations to expand the scope of the WITS Scheme to cover self-employed persons together with other views and suggestions raised at the meeting.

Implementation plan and timetable

67. Mr WONG Kwok-hing pointed out that a motion was passed at the Council meeting of 10 November 2010 urging the Government to adopt a set of criteria in formulating the implementation details and eligibility requirements for the WITS Scheme, so as to enable a greater number of low-income workers to benefit from the scheme. He called on the Administration to give serious consideration to the views expressed and suggestions raised by individual Members at the Council meeting and to expedite the implementation of the new WITS Scheme. He sought information on the Administration's proposed course of action, after briefing Members on the operational details of the WITS Scheme at the Panel meeting on 16 December 2010.

Action

68. In response, C for L advised that -
- (a) the Administration was drawing up the operational details of the scheme and would brief the Panel fully at its meeting on 16 December 2010;
 - (b) subject to Members' views on the proposed WITS Scheme, the Administration would strive to submit the funding proposal to the Finance Committee ("FC") for approval as early as possible; and
 - (c) subject to the approval of FC, at least six months' time would be required for the preparation because time was needed for the design and development of an information technology ("IT") system to support its implementation.
69. Mr WONG Kwok-hing held the view that the implementation of the proposed WITS Scheme should not be dragged on any further. He strongly requested the Administration to speed up the relevant preparatory work, with a view to putting the scheme in full operation in May 2011.
70. The Deputy Chairman and Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung considered that the Administration should put the WITS Scheme in place without delay. Mr LEUNG suggested that if there was a genuine need to undertake the necessary preparation work and it posed difficulty to implement the scheme at an early date, the Administration should explore the feasibility of "dating back" the implementation date with LD receiving WITS applications at a later stage.
71. Mr WONG Sing-chi queried the need to develop a separate IT system to support the implementation of the WITS Scheme, given the long existence of another system for processing TSS applications. He took the view that the Administration should expedite and advance the timetable as far as practicable for implementing the new transport subsidy scheme.
72. C for L responded that whether or not the IT system currently used for the processing of TSS applications could support the WITS Scheme would very much depend on how alike the eligibility criteria for the two subsidy schemes were. To prepare for the smooth implementation of the new WITS Scheme, system enhancements would be required. In addition, a dedicated division would need to be set up in LD to perform all the operational functions of implementation, and training would have to be

Action

arranged for staff involved in administering the WITS Scheme beforehand. C for L stressed that the Administration was aware of the calls from both Members and the local community for an early implementation of the WITS Scheme. It would strive to compress the time required as far as practicable.

73. Mr WONG Sing-chi expressed concern that the existing TSS only covered four remote districts and much time was needed for the preparation and implementation of the new WITS Scheme. He asked whether the scope of TSS could be extended to cover all 18 districts across the territory, before the WITS Scheme was put in place.

74. C for L responded that the objective of TSS had been clearly defined when the initiative was planned and funding approval was sought in 2007. There was practical difficulty in extending the scope of TSS to all districts in Hong Kong.

75. The Chairman said that to his knowledge, some non-government organizations engaged to assist in the processing of TSS applications provided services on Sundays, holidays or after work. He hoped that the dedicated office of LD responsible for handling WITS applications would do the likewise in future.

Employment services for youths

76. Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered that the relative lack of local employment opportunities in remote districts had forced residents to work across districts. He was particularly concerned about the difficulties encountered by young people without any working experience when they sought employment, including the high transport cost for attending job interviews/travelling to work. He asked about the measures to be taken by the Government to alleviate the transport difficulties encountered by young people in the remote areas in getting a job.

77. C for L advised that the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme ("YPTP") and the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme ("YWETS") were LD's integrated programmes to provide young people with through-train employment services. YPTP and YWETS provided youths with a comprehensive range of employment-related training and workplace attachment. Trainees who attended pre-employment training courses and workplace attachment were entitled to a training allowance. She undertook to provide supplementary information on training allowance provided by the Administration after the meeting.

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Action

78. The Chairman concluded that Members and deputations were generally of the view that -

- (a) applicants should be given the choice of undergoing a means test on a household basis or individual basis;
- (b) applicants who worked less than 72 hours per month should be eligible for transport subsidy calculated on a *pro-rata* basis;
- (c) the income limits for different household sizes should be raised, if a household-based approach was adopted for conducting means test;
- (d) the implementation date should be advanced to 1 May 2011; and
- (e) a job search allowance should be provided under the WITS Scheme.

79. The Chairman requested the Administration to proactively consider the views and suggestions of Members and deputations, in devising the implementation details of the WITS Scheme.

80. The meeting ended at 12:54 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
22 September 2011