

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)225/13-14
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 21 May 2013, at 9:45 am
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex

Members present : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Frankie YICK Chi-ming
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
Hon CHAN Han-pan
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, BBS, MH, JP
Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH
Hon TANG Ka-piu

Members absent : Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau

Public Officers attending : Item III

Mr Donald CHEN
Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Ms Jane LEE
Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare
(Poverty)
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mrs Anna MAK
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)
Social Welfare Department

Mr FUNG Man-chung
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child
Welfare)
Social Welfare Department

Item IV

Mr Donald CHEN
Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr FUNG Pak-yan
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)
Social Welfare Department

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

Item V

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, GBS, JP
Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr Donald CHEN
Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr Patrick NIP, JP
Director of Social Welfare
Social Welfare Department

Mr FUNG Pak-yan
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)

Social Welfare Department

Clerk in attendance : Mr Colin CHUI
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Ms Catherina YU
Senior Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1005/12-13(01) and CB(2)1165/12-13(01)]

Timing for discussion of "Study on retirement protection in Hong Kong"

Before commencing the discussion of the items for the meeting, the Chairman said that the item of "Study on retirement protection in Hong Kong" originally scheduled for discussion at this meeting had been deferred because the Panel's request, for the Administration to either provide the reports of the five studies conducted by the Central Policy Unit ("CPU") on retirement protection or make arrangements for Professor CHOW Wing-sun to attend the meeting, had not been acceded to.

2. Mr TANG Ka-piu suggested that Professor CHOW Wing-sun and representatives of CPU should be invited to a Panel meeting to give views on the proposals on retirement protection put forth by the community and listen to deputations' views on the subject matter.

3. Mr Alan LEONG and Dr Fernando CHEUNG shared Mr TANG's view that deputations should be invited to a Panel meeting to give views on retirement protection. However, since there was no new development on the study of retirement protection and the Panel had a long list of outstanding items for discussion, they said that the Panel should defer the discussion of the subject matter.

4. The Chairman suggested that the Panel should request the Administration to provide the reports on CPU's studies on retirement protection. Mr TANG Ka-piu and the Deputy Chairman were of the view

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that the reports should include the objectives, approach, findings and conclusions of the studies. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that if the Panel's request was not acceded to, the Administration should provide the reasons. Members agreed that the Panel should discuss the subject matter when CPU provided it with the aforesaid reports or when Professor CHOW was ready to brief members on his study on retirement protection.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response to the Panel's request was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1281/12-13(01) on 4 June 2013.)

5. Members noted that the following papers had been issued since the last meeting –

- (a) letter dated 16 April 2013 from Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG requesting the Panel to discuss the planning and inadequate provision of rehabilitation services for pre-school children (LC Paper No. CB(2)1005/12-13(01)); and
- (b) referral from the Public Complaints Office relating to support for street sleepers who are not on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (LC Paper No. CB(2)1165/12-13(01)).

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1129/12-13(01) and (02)]

6. Dr Fernando CHEUNG referred members to his letter requesting the Panel to discuss the planning and inadequate provision of rehabilitation services for pre-school children (LC Paper No. CB(2)1005/12-13(01). He said that for young children with special educational needs, the age from zero to six years was the "golden period" for their training and development. However, the current waiting time for assessment often exceeded half a year, and it took more than one year for the allocation of a pre-school rehabilitation service place. As a result, many young children had missed the golden period to receive the necessary education. As early identification and early intervention were essential for these young children, he considered that the Panel should discuss the subject matter as soon as possible.

7. Members noted that the Administration had proposed to discuss Guangdong Scheme and Social Welfare Planning at the next meeting scheduled for 10 June 2013. the Deputy Chairman suggested the item of

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"Planning and inadequate provision of rehabilitation services for pre-school children" should be discussed at the Panel meeting in June 2013 if the Administration was not yet ready to update members on social welfare planning in June 2013.

8. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting scheduled for 10 June 2013 –

- (a) Guangdong Scheme; and
- (b) Social welfare planning, or Planning and inadequate provision of rehabilitation services for pre-school children.

