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Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 9 March 2015**

Promoting active ageing

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of Members' past discussions on the Administration's measures on promoting active ageing.

Background

2. According to the Administration, in the face of a growing ageing population, it has been promoting a sense of worthiness and active ageing among elderly persons through elderly centres in the territory and a range of programmes including the Elder Academy ("EA") Scheme, the Neighbourhood Active-Ageing Project ("NAAP"), and the Opportunities for the Elderly Project ("OEP") to encourage elderly persons to pursue continuous learning, expand their networks, actively take part in community affairs, and make good use of their expertise and ample experience in life to further their contribution to society.

3. In addition, the Administration has been offering concessions to elderly persons to encourage them to achieve active ageing through more participation in community activities. Examples include concessions for the use of public recreational facilities and the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities ("Fare Concession Scheme").

Deliberations by Members

Lifelong learning and participation in volunteer work

4. Members expressed support for the Administration's various initiatives to enable elderly persons to lead an enjoyable golden age. They, however, were concerned about the inadequacy of current elderly services and the limited resources made available to meet diversified needs and interests of elderly persons. They called on the Administration to allocate more resources to the Elderly Commission ("EC") which was tasked to, among others, co-ordinate the planning and development of various programmes and services for elderly persons. They also urged the Administration to formulate long-term policies on life-long learning and leisure to enrich the retirement life of elderly persons.

5. The Administration advised that EC and the Labour and Welfare Bureau ("LWB") launched the EA Scheme in 2007 to promote active ageing. Under the EA Scheme, school sponsoring bodies and organizations, which provided elderly services, were encouraged to establish EAs in primary and secondary schools to enable elderly persons to pursue a healthy and active retirement life through life-long learning. Subsequently, the EA Scheme was expanded to the tertiary institutions, so that elderly persons could engage in academic studies. In March 2014, an additional \$50 million had been injected into the EA Development Foundation to strengthen the support for the EA Scheme. As at January 2015, a total of 121 EAs had been set up in primary and secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions. In addition, EC and LWB launched NAAP in 2008, in which elderly persons played a leading role, to develop support networks at community level. During 2008-2014, two phases of NAAP had been launched. Over 140 districts projects, with funding support of around \$13.7 million, had been carried out. The Administration launched a new phase of the 2014-2016 NAAP in June 2014 and planned to merge NAAP with OEP in 2016 for better use of resources.

Concession schemes

6. Some Members were concerned about the different minimum age requirements for the various concession schemes. For instance, the age requirements for the concessionary rate of the admission fee for public swimming pools, the Fare Concession Scheme, and the elderly health care vouchers were 60, 65 and 70 respectively. They suggested that the Administration should review the age requirements for these schemes and standardize them at the age of 60. The Administration advised that its

overall objective was to provide appropriate assistance and concessions to meet the needs of citizens, and ensure the proper use of public resources. Since the nature, aim and target recipients might vary across various assistance and concession schemes, different age requirements and eligibility criteria might apply. The Administration had no plan to standardize the age requirements under the various schemes.

7. Regarding the Fare Concession Scheme, some Members were concerned about the misuse of public money. The problem arose from some elderly persons taking cross-harbour tunnel buses for short trips which did not involve harbour crossing. To address the problem, these Members urged the Administration to adopt alternative concessionary modes, e.g. percentage discount of the transportation fare instead of a flat rate of \$2 per trip. They also suggested that the Administration should impose a condition in the public transport franchises awarded to operators, whereby the operators were required to provide fare concessions to elderly persons. As such, it would not be necessary for the Administration to pay the difference between the regular fare and \$2 to the operators concerned. The Administration advised that the detailed arrangement under the Fare Concession Scheme, including the rate of concessionary fare and age requirements, would be reviewed after the Scheme had operated for three years to ensure effective assistance to elderly persons and the proper use of public resources.

8. Some Members urged the Administration to extend the Fare Concession Scheme to the tram service, which was considered more elderly-friendly vis-à-vis the bus service. The Administration advised that while the tram service was frequently used by elderly persons, the Fare Concession Scheme did not apply to the tram service as the current tram fare for elderly persons aged 65 or above was \$1.1, which was below \$2. That said, the Administration would take into account Members' view in the review.

