

立法會 *Legislative Council*

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Panel on Welfare Services

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 14 May 2012

Manpower situation of Social Security Assistants

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") relating to the manpower situation of Social Security Assistants ("SSA") of the Social Welfare Department ("SWD").

Background

2. At present, SWD operates 38 Social Security Field Units ("SSFUs") which are responsible for processing applications for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") and Social Security Allowance. There are both departmental and general grade staff in each SSFU. The departmental grade staff of SSFU comprises Social Security Officers ("SSOs") and SSAs. In general, the SSA grade staff (including SSAs and Senior Social Security Assistants ("SSSAs")) are responsible for conducting investigation into and assessment on various types of social security cases while the SSO grade staff (including SSO II and SSO I) are responsible for vetting and approving cases and office administration.

Deliberations of the Panel

3. The Panel discussed the manpower situation of SSAs at its meeting on 14 February 2000. Members noted from the Social Security Assistants' Branch of the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, comprising SSA and SSSA ranks of staff of SWD that the workload of the SSA rank had increased continuously over the years but there was no corresponding

increase in its manpower, resulting in tremendous increase in work pressure on staff and undermining the quality of service delivery to CSSA applicants and recipients.

4. The Administration advised that to meet the increasing number of CSSA applications and cases, SWD had been providing additional staff to SSFUs. The establishment of the SSA grade was expanded by 63% from 623 post in 1995-1996 to 1 013 in 1999-2000. The provision of additional staff was meant for implementing a new Support for Self-reliance Scheme to provide assistance for unemployed CSSA applicants, strengthening investigation to combat fraud and meeting increase in caseload. To alleviate the work pressure of the SSA grade staff, a number of work easement measures had been introduced, such as streamlining and prioritizing work procedures and re-distributing duties among different grades of staff. The Administration further advised that an overall review of the manning requirement of the SSFUs would be conducted following the implementation of the new Computerized Social Security System in October 2000, which aimed at simplifying work process and enhancing service quality and alleviating the work pressure on the SSA staff.

5. At the meeting on 17 March 2008 when the Panel discussed the staffing proposal to create one permanent post of Assistant Director (Social Security) in SWD to oversee the social security portfolio and to head the Social Security Branch in SWD, some members took the view that apart from strengthening the directorate support in SWD, the Administration should critically examine the overall staffing position of the Social Security Branch. These members urged the Administration to review the terms of employment of Non-civil Service Contract ("NCSC") staff of SSA in SWD, and convert these positions into civil service posts taking into account the operational needs.

6. The Administration advised that there were over 100 NCSC positions of SSA in SWD. The number of civil service posts of SSA created in 2007-2008 and to be created in 2008-2009 would be over 100. Many SSAs on NCSC terms had applied for the posts in the open civil service recruitment and been appointed.

7. In the 2012-2013 draft Estimates of Expenditure, the Administration stated that with the strengthening of the overall manpower and the splitting of a large SSFU into two field units, it was estimated that there would be about 1 350 posts in 39 SSFUs in 2012-2013. Among them, about 980 posts were in the SSA grade. The Administration also stated that in 2011-2012, about 600 SSO grade staff and 1 500 SSA grade staff (all on civil service permanent terms) and 25 staff employed on NSCS

attended training programmes on professional knowledge and skills such as investigation and verification techniques, legal knowledge, customer service and communication skills.

Latest development

8. The Social Security Assistants' Branch of the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association has commissioned the Hong Kong Polytechnic University to conduct a survey on the working conditions and work pressure of the SSA rank in SWD, and the results were released in February 2012. The survey findings were highlighted in the Association's letter dated 15 February 2012 and were issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1217/11-12(01).

Relevant papers

9. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
8 May 2012

Appendix

Relevant papers on manpower situation of Social Security Assistants

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	14 February 2000 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	17 March 2008 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	10 March 2010	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 10)
Finance Committee	8 March 2012	Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expense 2012-2013
Panel on Welfare Services	12 March 2012 (Item II)	Agenda

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