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30 September 2015

Legislative Council Secretariat
(Attn: Ms Catherina YU)
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Ms YU,

Evaluation reports of the Community Care Fund assistance programmes

At the meeting of the Subcommittee on Poverty under the House Committee of the Legislative Council held on 24 May 2013, Members asked the Community Care Fund (CCF) to provide the evaluation reports of the CCF assistance programmes. We have provided previously a total of 20 evaluation reports (covering 21 programmes) so far. The following three evaluation reports, which have been completed recently, are now attached for Members' information:

- (1) the evaluation report for relaunching the programme of "One-off living subsidy for low-income households not living in public housing and not receiving CSSA";
- (2) the evaluation report for the third launch of the programme of "Subsidy for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients living in rented private housing"; and
- (3) the evaluation report for the programme of "Extra travel subsidy for needy special school students".

For enquiries, please feel free to contact the undersigned. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



(Ms Iris WONG)
for Secretary for Home Affairs

c.c.

Secretary for Education (Attn: Mr David LEUNG)

Director of Social Welfare (Attn: Ms Annisa MA)

Community Care Fund Assistance Programme
Relaunching the One-off living subsidy for low-income households
not living in public housing and not receiving CSSA
Evaluation Report

Background

On 2 January 2015, the Community Care Fund (CCF) relaunched the “One-off living subsidy for low-income households not living in public housing and not receiving CSSA” programme (the Relaunched Programme) to relieve the financial pressure of low-income households. It is implemented by the CCF Secretariat (the Secretariat) with the assistance of 239 service units. The application period will end on 31 August 2015. As at 30 June 2015, the Secretariat has received around 54 200 applications and disbursed about \$264.05 million subsidy to 34 982 eligible households (69 766 persons).

2. The amounts of subsidy under the Relaunched Programme are \$4,000 for one-person households, \$8,000 for two-person households, \$11,000 for three-person households and a uniform \$13,000 for four-or-more-person households. From January to April 2015, a phasing arrangement was adopted to process applications under the Relaunched Programme. During the period, the households that have benefited from the programme first launched from December 2013 to August 2014 (the First-launched Programme) would have their eligibility confirmed (old applications) and new applications would be accepted in phases according to household sizes.

Evaluation Results

3. The Secretariat analysed and evaluated the Relaunched Programme according to the relevant information and data gathered (based on the data collected under the Relaunched Programme as at 30 June 2015).

(A) *Statistics on Applications*

4. The Secretariat received about 54 200 applications, of which 35 501 have been vetted. Among these vetted applications, 34 982 households have been disbursed with a subsidy while 461 applications were considered unsuccessful and 58 applications withdrawn. The following analysis is based on the information of the 34 982 households (69 766 persons) which have been disbursed with the subsidy.

(a) Information of households

5. Application households came from various districts across the territory. In terms of district of residence, Sham Shui Po (6 934 applications/around 20%), Yau Tsim Mong (5 695 applications/around 16%) and Yuen Long (3 443 applications/around 10%) had the largest numbers of households. Among the beneficiary households, one-person households accounted for the largest share at around 37% (13 005 households), while two-person and three-person households accounted for around 31% (10 905 households) and 27% (9 571 households) respectively. The remaining share of some 4% (1 501 households) were four-or-more-person households.

6. As for the types of accommodation, most beneficiary households resided in rented private housing (29 929 households/around 86%) and temporary housing (3 969 households/around 11%). The rest accounted for around 3% of the beneficiary households, including those renting units in industrial buildings (210 households) and commercial buildings (96 households), renting bedspaces offered under the Singleton Hostel Programme of the Home Affairs Department (HAD) (142 households), living on board vessels (5 households) and homeless persons (631 households) (including persons residing in temporary shelters/street sleepers). Among the 29 929 households renting private housing, a majority resided in rented sub-divided units (16 352 households/around 55%) and rented independent units (7 289 households/around 24%), and the remaining 21% or so resided in rented rooms (cubicles/solid-partitioned cubicles) (5 716 households) and bedspaces/cocklofts (572 households). As for the 3 969 households residing in temporary housing, a majority resided in squatter structures (2 633 households/around 66%) and roof-top structures (574 households/around 15%), and the rest were residents of licensed structures (432 households/around 11%) and other temporary housing (330 households/around 8%). Among the 631 homeless persons, most were street sleepers (533 persons/around 84%) and the rest resided in temporary shelters (98 persons/around 16%).

7. In terms of income levels, the median income for households of different sizes amounted to about 62% to 71% of the income limit of the Relunched Programme, of which one-person households accounted for the largest proportion (around 71%).

8. Among the 30 235 households paying rent for accommodation (including those in private housing, industrial buildings and commercial buildings), the median rents paid by one-person and two-person households accounted for a higher proportion of the relevant rental limit of the Relunched Programme (around 58% and 48% respectively), while the corresponding figures for three-person to six-or-more-person households were about 39% to 44%. As for the rental level of various regions, the median rent for households of different sizes was higher on Hong Kong Island (from

\$3,000 to \$8,500)¹. In addition, the median rent paid by households of various sizes represented about 30% to 40% of their relevant median household income (of which the proportions for one-person and two-person households were higher, accounting for 40% and 37% respectively).

9. Besides, the major reasons for the 461 unsuccessful applications were that those applicants and their household members (if applicable) were receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) (198 applications), owning properties in Hong Kong (64 applications), and the rent (66 applications) or income (83 applications) exceeding the specified limits.

