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Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 19 February 2013**

**Non-renewal of contracts of Social Welfare Department's non-civil
service contract Community Work Organizers**

Purpose

This paper summarizes the major concerns raised by members of the Panel on Welfare Services ("WS Panel") and the Panel on Public Service ("PS Panel") on the captioned subject.

Background

2. The Community Work ("CW") Programme was part of the employment assistance services under the Support for Self-reliance Scheme ("SFS Scheme") of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme to help able-bodied CSSA recipients build up a work habit, enhance their self-confidence and enable them to make contribution to the community while receiving CSSA payment. Applicants were required to perform community work up to a maximum of three days or 24 hours a week in parallel to their job search process.

3. The other employment assistance services under the SFS Scheme included the Integrated Employment Assistance Scheme ("IEAS"), Special Training and Enhancement Programme (My STEP) and New Dawn ("ND") Project to help employable CSSA recipients return to the labour market. Having regard to the operational experience, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") had commissioned non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") to operate IEAS, My STEP and the ND Project by phases over the years to meet the multifarious needs of CSSA recipients, while the CW Programme was implemented by SWD direct.

4. In the 2011-2012 Policy Agenda, the Chief Executive proposed to review various employment assistance services under the CSSA Scheme to integrate and improve these services, thereby enhancing effectiveness and achieving synergy. Having regard to the experience gained from the existing services and taking into consideration stakeholders' views, SWD proposed to integrate the three existing services and the CW Programme through commissioning NGOs to provide employable CSSA recipients with multifarious and one-stop employment assistance services on a family basis according to their individual needs. According to the Administration, the integration of the CW Programme with other employment assistance services would allow NGOs to enrich the existing CW Programme, for example, through providing more diversified and structured voluntary work and work trial experience, etc.

Members' major deliberations and concerns

5. When the WS Panel discussed the integration of the employment assistance programmes under the CSSA Scheme at its meeting on 12 April 2012, members expressed concern about the prospect of SWD's non-civil service contract ("NCSC") staff, who assisted in implementing the CW Programme, after the Programme was delivered by NGOs in March 2013. They held the view that the staff should be retained as most of them had been working in SWD in the social security field for many years.

6. The Administration advised that the NCSC positions had been taken up by contract staff whose employment contracts were renewed annually having regard to the operational needs of the services. In the light of the proposal to commission NGOs to provide the CW Programme, the Administration had notified the some 80 NCSC staff concerned in February 2012 of the changing service delivery mode of the CW Programme and their contracts had been renewed up to 31 March 2013 to allow sufficient time for them to find other jobs. Employment assistance would be rendered to them as appropriate. In addition, the Administration had appealed to the prospective operating NGOs to recruit these NCSC staff to fill the new posts required for the integrated services, and the feedback from NGOs had been positive.

7. Noting that a group of NCSC Community Work Organizers ("CWOs") under the CW Programme would become unemployed starting from April 2013 after the commissioning of the Programme to NGOs, Hon TANG Ka-piu and Hon KWOK Wai-keung proposed that the PS

Panel and the WS Panel should discuss the SWD's non-renewal of contracts of the CWOs. They said that SWD had all along been reluctant to retain these NCSC staff by offering them civil service terms of employment, which was unfair to them. They also expressed dissatisfaction that SWD had not assisted these staff by giving priority to them in its recruitment of new staff, nor had SWD assisted them in seeking employment in the NGOs concerned.

8. At the meeting of the PS Panel on 21 January 2013, SWD NCSC staff associations, which had been invited to express their views, pointed out that many NCSC CWOs had been employed in the same position since 1999. Having regard to these CWOs' long years of service, commitment to work and relevant working experience, the Administration should consider renewing their contract or giving priority to them in its recruitment of new staff. Concerns were raised by members about the degree of management and control by the Civil Service Bureau ("CSB") in the non-renewal of contracts of CWOs. The Administration advised that the CSB's policy was not to micro-manage bureaux/departments in the employment of NCSC staff, so as to maintain flexibility of the NCSC Staff Scheme. SWD had provided employment assistance and training to the NCSC CWOs and would follow up the issue with the staff concerned.

Latest development

9. As requested by Hon TANG Ka-piu and Hon KWOK Wai-keung, the non-renewal of contracts of the CWOs will be discussed by the WS Panel at its meeting on 19 February 2013. The staff associations concerned have been invited to give views at the meeting.

Relevant papers

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

Appendix

Relevant papers on non-renewal of contracts of Social Welfare Department's non-civil service contract Community Work Organizers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	12 April 2012 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Public Service	17 December 2012 (Item II)	Agenda
Panel on Welfare Services	14 January 2013 (Item III)	Agenda
Panel on Public Service	21 January 2013 (Item VI)	Agenda

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