III. Additional funding for short-term food assistance service

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1129/12-13(03) and (04)]

9. The Chairman drew members' attention to Rule 83A of the Rules of Procedure ("RoP") concerning personal pecuniary interest to be disclosed. The Chairman reminded members to declare interests in the matter under discussion, if any.

10. The Chairman declared that the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions had provided meal services to the needy. However, it had not received any Government subsidy for the provision of such services.

11. At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)2 ("DS(W)2") briefed members on the Administration's proposal to seek additional funding of \$200 million for the continuation and enhancement of the short-term food assistance service ("the service").

Inadequacy of the existing social welfare policies

12. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that there should not be such a high demand for food assistance as Hong Kong was an affluent city. Such a phenomenon might be attributable to the deficiency in the current safety net. Citing the monthly meal allowance of \$245 provided for students receiving full-day education under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme as an example, he said that the allowance was insufficient to cover the students' meal expenses which cost more than \$400 a month. The Chairman concurred with Dr CHEUNG and said that some underprivileged individuals had recurrent need for food assistance. The

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Chairman and Dr CHEUNG called for the Administration to critically examine the existing social welfare policies and take steps to plug the loopholes, if any, to ensure that the needy was adequately provided for.

13. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the service demand in Yau Tsim Mong district was high because there were not many public rental housing units in the district and many low-income earners residing in the district had to pay high rents in private housing. To alleviate their rental burden, rent control should be imposed. A specific consumer price index taking into account the expenditure pattern of target service users should be developed to evaluate the impact of price changes on them, thereby providing them with the required assistance.

14. DS(W)2 noted members' views that improvements should be made to the existing social welfare policies. He said that the current-term Government had faced up to the problem of poverty and hence set up the Commission on Poverty ("CoP") to consider poverty alleviating measures. There was a view that the Administration should step up its assistance to the low-income earners. CoP would work on this direction.

15. DS(W)2 further said that under the CSSA Scheme, beneficiaries' basic meal expenditure had already been covered by the CSSA standard payment rates. The meal allowance was an additional allowance provided for students receiving full-day education who needed to have lunch outside their homes. The Administration would take account of inflation or deflation as reflected by the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices ("SSAIP") to adjust the standard payment rates on an annual basis. The weighting system of SSAIP was updated every five years on the basis of the findings of the Household Expenditure Survey on CSSA Households in order to maintain the purchasing power of the payments.

16. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services) ("DDSW(S)") said that the Administration had encouraged service operators to offer more choices for users so as to better meet their needs. In addition to providing hot meal coupons to service users who did not have the cooking facilities to prepare their own meals, service operators would also be encouraged to strengthen collaboration with hot-meal canteens.

Scope of service

17. Pointing out that the provision of food assistance was mainly in the form of dry rations which were less nutritious for young children, Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the Administration should increase the

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provision of hot meals.

18. Mr TANG Ka-piu was concerned about whether the service users' needs for infant formula products could be met given the shortage of supply for such products early this year. DS(W)2 responded that SWD had been in contact with concerned non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") and gathered that the supply of infant formula products for service users was not affected as the service operators had purchased the relevant products in bulk. The Administration would continue to closely monitor the supply of food for the service.

19. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung asked whether the objective of the Administration's proposal to re-demarcate service boundaries was to save cost and better meet service needs. DDSW(S) responded that the service demand in Sham Shui Po, Kowloon City, Yau Tsim Mong, Tuen Mun, Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai was higher. To better serve the users, the Administration suggested that these areas which were currently served by two service projects be split into four districts (i.e. Shum Shui Po and Tuen Mun as two separate districts; Kowloon City and Yau Tsim Mong as one district; Tin Shui Wai and Yuen Long as another district).

20. Mr Alan LEONG said that some organizations had provided free meals for the needy after processing the food waste they collected. He found such services meaningful as it could reduce food waste, help create job opportunities for low-skilled workers and provide hot meals for people in need. He enquired whether the Administration would consider deploying resources to support such services.