Barrier-free environment

9. The promotion of active ageing was also discussed in a wider context of developing an elderly-friendly policy. At its meeting on 8 June 2011, the Council passed a motion on "Setting out a five-year plan for elderly services" urging the Administration to implement the elderly-friendly policy in all public places, effectively enforce requirements of barrier-free facilities, and provide various types of facilities for elderly persons to facilitate their entry and exit.

10. Members were advised that the Housing Authority had devised a retrofitting programme to improve the accessibility of premises/facilities under its management (covering public housing estates, commercial centres, carparks and factory buildings). According to the Administration, the aforesaid retrofitting programme had been completed by 30 June 2014. The Administration would continue to upgrade existing government premises, public housing estates and connect road facilities to provide barrier-free access and related facilities. This would enable elderly persons to make use of community facilities and service conveniently, as well as facilitate their full participation in various social activities and integration into the community.

Employment support

11. Some Members noted with concern that retired elderly persons, who were below the age of 65 and no longer had any income, were not eligible for most of the current welfare measures. They wondered if the Administration would formulate a policy for assisting the re-employment of these elderly persons, such as providing subsidies or tax concessions to private enterprises and public organizations employing elderly persons.

12. The Administration advised that the Labour Department ("LD") would implement a series of measures to encourage elderly persons to re-join the employment market. For example, organizing employment briefings to assist elderly persons to better understand the latest situation of the employment market and improve their job searching skills; setting up a dedicated webpage under the Interactive Employment Service website and enhancing the functions of vacancy search terminals to facilitate elderly persons in obtaining employment information and looking for vacancies; strengthening liaison and co-operation with non-governmental organizations serving elderly persons; and organizing large-scale thematic job fairs for elderly persons and experience sharing sessions on elderly employment for employers.

13. The Administration further advised that LD had implemented the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged ("EPM") to encourage employers to employ job seekers aged 40 or above. LD would extend EPM to part-time jobs in the second half of 2015 to encourage employers to provide more suitable part-time jobs to elderly persons. The training allowance for both EPM and the extended EPM would be set at 25% of the employee's monthly salary, up to \$3,000 for a period of three to six months. Meanwhile, according to the Inland Revenue Ordinance (Cap. 112), all outgoings and expenses including expenditure incurred on the employment

of labour, to the extent to which they had been incurred by the taxpayer in the production of chargeable profits, were all allowed as deductions in calculating the taxpayer's assessable profits.

Latest Development

14. As announced by the Chief Executive in his 2015 Policy Address, the Steering Committee on Population Policy decided to deploy a five-pronged strategy to address the new challenges brought by demographic changes. One of the prongs was to vigorously promote active ageing by –

- (a) helping elderly persons enjoy their retirement life through the EA Scheme and some 200 elderly centres in the territory;
- (b) encouraging elderly persons to actively take part in community activities by promoting senior volunteerism and other programmes;
- (c) creating an elderly-friendly environment through the extension of the Fare Concession Scheme to green minibuses in phases starting from the end of March 2015, and continuing with the Universal Accessibility Programme to help elderly persons move around in the community; and
- (d) providing choices of service for elderly persons through the Senior Citizen Residences Scheme and the Reverse Mortgage Programme operated by the Hong Kong Housing Society and the Hong Kong Mortgage Corporation Limited respectively.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Relevant papers on promoting active ageing

Committee	Date of meeting	Papers
Legislative Council	8 June 2011	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 243 – 331 Progress Report
Legislative Council	5 December 2012	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 21 – 32
Panel on Welfare Services	11 March 2013 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	3 April 2014	Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2014-2015 Page 622
Legislative Council	11 June 2014 12 June 2014	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 301 to 326 Official Record of Proceedings Pages 6 to 77 Progress Report
Panel on Welfare Services	20 January 2015 (Item I)	Agenda
Panel on Welfare Services	26 January 2015 (Item I)	Agenda