(b) Information of applicants and household members

10. Among the 34 982 households, there were a total of 69 766 applicants and household members altogether, of which permanent residents and non-permanent residents accounted for 45 615 (around 65%) and 24 151 (around 35%) respectively. There were 54 078 persons aged 18 or above (around 78%) and the remaining 15 688 persons (about 22%) were household members aged under 18 including 10 366 persons aged under 11. About 6 persons were mentally incapacitated household members aged between 19 and 49.

11. Among the 461 unsuccessful application households, there were a total of 730 applicants and household members altogether, of which permanent residents and non-permanent residents accounted for 477 persons (about 65%) and 253 persons (about 35%) respectively. There were 613 persons (about 84%) aged 18 or above and 117 persons (about 16%) aged under 18 including 77 persons aged under 11.

(B) Views of Households/Stakeholders

(a) Beneficiary households

12. The Secretariat and service units conducted a questionnaire survey with 1 557 beneficiary households (about 4.5%) by random sampling to understand their views on the subsidy amount, eligibility criteria, application procedures, publicity, implementation arrangements of the Relunched Programme and the services provided by service units.

13. About 89% of the respondents agreed that the subsidy provided by the Relunched Programme could relieve their financial pressure. However, some respondents hoped that the level of the subsidy could be raised and the subsidy be disbursed on a continuous basis, say more than once within a year or on a monthly basis.

¹ The median rental level in the New Territories was the highest for six-or-more-person households.

A vast majority of the respondents considered the eligibility criteria of the Relunched Programme reasonable (about 96%) and its application procedures simple and convenient (about 96%). Most of them agreed that exempting the beneficiary households of the First-launched Programme from resubmitting applications could streamline the application procedures. Some respondents suggested that both the income and rental limits of the Relunched Programme should be raised and the rental limit be close to market rental levels. About 93% of the respondents considered that the publicity for the Relunched Programme was adequate. However, some said that its promotion to the ethnic minorities should be strengthened.

14. On the implementation arrangements, about 98% of the respondents were satisfied with them while some considered that the processing time was relatively long. About 97% of the respondents found the services provided by service units satisfactory and commended the staff for providing good services and being helpful in explaining the application details and offering assistance in applying for the subsidy. Nevertheless, some respondents pointed out that the locations of several service units were too remote or their opening hours were inconvenient for applicants. They hoped that the number of locations to receive application forms could be increased.

(b) Unsuccessful applications under the Relunched Programme

15. The Secretariat also approached 25 unsuccessful application households (around 5.4%) for their views on the Relunched Programme through a telephone survey. Some respondents considered that the income limit (about 12%) and the rental limit (about 12%) of the Relunched Programme should be raised. Apart from this, a respondent expected flexibility from the Secretariat regarding the restriction on property ownership in Hong Kong.

16. In terms of application procedures under the Relunched Programme, about 92% of the respondents agreed that they were simple and convenient. About 83% of the respondents agreed that the publicity for the Relunched Programme was sufficient. About 70% of the respondents were satisfied with the Secretariat's arrangements for the Relunched Programme while 75% of them found the service provided by service units satisfactory. On the whole, they expected that the CCF would implement the programme on an on-going basis to relieve the financial pressure of low-income persons.

(c) Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)/service units which assisted in implementing the Relunched Programme/staff of the implementation team under the Secretariat

17. The Secretariat held an evaluation meeting on 9 June 2015 to collect views from NGOs/service units on the Relunched Programme with a view to evaluating its

effectiveness. The NGOs/service units attending the meeting commented on the Relunched Programme in the areas of eligibility criteria, income and rental limits, subsidy amounts, publicity, application arrangements, vetting procedures, administrative arrangements and prevention of abuse.

18. The NGOs/service units generally agreed that the subsidy provided under the Relunched Programme could relieve the financial pressure of low-income households, and suggested that the programme be regularised. Some suggested that those households with financial needs should be allowed to apply for and benefit from the Relunched Programme while waiting for the result of their CSSA applications. Also, some households who owned properties without commercial viability (e.g. waste land) should be allowed to apply for a subsidy under the Relunched Programme. In addition, in view of the generally higher rental level in individual regions (e.g. Hong Kong Island), some NGOs/service units suggested that different limits should be set according to the different rental levels in various regions. In respect of the subsidy amounts, the NGOs/service units suggested that it should be raised (e.g. subject to the inflation rate) for all household sizes, and that one or two additional levels of subsidy should be provided for five-person and six-or-more-person households so as to strengthen the support for larger families.

19. Regarding publicity, the NGOs/service units considered that the promotion of the Relunched Programme to the ethnic minorities should be strengthened. They suggested that publicity leaflets in languages of the ethnic minorities should be produced and distributed to them through service units and religious organisations.

20. Some NGOs/service units indicated that some old applicants mistook that no response was required after receiving the notification from the Secretariat and the subsidy would be disbursed to them automatically. They considered that it should be clearly stressed on the notification and during the publicity of the Relunched Programme that old application households were required to complete the reply slips. They also suggested that households renting and residing in flats under the Home Ownership Scheme/Tenants Purchase Scheme should be required to specify clearly on the application form that their flats were no longer bound by alienation restrictions.

