

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**Arrangements for the Non-Civil Service Contract
Community Work Organisers of Social Welfare Department at
the expiry of their employment contracts**

Purpose

The employment contracts of the Non-Civil Service Contract (NCSC) Community Work Organisers (CWOs) employed by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will expire on 31 March 2013. This paper aims to brief members on the background of commissioning the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide the employment assistance services under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and the assistance rendered to the CWOs to seek employment.

Background

2. In June 1999, SWD implemented the Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme including the Active Employment Assistance Programme and the Community Work (CW) Programme which aimed to assist and encourage unemployed CSSA recipients to find jobs to become self-reliant. In this light, SWD employed NCSC staff, including the CWOs, to assist in the implementation of the above mentioned programmes.

3. Over the 10 years or so, the service content and the mode of the operation of the SFS Scheme have been continuously under enhancement. SWD have launched various employment assistance programmes and have been fine-tuning the programmes, including commissioning NGOs to operate the programmes by phases, for instance, the Special Job Attachment Programme and the Intensive Employment Assistance Fund Project launched in

2001, the Intensive Employment Assistance Projects launched in 2003, the Community Work Experience and Training Programme launched in 2005 as well as the Special Training and Enhancement Programme, New Dawn Project, the District Employment Assistance Trial Projects and the Community Work-cum-Occupational Skills Training Programme launched in 2006, etc.

4. Commissioning the NGOs to provide employment assistance services in order to utilize their professional knowledge and experience in providing targeted supportive services to the unemployed CSSA families had been developing into a trend in more than ten years in the past and the result was satisfactory. After commissioning NGOs to operate the Integrated Employment Assistance Scheme in October 2008, all the employment assistance programmes under the CSSA Scheme had been operated by the NGOs commissioned by SWD except the CW Programme. As for community work, SWD had also commissioned NGOs to implement pilot projects during 2005 to 2009 and SWD had ceased recruiting NCSC CWOs since 2007. The management of SWD in each of the past five annual meetings with the staff association of the CWOs had explained the situation, including the trend on commissioning NGOs to provide the relevant services, and that SWD would keep on examining the service needs and the mode of operation of the employment assistance programmes to match with the overall development and would timely review the need to continue to employ NCSC CWOs. The Department had also pointed out that it was impossible for SWD to employ NCSC CWOs permanently. Furthermore, since there was no similar post in the permanent establishment in the civil service, the Department could not change the position of CWO to be a post on the permanent establishment and colleagues should not have wrong expectation. Nevertheless, SWD would give them sufficient advance notice and inform them of the arrangements on the expiry of their employment contracts at the earliest possible time.

5. It was announced in the Policy Agenda in October 2011 that the Government would review the various employment assistance programmes under the CSSA Scheme with a view to achieving better integration and effectiveness. In February 2012, funding was reserved for enhancing the employment assistance programmes under the CSSA Scheme in the Budget. To take forward the above policy, SWD has commissioned 26 NGOs to implement the Integrated Employment Assistance Programme for Self-reliance (IEAPS) which integrates the various employment assistance programmes since January

2013, to provide the able-bodied CSSA recipients with diversified and one-stop employment assistance services on a family basis, including the enhanced CW Programme now known as Work Exposure Services. Since then, all the employment assistance services provided to the families on CSSA have been commissioned to NGOs for operation. There is no more operational need for employing the NCSC CWOs. Besides, their employment contracts will expire on 31 March 2013.

NCSC Staff Scheme

6. The NCSC Staff Scheme, introduced in 1999 by the Government, aimed at providing a flexible means of employment so that Bureaux/Departments could respond more promptly to changing operational and service needs, including the mode of delivery of some public services which were under review or likely to be changed.

7. To ensure that the NCSC Staff Scheme would be implemented properly, departments had to review the employment of the NCSC staff from time to time to determine whether the relevant services could be provided in other more appropriate mode.

Arrangements for the NCSC CWOs at the expiry of their employment contracts

8. In order to enable the NCSC CWOs to have sufficient time to plan for the arrangements after the expiry of their employment contracts, SWD, after knowing that funding was reserved in the Budget in February 2012 for the implementation of the integrated programme, immediately informed the 80 affected CWOs of the relevant arrangements, so that they had more than a year's time to find jobs or make other arrangements. SWD had been making a lot of effort in assisting the CWOs to find jobs or seek employment including:

Employment assistance

9. As early as in March 2012, SWD conducted briefing sessions to the

CWOs to explain to all the affected staff in detail the circumstances and arranged the Labour Department to introduce its employment services. Moreover, SWD set up a mechanism to collect information and inform every serving CWOs of civil service and non-civil service job vacancies in the Government and job openings in the public organisations and NGOs, for example, the job vacancies of Social Security Officer II (SSOII), Social Security Assistant (SSA), Assistant Hawker Control Officer (AHCO), Assistant Clerical Officer (ACO), Clerical Assistant (CA), etc, and encouraged the CWOs to apply for the jobs and assisted them to submit application forms.