21. DDSW(S) responded that the Administration welcomed other organizations to provide food assistance services out of their own initiatives, and indeed, there were already a great variety of such community services. The Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged ("PED") had also been providing funding to some of these community food assistance services.

22. As regards the financial support for food recycle programmes, DDSW(S) said that the Administration had provided funds to relevant schemes through PFD. For every \$1 they received in donations from business organizations, successful PFD applicants would receive another \$1 from PFD.

Invitation of proposal

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23. Mr POON Siu-ping sought information on whether the Administration would collect public views on policies relating to the provision of food assistance before conducting the new round of invitation of proposals in July 2013 and on the scope of the invitation of proposals.

24. DDSW(S) responded that the new round of invitation of proposals would not be restricted to the existing five operators. Proposals from other subvented or self-financing food assistance service providers or new providers were also welcomed. The Administration would explain to the sector the operational and service requirements. The Administration would evaluate the proposals received and select seven operators for the seven projects.

25. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that given that the one-off set up cost for each project would be as high as \$2.5 million and the existing operators had already had the necessary furniture and equipment for the service, the Administration should carefully consider whether it was necessary to invite new proposals on service provision to avoid any waste of public money.

Service duration

26. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the service period of a maximum of six weeks was too short and had, in a way, discouraged some people in need of food assistance to use the service. The existing operators had also indicated that according to their experience, the service duration should be between 10 and 12 weeks. He urged the Administration to extend the service duration to at least 12 weeks.

Administrative fee

27. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that the administrative fee for the service was already higher than that of similar services and yet some service operators had requested for more administrative fee. He enquired about the reasons for such requests. DS(W)2 responded that the administrative fee was currently set at 15% of the operational expenses allocated to the service operators and the remaining 85% was food cost. In view of the increase in food prices and to catch up with inflation, the Administration proposed that the allocation per meal-day for the operators be increased by 10% with effect from October 2013. With this upward adjustment, more administrative fee would be given to the service operators, while having the 15% proportion unchanged.

28. DDSW(S) supplemented that the administrative fee for other

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time-limited services ranged from 10% to 15%. Some service operators had requested for more administrative fee because they wished to provide other services in addition to food assistance. Since this had somewhat departed from the service objective, the Administration considered that services other than food assistance should be referred to the providers of mainstream services. In response to Mr TAM Yiu-chung's enquiry about the expenses which were covered by the administrative fee, DDSW(S) said that the administrative fee mainly included costs on case assessment, food delivery, case referral, etc.

29. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung said that comparing with services commissioned to outside parties, the administrative fee for services provided by the Administration had always been criticized for being on the high side. As the short-term food assistance service was provided by NGOs, he enquired whether the Administration had any savings in administrative fee.

30. DDSW(S) responded that no comparison had been made on the administrative fee for the services provided by the Administration and by NGOs. The service was commissioned to NGOs because they had good networks and therefore would be able to use the resources more effectively.

31. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that according to the existing operators, the provision for administrative fee was not enough to cover some of the administrative and transportation expenses. They had to pay some of these expenses out of their own pockets. He said that the Administration should consider reviewing the level of administrative fee. The Chairman added that although the provision for food cost was sufficient, the Administration should assist the operators in finding suppliers who were willing to offer discounts on food. With lower food costs, service operators could provide more food to users.

Service users

32. Noting that some 10 000 CSSA recipients had received the service, Mr TANG Ka-piu wondered whether it was an indication that the amount of CSSA was insufficient to meet CSSA households' daily needs. Mr TANG Ka-piu and the Deputy Chairman said that a detailed analysis on the types of service users would help identify the causes of the need for the service and facilitate the adoption of appropriate measures to help the people in need.

33. DS(W)2 responded that service users were mainly low-income

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earners and unemployed individuals. They had accounted for 47.5% and 23% respectively of the total. Other users included new arrivals (13%), street sleepers (2%) and those who were facing immediate financial difficulties arising from sudden changes (e.g. illness of family members) in their families. About one-third of the service users were repeated users. DDSW(S) supplemented that about 12% of the service users were CSSA recipients who had financial hardship because of sudden changes in their families. At the request of the Deputy Chairman, the Administration undertook to provide a breakdown of the number and types of users, including the number of repeated users, of the service between 2008 and 2013.