21. Regarding the vetting procedures and administrative arrangements, the NGOs/service units hoped that a dedicated staff member of the Secretariat should be assigned to follow up with the applications referred by the same service unit. Besides, for those old application households who have moved to other districts, the administrative fees and follow-up work of their applications should be transferred to the service units in their new districts of residence.

22. As for the prevention of abuse of the Relunched Programme, some NGOs/service units considered that, for applicants or their household members who

were often away from Hong Kong for various reasons (e.g. working or studying in the Mainland), a set of uniform criteria should be set to determine whether such household members were deemed to be eligible “household members”. A set of uniform criteria should also be set to whether two households residing in the same flat were financially independent of each other. Some NGOs/service units pointed out that the requirement was too lax and might be abused if applicants who rented a property of their siblings were still eligible for a subsidy under the Relunched Programme.

23. In summary, the NGOs/service units were satisfied with the operational arrangements of the Relunched Programme and agreed that the Relunched Programme could help the needy low-income persons and allow follow-up action to be taken in response to their other welfare needs. The views given at the evaluation meeting by NGOs/service units that assisted in implementing the Relunched Programme are set out in the Summary of Discussion of the Evaluation Meeting as attached.

24. Furthermore, staff of the implementation team under the Secretariat pointed out that the arrangement of processing applications in phases according to household sizes could effectively speed up the application procedures and avoid confusion. With this arrangement, the Secretariat could process a large number of applications within a reasonable period of time and help application households to receive subsidy in time. Staff of the implementation team considered that under the existing collaborative arrangement, applicants could submit applications to the service units near their accommodations. This not only allowed the service units to handle their applications and enquiries professionally, but also made it more effective for the staff to identify ineligible applicants through home visits. On the whole, the collaboration between the implementation team and service units operated smoothly.

(C) *Public Enquiries and Views*

25. During the implementation of the Relunched Programme, the Secretariat had set up an enquiry hotline to provide necessary support and information to the public and the staff of service units. Owing to the positive public response to the Relunched Programme, over 10 000 enquiries were received through the enquiry hotline/the CCF’s standing hotlines for the first two weeks. As at 30 June 2015, the Secretariat received 66 800 enquiries, mostly about the eligibility criteria, application arrangements and progress. Besides, the Secretariat received 8 written comments/enquiries from the public/stakeholders.

26. Comments from the public and NGOs/service units mainly included the suggestions of increasing both the income and rental limits and extending the coverage of subsidy to Hong Kong citizens renting properties in the Mainland, low-income persons living in self-owned properties, persons temporarily lodging with their relatives

without paying a rent and persons renting properties of their parents. As regards application arrangements, the content of the reply slip should be simplified and efforts should be stepped up to prevent any abuses. As for the administrative arrangements, it was recommended that old application households with changes in their household situations should be allowed to submit application forms to the service unit at their own choice. On the whole, the views received were positive. Respondents found the application procedures and processing arrangements satisfactory, and wished that the subsidy would be disbursed on an on-going basis.

Conclusion

(a) Number of households/persons benefited

27. The Secretariat received a total of about 54 200 applications, among which some 37 100 were replies from old applicants confirming their eligibility and around 17 100 were new applications. About 11 400 old application households had yet to reply and the relevant service units were following up the matter.

28. The original estimated number of beneficiary households under the Relunched Programme was around 53 140 (about 126 100 persons). Since the Relunched Programme attracted more applications than expected, the Commission on Poverty endorsed at its meeting on 22 May 2015 an additional funding of about \$142.83 million for the Relunched Programme to deal with the increased applications. The estimated total provision for the Relunched Programme would amount to about \$610.95 million. According to the latest progress, it was estimated that the final total number of applications would be around 65 300. We have checked with the service units on the possible reasons for the increase in the number of the applications under the Relunched Programme as compared to its original estimation. Their feedback was that it might be attributed to the enhanced publicity by both the Secretariat and the service units and the increase in public awareness of the programme after several launches. Furthermore, the simplified application procedures for the Relunched Programme might also help to encourage more applications.

29. When the Secretariat estimated the number of beneficiary households under the Relunched Programme, it based on the projected number of applications to be received in the First-launch Programme. Similarly, the projected number of applications to be received in the Relaunch Programme can also be served as a basis for estimating the number of beneficiary households under the programme to be launched for the third time (the Third-launch Programme).

(b) Household income and rental limits

30. As for eligibility criteria, while some respondents said that the income limits should be raised, the median income of the beneficiary households only represented some 62% to 71% of the income limits under the Relunched Programme. For the Third-launched Programme, it was recommended that the requirement should continue to be based on the updated income limits set for public rental housing (PRH) applications (i.e. the 2015-16 PRH Waiting List), and reference should be made to the latest Median Monthly Domestic Household Income (MMDHI) of the relevant household size groups. If the income limit of any household size group is below 75% of the median income, a corresponding upward adjustment can be considered.

31. There were views that the rental levels on Hong Kong Island, generally speaking, were relatively higher. Therefore, it was recommended that, in the Third-launched Programme, different rental limits should be set subject to the rental differences in various districts. When considering the third launch of the programme, the CCF Task Force might make reference to the latest territory-wide statistics provided by the Census and Statistics Department on the median rent-to-income ratio of households residing in private housing and meeting the recommended income limits under the Third-launched Programme, in order to see whether the existing practice of setting the rental limit at 50% of the income limit was appropriate or not. According to the statistical analysis on households, the median rent paid by one-person to six-or-more-person households disbursed with subsidies represented 39% to 58% of the respective rental limits, and the median rent-to-income ratio was about 30% to 40%. As such, the rent paid by most households was still considerably below the respective rental limits under the Relunched Programme.