10. To better prepare CWOs for attending job interviews and skill tests, SWD organised a “Workshop on Enhancing Job Interview Skills and Personal Effectiveness” conducted by a professional training consultant. Besides, in order to enhance their knowledge in applying for vacancies in the civil service, SWD held a number of sharing sessions on job interview and skill tests conducted by civil servants successfully recruited by the relevant departments to share their experience, including sharing sessions for applying for the post of SSOII, SSA, AHCO, ACO and CA. There were a total of 43 participants who attended these sharing sessions

Arrangements on training

11. To assist the CWOs to understand more about the employment situation of other industries, SWD also arranged the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) to conduct a briefing session on the entry requirements and the job market of the industries suitable to the CWOs. Also, SWD arranged personalised ERB Training Consultant Services to assist the CWOs to explore and understand their career preferences. To enhance the competitiveness of the CWOs in seeking employment, subsidies were provided to CWOs for attending courses organised by the ERB or other recognised organisations, such as the Construction Industry Council and the Travel Industry Council of Hong Kong. The courses enrolled were self-arranged according to personal needs of the CWOs. As of today, 16 participants have enrolled in seven courses.

12. In addition, to enhance their competitiveness, SWD also provided generic training courses to CWOs, for example, courses on computer software application, interview skills and the Basic Law. As of today, attendance counts add up to 370 in 17 different courses.

Current position of referral for employment

13. SWD believes that the experience of CWOs accumulated over the past years can help implement the enhanced CW Programme, i.e. the Work Exposure Services under the IEAPS implemented with effect from January 2013. For this, when inviting NGOs to submit proposals to operate the projects under the IEAPS, SWD had encouraged the applicant NGOs to recruit persons with experience in CW Programme. Since all the 26 NGOs commissioned by SWD to implement the IEAPS undertook to actively consider employing suitable CWOs; SWD sought the consent from the 72 CWOs who were still serving in October 2012 for the Department to refer their personal particulars to the NGOs concerned for consideration of employment when the latter commenced to recruit staff for IEAPS. Out of the 72 CWOs, 29 CWOs gave consent for SWD to transfer their personal particulars to the NGOs concerned for follow-up. Moreover, SWD also provided information about the recruitment under the IEAPS operated by the NGOs to all the 72 CWOs for their consideration of applying for the posts.

14. Since the 80 CWOs were notified in February 2012 that they would be leaving the service after the expiry of their contracts on 31 March 2013, and up to mid-February 2013, 21 CWOs, or 26 % of the total number of CWOs, have successfully secured employment.

15. Among the 29 CWOs who gave consent for SWD to refer them to NGOs concerned for consideration of employment, 19 CWOs or 66% had been offered employment by the NGOs. Of these, nine CWOs have already left the service while the dates of employment by the NGOs of another two CWOs were still pending confirmation. Regrettably, there were eight CWOs who had been offered employment by one to four NGOs but did not accept the offer owing to personal reasons. For the remaining 10 CWOs, one took up employment by himself and the remaining nine were invited to attend job interviews for one to six times. Among them, five CWOs did not accept the invitation to job interviews for one to two times owing to personal reasons. Nevertheless, the NGOs concerned are still considering to employ suitable CWOs.

16. At present, 40 out of the 59 NCSC CWOs (i.e. 70%) still employed

by SWD have not given consent for SWD to transfer their personal particulars to the NGOs concerned for consideration for employment. Fifteen of them have applied for vacancies in the Government, including the posts of AHCO, ACO, CA and SSA; 22 have enrolled in various training courses, for example, Introduction to Basic Law, Cangjie Input Method, word processing and spreadsheet application software, workshop for interviewing techniques, Training Consultancy Services and Recognition Scheme for Security Training Courses, etc; while the remaining three CWOs have not sought employment or enrolled in any training courses.

17. Furthermore, under the existing policy, the appointment of civil servants should be under the principle of open and fair competition. SWD has to follow the established recruitment mechanism and procedures to select the best qualified candidates to fill the civil service vacancies through a competitive selection process. When SWD recruits civil servant, CWOs meeting the basic entry requirement will be arranged to attend the selection interview without the need to go through the process of short-listing. However, same as the other candidates selected to attend the selection interviews, CWOs have to be considered for appointment through the selection process.

18. SWD will continue to strive to provide appropriate support to the CWOs to help them secure suitable jobs as far as possible.

19. Members are invited to note this paper.

Social Welfare Department
February 2013