

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)417/13-14(06)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 9 December 2013**

Extension of the Principal Assistant Secretary (Poverty) post

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the extension of the Principal Assistant Secretary (Poverty) ("PAS(P)") post in the Poverty Team of the Labour and Welfare Bureau ("LWB"), as well as the past discussions of the Legislative Council and its committees on the subject.

Background

2. According to the Administration, following the conclusion of work of the former Commission on Poverty ("CoP") in 2007 and the re-organization of policy bureaux of the Government Secretariat with effect from 1 July 2007, LWB had been responsible for overseeing and coordinating poverty alleviation matters. In the 2007-2008 Policy Address, the Administration announced the setting up of an inter-bureau/departamental Task Force on Poverty, headed by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") and comprising representatives from relevant bureaux/departments, to follow up the former CoP's recommendations and coordinate the Government's efforts in alleviating poverty. The Poverty Team in LWB provided secretariat support to the Task Force.

3. With the set up of the Task Force, one supernumerary post – PAS(P) – at D2 directorate-level rank was created in the Poverty Team in LWB for a period of three years with effect from 10 March 2008. According to the Administration, the incumbent served as the secretary to the Task Force on Poverty and provided support to the work on poverty alleviation. The

supernumerary post was extended in 2011 for three more years until March 2014.

Members' deliberations

A dedicated post to support poverty alleviation work

4. At the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services ("WS Panel") in November 2007, members welcomed the Administration's proposal to create the three-year supernumerary post in March 2008 to support the poverty alleviation work. They were, however, concerned about the absence of a concrete work plan for combating poverty. They were of the view that the Administration should also set out specific targets for poverty alleviation and other related initiatives in the coming years. Some Members considered the Administration's staffing proposal far from adequate to make any practical achievements on the poverty alleviation measures put forth by the former CoP, including the development of social enterprises which required inter-bureau/departmental collaboration. To this end, a more senior officer was needed to coordinate the Government's efforts on combating poverty.

5. Given its complexity and extensive scope, some Members also questioned the adequacy of creating only one post to support the work on poverty alleviation. They opined that the staffing proposal reflected a lack of commitment on the part of the Administration to poverty alleviation. They considered that a post of a higher rank should be created to facilitate the implementation of poverty alleviation strategies and measures.

6. The Administration advised that it attached great importance to poverty alleviation. LWB would work closely with the Task Force on Poverty to promote inter-departmental efforts on combating poverty, and SLW would oversee the overall progress of the work on poverty alleviation. The Task Force on Poverty would report regularly to the Chief Secretary for Administration, and LWB would keep the WS Panel informed of the work progress of the Task Force. The Administration further advised that the Task Force on Poverty would continue to co-ordinate the Government's efforts and monitor the progress in implementing the former CoP's recommendations, as well as to explore possible new initiatives and measures which would assist the disadvantaged groups and people in need.

Need for a permanent post

7. Shortly before the expiry of the three-year term of the post of PAS(P), the Administration proposed in January 2011 to extend this supernumerary post for a further period of three years to continue providing dedicated support to the work of poverty alleviation. Supporting the Community Care Fund ("CCF") was added to the responsibilities of the post. Members generally considered that as poverty alleviation was an ongoing commitment, the post should be made permanent in order to steer and coordinate the Administration's efforts in fighting poverty on a long-term basis. Instead of seeking approval for extending the post every three years, the Administration should formulate a long-term strategy and plan for poverty alleviation, and convert the supernumerary post into a permanent one.

8. While reiterating its long-term commitment to alleviate poverty, the Administration emphasized the need for a time-limited supernumerary post only to oversee the progress of poverty alleviation work, including the Child Development Fund and the review of the "one-stop" employment service. The Administration explained that once the long-term development directions were identified and determined, some on-going duties of PAS(P) would be absorbed within the relevant departments. It would therefore be more flexible to retain the PAS(P) post as a time-limited supernumerary post.

9. Noting that LWB would be heavily involved in supporting the operation of CCF especially the Welfare Sub-committee, some members of the WS Panel took the view that PAS(P) should spend more time in providing policy input than coordinating contributions from parties concerned. Specifically, PAS(P) should take into account the operational experience of CCF in providing social services and assistance to the disadvantaged and people in need, and identify the specific areas of services which could become regular services.

Re-establishment of CoP

10. At the special Finance Committee meeting on 11 April 2013, some Members were concerned about the overlapping of duties in the Government's support teams to CoP and the poverty alleviation team under LWB after the re-establishment of CoP in December 2012. The Administration advised that CoP was supported by the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office whereas the Poverty Team under LWB was designated to carry out poverty alleviation work under the purview of LWB, and there was no overlapping of duties.

Latest development

11. The Administration will consult the WS Panel on its proposal to extend the PAS(P) post at the Panel meeting to be held on 9 December 2013.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 December 2013

Appendix

Relevant Papers/Documents on extension of the Principal Assistant Secretary (Poverty) post

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	12 November 2007 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	23 October 2008 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	13 July 2009 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	13 December 2010 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
House Committee	23 November 2012 (Item I)	Agenda Information Note
Finance Committee	11 April 2013	Agenda Minutes

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 December 2013