(c) Enhancement of the application form and the notification letter

32. There were views that it was emphasised in the Relunched Programme that old application households were not required to submit the application form again. Some of the old application households might mistake that no response was required after receiving the notification from the Secretariat and the subsidy would be disbursed to them automatically. In this regard, in the Third-launched Programme, we will improve the notification by making it clearly that old application households are required to complete the reply slips (resubmission of the application form is not required though). Moreover, some respondents considered that those application households residing in rented subsidised home ownership housing should be required to declare clearly that their flats were no longer bound by alienation restrictions when submitting applications. It is already specified in the existing application form and programme brief that, in the case of subsidised home ownership housing, only those flats with alienation restrictions removed will be considered as private housing. In this

connection, in the Third-launched Programme, the relevant requirement may be emphasised on the application form (e.g. highlighted in bold).

(d) Prevention of abuse

33. Some respondents pointed out that applicants or their household members would be often away from Hong Kong for various reasons (e.g. working or studying in the Mainland). Under the Relunched Programme, the beneficiary households were required to reside in Hong Kong. However, no restriction was imposed on the number of days for applicants and their household members to reside in Hong Kong. Therefore, when processing the applications, it was hard to identify whether the household members who were often away from Hong Kong were eligible “household members”. The Secretariat was at present adopting a relatively lax arrangement when handling the relevant cases. If there were household members working or studying in the Mainland, those cases would be considered subject to individual situations (e.g. the period that the member works/studies in the Mainland, whether the member resides with the applicant while staying in Hong Kong and sharing living necessities with the applicant).

34. As there was no restriction on the relationship among household members under the Relunched Programme, some NGOs/service units reflected that when two households resided in the same flat and each or one of them made the application, it would still be difficult for the service unit to identify whether the relevant household was financially independent after a home visit. According to the present arrangement under the Relunched Programme, when conducting a home visit, the relevant service unit would investigate the financial and daily living situation of the household members (e.g. whether the household members are sharing household items and daily necessities (e.g. bedding, toiletries), whether the household members are having meals or sharing time together), so as to identify whether two households were financially independent of each other.

35. In addition, some NGOs/service units stated that some applicants rented and resided in a property of their siblings. However, under the Relunched Programme, the requirement that only households renting properties of their father, mother, son, daughter, husband or wife were not allowed for application was too lax.

36. Regarding the existing arrangements under the Relunched Programme, a more relaxed approach was adopted because, having considered its one-off nature and the need to reduce the risk of abusing the Relunched Programme, it was hoped to help more low-income persons and keep the administrative procedures as simple as possible for meeting the CCF’s requirement. It was recommended that while considering intensifying the vetting procedures, a well-balanced approach should be adopted to streamline administrative arrangements and prevent any abuses.

(e) Enhanced publicity and promotion

37. When relaunching the programme in January 2015, the Secretariat made use of various promotion channels, including broadcasting on television and radio, uploading information to webpages, printing publicity posters/application forms/programme briefs, holding press briefings, issuing press releases, etc. The Secretariat also placed the publicity posters at the Public Enquiry Service Centres of the HAD, the District Social Welfare Offices of the Social Welfare Department and the “Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities” for information of applicants. An enquiry hotline was also set up by the Secretariat for applicants or other members of the public to seek information and make enquiries.

38. There were views that the promotion of the Relunched Programme to the ethnic minorities should be stepped up. Actually, during the implementation of the Relunched Programme, posters in six ethnic minority languages (i.e. Hindi, Indonesian, Nepali, Tagalog, Thai and Urdu) were prepared (for distribution to primary and secondary schools with ethnic minority students and the “Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities”). When the programme is launched for the third time, the publicity leaflets can also be translated into the six ethnic minority languages and uploaded to the CCF webpage for access by the public. Also, the leaflets can be distributed through service units and religious organisations.

(f) Streamlining the procedures and administrative arrangements

39. Some NGOs/service units suggested that for those old application households who have moved to other districts, the administrative fees and follow-up work of their applications should be transferred to the service units in their new districts of residence. Under the Relunched Programme, different types of households should hand in their applications to the relevant service units near their districts of residence. All service units could, subject to the arrangement of their manpower resources, consider whether they should cope with other types of applications at the same time, or refer such applications to other respective service units.

(g) Overall effectiveness

40. As far as the overall effectiveness of the Relunched Programme was concerned, the beneficiary households/beneficiaries or NGOs/service units all agreed that the Relunched Programme could help to relieve the financial pressure of low-income persons who were not living in public housing and not receiving CSSA, and hoped that the CCF could launch the programme for the third time as soon as possible. The responses of most beneficiary households/beneficiaries were positive towards the

services provided by the service units and the Secretariat and agreed that the application procedures were simple and convenient.

41. A consolidated analysis of the above information and data collected showed that the feedback of the stakeholders were positive towards the Relunched Programme and were generally satisfied with its existing operational arrangements. They supported to launch the programme for the third time so as to help more needy low-income persons. They also suggested that the CCF should consider relaxing the eligibility criteria, increasing publicity channels and enhancing the support to service units.