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34. Mr Albert HO said that since refugees in Hong Kong were not provided with adequate food, food assistance service should be extended to them. DDSW(S) responded that separate assistance on housing, food and travelling expenses was provided for refugees to meet their basic needs.

IV. Additional provision for social security recipients

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1129/12-13(05) and (06)]

35. The Chairman drew members' attention to Rule 83A of RoP concerning personal pecuniary interest to be disclosed. The Chairman reminded members to declare interests in the matter under discussion, if any.

36. At the invitation of the Chairman, DS(W)2 briefed members on the Administration's proposal to provide an extra payment to recipients of CSSA, Old Age Allowance ("OAA"), Old Age Living Allowance ("OALA") and Disability Allowance ("DA").

37. Mr TAM Yiu-chung enquired whether there would be any delay in the disbursement of the extra payment given that the Appropriation Bill 2013 ("the Bill") had not yet been passed and the steps to be taken to speed up the disbursement, if necessary. DS(W)2 responded that, subject to the passage of the Bill, the Administration planned to seek approval of the Finance Committee ("FC") of the funding proposal in June 2013 with a view to effecting the extra payment in July 2013. The disbursement schedule would be about the same as that for the previous one-off extra payment to social security recipients.

38. Pointing out that some DA recipients had switched to receive OALA, Mr TANG Ka-piu enquired whether these applicants would receive extra payment for DA or OALA.

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39. Miss Alice MAK asked when the OAA recipients who did not opt to switch to OALA through the "auto-conversion" arrangement would receive the extra payment. She also enquired how the Administration would deal with the situation in which an OAA recipient could not switch to receive OALA through the auto-conversion programme because of computer problems and how the extra payment would be handled if he/she passed away before submitting the OALA application.

40. DS(W)2 responded that for DA recipients aged 65 or above and were eligible to receive OALA at the approval date of the funding proposal by FC, they might receive the extra payment of OALA if their OALA applications were submitted on or before 31 December 2013. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration) ("DDSW(A)") supplemented that the same applied to OAA recipients who had switched to receive OALA. Subject to FC's approval of the funding proposal, the first round of extra payment would be disbursed in July 2013 and the second round in September 2013. The difference between the extra payment for DA/OAA and OALA would be paid to the recipients who received DA/OAA extra payment in July 2013 but successfully switched to receive OALA afterwards. Should an OALA applicant pass away during the process of his/her application, the extra payment would be dealt with as the estate of the applicant.

41. Mr TANG Ka-piu said that since about half of the CSSA recipients living in private housing were paying rents which exceeded the maximum rent allowance, the Administration should consider providing CSSA recipients, who were living in private housing, with an extra month of rent allowance or non-accountable rent allowance.

42. DS(W)2 responded that the Community Care Fund would re-launch the "Subsidy for CSSA Recipients Living in Rented Private Housing" programme to provide a one-off subsidy to CSSA households living in rented private housing whose actual rent payment exceeded the maximum rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme. Subsidy for one-person CSSA household would be \$2,000 while that for two-or-more-person household would be \$4,000. The subsidy would be disbursed at the end of this year.

43. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the existing level of CSSA was far from adequate to maintain subsistence living. It was one of the reasons why the Administration provided extra payments to social security recipients in the past five years. Pointing out that the Administration had not conducted any comprehensive review of the CSSA Scheme since 1996,

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Dr CHEUNG called on the Administration to conduct an in-depth study on the needs of the impoverished group and increase the level of CSSA to provide them with protection for subsistence.

44. DS(W)2 responded that the one-off measures introduced in the past few years were in response to the economic situation and special circumstances such as the financial tsunami. Having regard to the uncertain external economic outlook and the continued risk of rising inflation, the Financial Secretary proposed the provision of an extra payment to social security recipients. The CSSA standard payment rates would be adjusted on an annual basis taking into account the movements of SSAIP and the weighting system of SSAIP would be updated once every five years.

45. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that providing extra payment to recipients of CSSA, OAA, OALA and DA could not help them escape poverty. The poverty problems of the elderly and persons with disabilities could not be resolved unless there was a revamp of the existing social security system. In response to Mr LEUNG's enquiry about the Government expenditures incurred in the additional provision and one-off measures for social security recipients, DS(W)2 said that the estimated financial implication of the proposed one-off payment to social security recipients was \$2.728 billion. Regarding Mr LEUNG's enquiry about whether the existing social welfare services would be affected if the Government were to commit \$50 billion for universal retirement protection, DS(W)2 responded that resources should be allocated according to the policy direction.

46. In response to the Chairman's invitation of view, members supported in principle the submission of the relevant funding proposal to FC for consideration.

V. Pilot scheme to further encourage Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients to take up employment

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1129/12-13(09) and (10)]

(The Chairman left the meeting at this juncture after which the meeting was chaired by the Deputy Chairman.)

47. At the invitation of the Deputy Chairman, Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") briefed members on the proposal to launch a pilot scheme ("the Pilot Scheme") to further encourage CSSA recipients to take up employment. Director of Social Welfare ("DSW") said that the duration

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of the Pilot Scheme would be three years and the Administration was in the course of working out the details. He took members through the relevant concept paper (Annex to the Administration paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1129/12-13(09)).

Review on disregarded earnings arrangements

48. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the first \$800 of the income of CSSA recipients which would be disregarded in full was insufficient to cover the expenses for taking up employment such as expenses on meal, transport, clothing, etc. To encourage CSSA recipients to take up employment, the Administration should consider increasing the "no-deduction" limit for disregarded earnings ("DE") from \$800 to \$1,000.

49. SLW said the "no-deduction" limit for DE had been raised from \$600 to \$800 in 2007. Given that a new initiative would be tried out under the Pilot Scheme, the Administration considered it unsuitable to make any changes to the "no deduction" limit at this stage. The Administration would keep in view the development of the Pilot Scheme and review the "no-deduction" limit if necessary.

50. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong had always advocated an increase in the "no-deduction" limit as it was the most direct and effective way to benefit the CSSA recipients who were in employment. He requested the Administration to review the DE arrangements having regard to the outcome of the Pilot Scheme.

51. The Deputy Chairman said that the "no-deduction" limit was adjusted six years ago. The Administration should review the "no-deduction" limit and the maximum amount of monthly DE in its future reviews on the CSSA system. The Administration could consider increasing the "no-deduction" limit on a trial basis with the launching of the Pilot Scheme.

52. The Deputy Chairman further said that CSSA recipients would have greater motivation to work if they could have more take-home pay. He suggested that more levels of disregard should be provided for earnings and instead of putting the entire amount of DE in the savings accounts, part of DE should be given to the participants so that the more they earned, the more take-home pay they would get.

53. Mr Frankie YICK said that the Pilot Scheme might not be effective

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in encouraging CSSA recipients to work in the long run. When a CSSA recipient had used up the savings under the Pilot Scheme, he or she might eventually need to rely on CSSA. In his view, CSSA recipients would have an incentive to work if they could use the full amount of their earnings to support their families. For the interests of CSSA recipients, the Administration should increase the "no deduction" limit.

54. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that CSSA recipients would not be motivated to work if the amount of DE was not sufficient to cover their expenses for taking up employment. Given that prices for basic necessities had gone up since the adjustment of the "no-deduction" limit in 2007 and the wages had increased as a result of the implementation of statutory minimum wage, the Administration should not defer any further the review of the "no-deduction" limit. He considered that the review on DE arrangements and the Pilot Scheme could be carried out in parallel.