42. In conclusion, the programme, in the light of the Budget's various short-term relief measures and through the CCF's effective identification mechanism, was launched to provide a one-off subsidy to the "n have-nots" who could not benefit from those relief measures, so as to plug the gaps in the existing system. Therefore, it is not appropriate to consider regularising the programme.

Community Care Fund Secretariat
July 2015

Community Care Fund
**Relaunching the “One-off living subsidy for low-income households
not living in public housing and not receiving CSSA” Programme**

Evaluation Meeting

Summary of Discussion

On 9 June 2015, the Community Care Fund (CCF) Secretariat (the Secretariat) held an evaluation meeting on the relaunched “One-off living subsidy for low-income households not living in public housing and not receiving CSSA” programme (the Relaunched Programme) to collect views from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and service units assisting in the implementation of the Relaunched Programme on aspects such as its implementation arrangements and eligibility criteria for the purpose of evaluating its effectiveness. Views and recommendations from the participants are summarised below:

Eligibility Criteria

- Generally speaking, the rental levels in some districts such as the Hong Kong Island were relatively higher. It was recommended that different rental limits should be set subject to the rental differences in various regions.
- It was suggested that discretion might be exercised in processing applications of households owning properties without commercial viability (e.g. waste land) so that they could benefit from the Relaunched Programme.
- Households with financial needs should be allowed to apply for and benefit from the Relaunched Programme while waiting for the result of the CSSA applications.

Subsidy Amount

- It was recommended that the level of subsidy amounts for all household sizes should be raised (e.g. subject to the inflation rate) and that one or two additional levels of subsidy should be provided for five-person and six-or-more-person households so as to strengthen the support for larger families.

Publicity

- It was agreed that more people were aware of the Relaunched Programme following several launches of the programme and enhanced publicity.

- It was suggested that the promotion of the Relunched Programme to the ethnic minorities should be strengthened, including producing publicity leaflets in languages of the ethnic minorities for distribution through service units and religious organisations.

Application Arrangements

- As the application procedures were simple and convenient, it helped encourage more applications.
- As the Relunched Programme stressed that old application households were not required to submit an application form again, some old application households mistook that no response was required after receiving the notification from the Secretariat and the subsidy would be disbursed to them automatically. It was suggested that it should be clearly stressed on the notification and during the publicity of the Relunched Programme that old application households were required to complete the reply slips.
- The specified format for an address on the application form was too complicated. Such a requirement should be removed to make it more easy for applicants (especially those residing in squatter structures) to complete.
- Households renting flats under the Home Ownership Scheme/Tenants Purchase Scheme should be required to specify clearly on the application form that their flats were no longer bound by alienation restrictions.
- It was recommended that application forms and programme briefs should be translated into the languages of the ethnic minorities to facilitate their applications.
- In case those application households who had been ineligible under the Relunched Programme turned to be eligible owing to subsequent changes of their household situations (e.g. leaving the CSSA net), they should be allowed to submit applications again.
- The section on declaration in the application form was too lengthy for some applicants to comprehend and its content should be simplified.

Vetting procedures and administrative arrangements

- It was suggested that all applications referred to by the same service unit should be followed up by the same staff member of the Secretariat to facilitate communication.

- As some old application households have moved to other districts, it was difficult for the service units originally handling those applications to continue the follow-up. There were views that both administrative fees and the follow-up work should be transferred to the service units in their new districts of residence.
- Old applications involving street sleepers who have moved into fixed abodes should no longer be followed up by the service units handling applications of street sleepers. These applications should be referred to other service units for follow-up.
- It was suggested that the Secretariat should continue to deploy their staff to assist those service units with more applications in processing applications. The working period of these staff should also be extended to the end of the Relaunch Programme.
- Emails should be sent regularly to inform service units of the date of application of the relevant application households when order cheques were distributed to the households through the service units. This was to facilitate the service units in handling enquiries about the progress of the subsidy disbursement.
- Regarding cases with applicants claiming to have no household income, service units should not be required to enquire the applicants about their financial situations again as it has already been done when the service units processed the applications.

Prevention of abuse

- For applicants or their household members who were often away from Hong Kong for various reasons (e.g. working or studying in the Mainland), a set of uniform criteria should be set to determine whether such household members were deemed to be eligible “household members”.
- A set of uniform criteria should be set for the staff of service units to identify during home visits whether two households residing in the same flat were financially independent of each other.
- The requirement was too lax and might be abused if applicants who rented a property of their siblings were still eligible for a subsidy under the Relaunch Programme.

Other views

- The Relaunched Programme was considered useful in helping those in financial needs and should be regularised.
- Despite the launch of the Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme (the Scheme), some households who have already benefited from the Relaunched Programme (e.g. one-person households and households with an income of 60% to 75% of the MMDHI) would not benefit from the Scheme. The CCF should continue to launch the programme to provide them with assistance.
- The application vetting time of the Relaunched Programme was rather long.
- It was suggested inviting households in sub-divided units to give views in the evaluation of the Relaunched Programme.
- The information provided by the households in their application forms involved privacy concerns. Some eligible households residing in industrial buildings did not apply for the Relaunched Programme for fear that the Secretariat would report their cases to relevant departments.
- It was suggested that the Secretariat should provide the latest analysis data of households for service units to help study the ways of providing appropriate assistance to low-income households.

Community Care Fund Assistance Programme
Third Launch of the “Subsidy for Comprehensive Social Security
Assistance recipients living in rented private housing”
Evaluation Report

Background

The Community Care Fund (CCF) launched the “Subsidy for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients living in rented private housing” programme (the Programme) for the third time to provide a one-off subsidy to Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) households living in rented private housing and paying a monthly rent which exceeded the maximum rent allowance (MRA) under the CSSA Scheme, so as to relieve their financial burden arising from the periodic increase of rent.

Implementation of the Programme

2. Implementing the Programme in September 2014, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) also announced the details of the Programme and started a publicity campaign¹. The CSSA households concerned were not required to submit applications. Based on their previously reported rental information as recorded in the Computerised Social Security System (CSSS), eligible CSSA households were identified, following which eligible one-person households and two-or-more-person households were provided with a one-off subsidy of \$2,000 and \$4,000 respectively. As at 30 April 2015, a total subsidy of about \$44.57 million had been disbursed.

Evaluation

3. With reference to the experience gained from the evaluation of the Programme which had been implemented twice previously and the methodology used for the evaluation of other CCF programmes, SWD commenced the evaluation on the effectiveness of the Programme in April 2015 and completed it in May 2015. The effectiveness of the

¹ The publicity campaign included issuing press releases, distributing programme leaflets via SWD’s District Social Welfare Offices and the Home Affairs Department’s District Offices, and uploading relevant information onto the SWD website.

Programme was analysed based on the number of households benefited, how the subsidy had been used by the beneficiaries, the beneficiaries' views on the Programme, enquiries and suggestions made by the public, etc. The data for the evaluation was collected from sources including the CSSS, questionnaire survey of the beneficiaries and enquiries made by the public.

Analysis of the Evaluation Results

(a) Statistical Data on the Beneficiaries

4. Based on the data in the CSSS, SWD verified the eligibility of 14 986 CSSA households which then received subsidy. The beneficiaries mostly comprised 7 688 (51.3%) one-person households, followed by 3 626 (24.2%) two-person households, 1 975 (13.2%) three-person households and 1 697 (11.3%) four-or-more-person households. As at 30 April 2015, the total disbursement was about \$44.57 million, including about \$15.38 million for one-person CSSA households and about \$29.19 million for two-or-more-person CSSA households.

(b) Beneficiaries Surveyed

5. SWD interviewed by telephone 150 randomly-selected CSSA households² which benefited under the Programme in order to find out how they had used the subsidy and what their views on the Programme were.

(i) *Use of Subsidy*

6. Over 77% of the respondents mainly used the subsidy for rental expenses, while 61% of the respondents spent it on essential daily living expenses³. Moreover, a small number of respondents had also used the subsidy for other purposes, including educational expenses (5

² The survey was conducted with prior consent obtained from the 150 respondents.

³ If an individual respondent had spent the subsidy on more than one expense item, each of the expense items would be categorised and counted. As the percentage for each expense item was calculated based on the overall number of respondents (i.e. 150), total percentages may not add up to 100%.

respondents), medical expenses (3 respondents) and savings/debt repayments (5 respondents).

(ii) Views on the Programme

7. About 97% of the respondents agreed that the Programme could relieve their burden of paying for housing expenses, and over 97% of the respondents were satisfied with the operational arrangement of the Programme. (one respondent added that as no application was required under the Programme, form-filling time was saved). While most of the respondents (89%) had no other comments on the Programme, 4 respondents praised the implementation of the Programme and expressed their gratitude. Suggestions from a small number of respondents who had other comments mainly included increasing the amount of subsidy (7 respondents), implementing the Programme on a long-term basis or more frequently (4 respondents), strengthening the support for those “suffering from high levels of rent” (1 respondent), that the publicity of the Programme was not adequate (1 respondent) and that beneficiaries should be informed of the content of the Programme (1 respondent).

(c) Public Enquiries and Suggestions

8. During the implementation of the Programme, SWD had set up an enquiry hotline to provide necessary support and information to the individuals concerned. As at 30 April 2015, SWD had received a total of 707 enquiries regarding the Programme, most of which concerning the arrangement for the disbursement of subsidy (46%), the eligibility criteria (37%) and the acknowledgement of receipt of subsidy (15%). There were a small number of other enquiries (7%), including those about the arrangement for the relaunch of the Programme, application procedures and information updates. Moreover, one person expressed the view that the Programme had pushed up market rent levels⁴.

⁴ An individual person making enquiries might express more than one view, and each view would be categorised and counted. As the percentage for various enquiry items was calculated based on the overall number of persons making enquiries (i.e. 707), total percentages may not add up to 100%.

Conclusion

(a) Programme Publicity

9. Since the CSSA households meeting the eligibility criteria were identified based on the data in CSSS, the beneficiaries were not required to submit applications. Nevertheless, SWD had launched a number of publicity initiatives which included issuing press releases, distributing programme leaflets via SWD's District Social Welfare Offices (including the Social Security Field Units which handle CSSA cases) and the Home Affairs Department's District Offices, and uploading relevant information to the SWD website to allow eligible persons to know more about the Programme arrangements. At the same time, those who met the eligibility criteria but had previously failed to duly report to SWD change(s) on housing information could become aware of the Programme and report the change(s) in a timely manner for receiving the subsidy. Furthermore, in line with the above publicity initiatives, SWD had also set up an enquiry hotline under the Programme to provide on-the-spot support and detailed information for the individuals concerned. Although a few individual had commented that the release of information was insufficient, the publicity efforts and the information released for the Programme were considered adequate on the whole.