55. Mr CHAN Han-pan was of the view that it was important for CSSA recipients to remain in employment. Otherwise, they might have to rely on CSSA again after they had exhausted the savings. He urged the Administration to seriously consider increasing the "no-deduction" limit. He also suggested that the Administration should consider giving interest for the savings to the CSSA recipients concerned to further encourage them to work.

56. SLW responded that under the Pilot Scheme, the Community Care Fund would provide funding equal to the amount of the participants' employment earnings in excess of the maximum amount of DE. In other words, the more the participants earned, the more they could save. It would give an impetus to CSSA recipients to take up employment. He further said that the average monthly CSSA payment for a four-member household was \$11,817 whereas the average monthly income of non-CSSA four-member households in the lowest 20% income group was \$11,800. Further relaxation of the "no-deduction" limit would be unfair to these non-CSSA households and might attract them to apply for CSSA. Furthermore, an increase in the "no-deduction" limit might prolong the duration of stay of CSSA recipients on CSSA. On the other hand, since the CSSA recipients concerned should have a stable job by the time they were given the total amount of savings, the chance of them being on CSSA again would be rather slim.

57. DSW supplemented that the Administration would keep track of the participants of the Pilot Scheme for a period of about six months or beyond and see whether they would return to the CSSA net soon after they had

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received the savings. A consultant would be appointed to conduct an evaluation on the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme. He added that a target amount on the savings would be set and when the target amount was reached, the amount would be disbursed to the participants for them to leave the CSSA net. The Administration would be careful in setting the target amount of savings to ensure that the participants did not need to take a long time to save the target amount or rely on CSSA again shortly after they had left the CSSA net because the target amount of savings was too little.

58. Regarding the suggestion of providing interest for the savings, DSW said that the Administration considered it necessary to keep the administration and operation of the Pilot Scheme simple. As such, the provision of interest for the savings would not be considered at this stage.

59. In response to Mr CHAN Han-pan's enquiry on the situations in which savings could be withdrawn and the approving authority for the withdrawal, SLW said that withdrawal of savings might be considered for urgent medical expenses.

60. Dr Helena WONG shared members' views that the Administration should increase the "no-deduction" limit to alleviate the participants' financial burden for taking up employment. SLW said that under the Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme, eligible CSSA recipients who were in employment would receive transport subsidy.

61. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that many CSSA recipients had to remain in the CSSA net because their wages were too low. To help CSSA recipients to leave the CSSA net, the Administration should address the problem of low wages for certain jobs. In his view, instead of wasting public money on the Pilot Scheme, the Administration should give the money to CSSA recipients as it was the quickest way to help them escape poverty.

62. Mr Frederick FUNG said that in addition to increasing the "no-deduction" limit and the maximum amount of monthly DE, a bonus should be given to the participants who had met the savings targets. Training courses should be designed according to the education level and working experience of the participants to enhance their earning ability. Adopting these measures would help reduce the chance of them having to rely on CSSA again.

63. SLW said that support for skill enhancement and employment was

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provided to the participants under various employment assistance services. The NGOs concerned would follow up the employment situation of the participants. DSW supplemented that to enable the Administration to evaluate whether the Pilot Scheme met its objectives, the operation of the Pilot Scheme should be simple. The Administration would consider members' suggestion having regard to the administrative costs required.

Participants of the Pilot Scheme

64. While expressing support for the Pilot Scheme, Dr Fernando CHEUNG considered the scale of the Pilot Scheme too small. He said that there were around 10 000 low-income CSSA households but the target beneficiaries of the Pilot Scheme was only about 1 000. With a limited number of beneficiaries, the Pilot Scheme could not serve the objective of further encouraging CSSA recipients to take up employment.

65. Mr POON Siu-ping enquired about the basis of inviting seven Integrated Employment Assistance Programme for Self-reliance ("IEAPS") service team to serve as trial groups for the Pilot Scheme and whether the Administration would consider increasing the number of trial groups. He also sought information on the evaluation criteria for the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme.