(b) Operational Arrangements

10. Apart from those views which had no direct relationship with the operational arrangements (such as increasing the amount of subsidy and enhancing the frequency of implementation), over 95% of the surveyed beneficiaries were satisfied with the operational arrangements of the Programme. There were also views expressed that the Programme was convenient for beneficiaries as no application was required. Regarding the enquiry hotline specially set up for the Programme, the number of enquiries received (707) accounted for only a very small proportion of the total of nearly 15 000 CSSA households benefited. This showed that the operational arrangements of the Programme was satisfactory.

(c) Overall Effectiveness

11. As can be seen from the survey data, the vast majority of the beneficiaries surveyed agreed that the Programme could relieve their burden of paying for housing expenses, and some of them even gave praise and expressed gratitude. This showed that the implementation arrangements of the Programme and the amount of subsidy were both appropriate. Furthermore, as the beneficiaries used the subsidy mainly to cover essential expenses such as rent and daily necessities, it can be seen that the Programme has achieved its objective of relieving the financial burden on the beneficiaries arising from the periodic increase of rent.

12. The MRA under the CSSA Scheme is adjusted annually in accordance with the established mechanism having regard to the movement of rent index for private housing⁵ under the Consumer Price Index (A) for CSSA households to meet the necessary rental expenses. Under the mechanism, the MRA from 2012 to 2015 was adjusted upwards yearly by 5.7%, 7.8%, 6.5% and 6.7% respectively (with a cumulative increase of up to 29.5%). Along with this, the number of CSSA households benefited from the Programme due to their rents exceeding the MRA dropped from about 22 600 during the first launch of the Programme in 2011 to about 17 700 during its relaunch in 2013, and dipped further to about 15 000 during its third launch in 2014. It could be seen that the mechanism had effectively reflected the relevant rental changes, and the launch of the Programme could relieve the financial burden on CSSA households living in rented private housing at a time when there was a periodic increase of rent. While some had commented that the Programme had pushed up market rent levels, the Programme, being a one-off subsidy in an appropriate amount, had precisely been designed not to push up the rent for private housing as far as possible. Nevertheless, if the rent allowance is adjusted according to the actual rent paid by CSSA households living in rented private housing, it may induce an increase in rent for private housing when the housing supply is tight, thus increasing the burden on low income non-CSSA households, which may indirectly result in more households falling into the CSSA net.

⁵ The index, compiled by the Census and Statistics Department on a monthly basis, measures the rental movements of private housing among non-CSSA households with relatively low expenditure and serves as the basis for adjusting the MRA.

13. The rent levels of private housing are closely linked to housing supply. In the long term, the Government will continue to increase the supply of public housing to fulfill the housing needs of those who cannot afford rented private housing. For individuals who have pressing housing needs, the social workers from the Integrated Family Service Centres of SWD or subvented non-governmental organisations would provide them with appropriate assistance on a case-by-case basis, which could include short-term financial assistance to meet rental and removal expenses, arrangement for admission to urban hostels for single persons, and/or recommendation for allocation of public rental housing flats under the Compassionate Rehousing Scheme.

14. The above measures have been taken having regard to the housing needs of the CSSA households in various aspects. SWD will continue to adjust the MRA in accordance with the existing mechanism so as to reflect relevant rental changes. At a time when there is a periodic increase of rent, implementing the Programme can serve as a buffer, while triggering the increase of rent for private housing would be avoided as far as possible. Therefore, it is not necessary to implement the Programme on a long-term basis or incorporate the Programme into the Government's regular assistance programmes. As some recent figures⁶ have indicated, while the movement of rent for private housing has been relatively steady, there are signs that periodic rental increases have remained in existence. CSSA households living in rented private housing are therefore still in need of assistance at present. It is therefore recommended that the Programme be re-launched in order to relieve their financial burden.

Social Welfare Department
June 2015

⁶ According to the Monthly Report on the Consumer Price Index published by the Census and Statistics Department, the month-to-month increase of private housing rent index under the Consumer Price Index (A) ranged from 0.3% to 0.5% during the period from January to March 2015.

Community Care Fund Assistance Programme
Extra travel subsidy for needy special school students
Evaluation Report

Background

To provide enhanced support for needy special school students to meet their daily basic travelling expenses to and from school, the Commission on Poverty (CoP) approved in May 2013 to launch the Community Care Fund (CCF) programme of providing extra travel subsidy for needy special school students (the Programme) in the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years.

2. Target beneficiaries of the Programme are primary one to secondary six students from special schools for the physically disabled, visually impaired, hearing impaired and the mildly, moderately and severely intellectually disabled who are eligible¹ for full or half level of assistance under the means-tested Student Travel Subsidy (STS) Scheme administered by the Student Finance Office (SFO) of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency. Based on the existing operation of the STS Scheme, the SFO disburses to each eligible student an extra 50% of travel subsidy on top of the STS they receive.

3. The Programme was rolled out by the SFO in October 2013. With an estimated expenditure amounting to \$3.64 million (including \$0.13 million of administrative cost) for the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years, about 1 720 students are expected to benefit from the Programme in each school year.

Implementation of the Programme

4. The SFO started to disburse the subsidy to eligible applicants in

¹ An applicant residing at a place beyond 10 minutes' walking distance from school during term time and travelling to and from school by public transport is, subject to a means test, eligible for STS. He/She may receive full rate or half rate of travel subsidy for home-school travels, depending on his/her family's actual financial situation.

October 2013. No separate application for the extra travel subsidy is required. The extra subsidy is disbursed to eligible applicants together with the STS automatically and credited to their bank accounts through auto-transfer. For the information of applicants, the SFO uploads details of the extra travel subsidy onto its website, notifies the applicants of the auto-transfer transactions in writing or via text messages after disbursement. The SFO has provided the extra travel subsidy to 1 736 and 1 667 primary and secondary students from special schools for the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years (as at end January 2015) respectively, with the disbursement involved amounting to about \$3.29 million (see Appendix I).

Evaluation of Programme Effectiveness

5. The SFO has evaluated the effectiveness of the Programme. The evaluation results and the arrangement on regularisation of the Programme were reported to the CoP at its meeting in July 2015. The details and findings of the evaluation are as follows:

(i) Extra travel subsidy as support for low-income families

6. At present, subject to professional assessments and recommendations as well as parental consent, the Education Bureau (EDB) places students with severe or multiple disabilities in special schools. Unlike ordinary students, the majority of special school students are unable to travel to school by public transport due to physical limitations or safety concerns. Consequently, they have to take rehabilitation buses or other non-public modes of transport, including school buses. Rehabilitation buses, which serve not only students, have limited seating capacity and are restricted in service flexibility. Some disabled students, including the mildly and moderately intellectually disabled students as well as the hearing impaired students, are not eligible for rehabilitation bus service. Thus, many special school students have to take non-public modes of transport to and from school, incurring higher transport fees. Since the amount of STS is calculated on the basis

of the fee level of public transport, the annual transport expenses incurred by needy students from special schools for home-school travels are often higher than the STS they receive. The extra travel subsidy provided for eligible students of special schools on top of the STS can no doubt strengthen the support for low-income families.

(ii) Survey among beneficiaries

7. To gauge stakeholders' views on the effectiveness of the Programme, the SFO conducted a questionnaire survey among parents of 920 primary and secondary student beneficiaries between November and December 2014. According to the findings, about 98% of the respondents agreed that the Programme could help alleviate their burden for children's school-related expenses, about 98% were satisfied with the operational arrangements of the Programme, and about 99% concurred that the Programme should be continued. In the survey, almost all the respondents mentioned that the extra subsidy gave them substantive help and should be provided on a continuous basis. More details about the survey are given at Appendix II.

(iii) Implementation mode of the Programme

8. The Programme operates under an existing mechanism with the extra travel subsidy disbursed to needy students from special schools through the SFO. The SFO considers that such an arrangement is operating well in that apart from minimising cost and administrative work, it enables the disbursement of extra travel subsidy to eligible persons within the shortest span of time. Moreover, separate applications are not required for the convenience of the applicants.

Conclusion

9. According to the above evaluation and the survey findings, the vast majority of the parents surveyed agreed that the Programme was generally effective in alleviating their burden for children's school-related

expenses, and they were satisfied with the operational arrangements. They indicated that the Programme should be implemented on a continuous basis. They also expressed that it was appropriate for the Programme to be implemented by the SFO. This shows that the Programme can meet the purpose for which it was launched as well as the objective of the CCF to render appropriate assistance to people facing economic difficulties.

Regularisation of the Programme

10. In light of the effectiveness of the Programme and the beneficiaries' expectation of its continued implementation, the Government has announced that starting from the 2015/16 school year, the Programme would be incorporated into its regular assistance programmes and the necessary provision has been earmarked in the estimates of the 2015-16 budget to meet the expenses.

11. Upon regularisation of the Programme, subsidy will be disbursed to needy special school students through the STS Scheme of the SFO. Disbursement will be made to parents of eligible students in October each year at the earliest to provide them with appropriate support. Since the Programme will be implemented under the existing mechanism, the SFO does not need to augment their manpower. Upon regularisation of the Programme in the 2015/16 school year, it is estimated that about 1 700 eligible and needy primary and secondary students from special schools will benefit each year.

Education Bureau

May 2015

**Number of student beneficiaries of the extra travel subsidy and
amount of subsidy disbursed**

	No. of beneficiaries	Amount disbursed
2013/14	1 736 persons	\$1.66 million
2014/15 (as at end January 2015)	1 667 persons	\$1.63 million
Total	3 403 persons	\$3.29 million

Survey among beneficiaries of extra travel subsidy**Respondents' satisfaction level and views about the assistance programme**

Questions and views	No. of respondents	Percentage
1. Do you agree that this assistance programme has alleviated your burden for children's school-related expenses? - Agree - Disagree - No comment	898 21 1	97.6% 2.3% 0.1%
2. Generally speaking, are you satisfied with the arrangements of this assistance programme? - Satisfied - Not satisfied - No comment	898 20 2	97.6% 2.2% 0.2%
3. Do you think this assistance programme, which was implemented in the 2013/14 and 2014/15 school years, should be continued? - Yes - No - No comment	912 7 1	99.1% 0.8% 0.1%

<p>4. Do you have any other comments on this assistance programme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No - Yes (including the following views) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of assistance should be raised. (26) • The Programme should be implemented on a continuous basis. (8) • Travel subsidy should be calculated on the basis of the actual amount of travelling expenses incurred. (3) • Subsidy should be provided to cover travelling expenses of parents. (1) • Questions concerning bank transaction legends (2) • No reasons given (3) 	<p>877</p> <p>43</p>	<p>95%</p> <p>5%</p>
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