66. SLW responded that the Administration would review the number of beneficiaries. Regarding the selection of participants, DSW said that the trial groups would be selected having regard to factors such as their experience in providing IEAPS services for CSSA recipients and in managing savings accounts in other programmes. The experience would be useful for the implementation of the Pilot Scheme. In addition to the trial groups, the Administration was considering inviting seven control groups, which would not participate in the Pilot Scheme, with a view to comparing the employability and the income of the trial groups and the control groups, as well as the time they would take to leave the CSSA net. The Administration would also explore other approaches, e.g. selecting the number of participants in proportion to the total number of the IEAPS service teams.

67. Mr TANG Ka-piu sought information on whether the Administration would also include in the Pilot Scheme individuals who had been on CSSA persistently and consider removing the age limit so that CSSA recipients aged 60 or above and had working ability could also participate in the Pilot Scheme.

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68. DSW responded that the Pilot Scheme was targeted at CSSA recipients aged 15 to 59 who had working ability and had taken part in the Administration's employment assistance services. Given that a diversity of participants' background would provide useful information for determining the target beneficiaries in future, the Administration would invite CSSA households of different sizes, CSSA recipients from different age groups and specifically, young people who had participated in the Special Training and Enhancement Programme (My STEP) to join the Pilot Scheme. Under the CSSA Scheme, recipients who were 60 years old or above were elderly recipients and should therefore be excluded from the Pilot Scheme.

69. Dr Helena WONG said that given that the population was ageing and many elderly persons were still capable of working, the Administration should consider waiving the age limit so that elderly persons, particularly elderly women who had working ability, would not be deprived of the opportunity to join the workforce.

70. SLW responded that releasing labour force of elderly persons might be necessary in view of the ageing population. The Administration would keep in view the implementation of the Pilot Scheme during the three-year period and make improvements if necessary. The Pilot Scheme might become a regular scheme if it was proven successful and inclusion of elderly persons in the regular scheme might then be considered.

71. Mr TANG Ka-piu asked whether CSSA recipients who had joined the Support for Self-reliance Scheme and subsequently withdrawn from it could participate in the Pilot Scheme. DSW responded that the participants who had been receiving employment assistance services on and off during the three-year period of the Pilot Scheme were allowed to continue their participation in the Pilot Scheme. However, the participants of the Pilot Scheme who had got their target savings and left the CSSA net could not rejoin the Pilot Scheme.

(To allow sufficient time for discussion, the Deputy Chairman extended the meeting for 15 minutes beyond the appointed ending time.)

72. The Deputy Chairman said that to facilitate better evaluation of the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme, districts with promising job opportunities and those with little job opportunities should be included in the Pilot Scheme. To optimize cost effectiveness, two additional staff should be deployed to each service team for case management and giving

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advice to participants.

Motion

73. Dr Fernando CHEUNG moved the following motion –

"本事務委員會歡迎"進一步鼓勵綜合社會保障援助(下稱"綜援")受助人就業試驗計劃"的構思，但鑒於計劃的受惠人數太少，本事務委員會認為，政府當局應大幅放寬豁免計算入息安排，以更能鼓勵綜援人士就業。"

74. Dr Helena WONG proposed adding the relaxation of age limit to the motion.

75. The Deputy Chairman put the following motion which had incorporated Dr WONG's proposal (as underlined below) to vote –

"本事務委員會歡迎"進一步鼓勵綜合社會保障援助(下稱"綜援")受助人就業試驗計劃"的構思，但鑒於計劃的受惠人數太少，本事務委員會認為，政府當局應大幅放寬豁免計算入息安排及年齡上限，以更能鼓勵綜援人士就業。"

(Translation)

"That, this Panel welcomes the proposal to launch a pilot scheme to further encourage Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") recipients to take up employment; however, as only a limited number of people can be benefited from the scheme, this Panel considers that the Administration should substantially relax the disregarded earnings arrangements and the age limit to better serve the purpose of encouraging CSSA recipients to work."

76. All members present, except Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung and Mr CHAN Chi-chuen who abstained in the vote, voted for the motion. The Deputy Chairman declared that the motion was carried.

VI. Any other business

Action

77. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:55am.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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