

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)826/15-16(04)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for
the meeting on 15 February 2016**

**Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of the Elderly Persons
from Low Income Families**

Purpose

This paper provides a brief account of the past discussions by the Council and relevant committees relating to the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of the Elderly Persons from Low Income Families ("the Pilot Scheme").

Background

2. According to the Administration, the Community Care Fund ("CCF") under the Commission on Poverty launched the Pilot Scheme in end-June 2014. The objective of the Scheme is to provide carers of elderly persons from low-income families with a living allowance ("carer allowance") to help supplement their living expenses so that elderly persons in need of long-term care ("LTC") services can, under the help of their carers, receive proper care and to enable them to remain in the community.

3. In implementing the two-year Pilot Scheme, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") has issued letters in phases, according to the dates of application by the elderly persons for subsidized LTC services on the Central Waiting List, and invited their respective potentially eligible carers to submit applications for the carer allowance under the Pilot Scheme. After completing the vetting procedures, SWD has issued notification letters with application results to the applicants. The approved service

providers of the Pilot Scheme then approach the eligible carers and the elderly persons concerned to provide carer support services and follow-up on the arrangement for disbursement of the carer allowance. Under the Pilot Scheme, each eligible carer will be provided with a monthly carer allowance of \$2,000, or a maximum of \$4,000 for those who take care of more than one elderly person at the same time. The funding provision for the Pilot Scheme is \$126 million and it is estimated that about 2 000 carers of elderly persons will benefit.

Deliberations by Members

Features of the Pilot Scheme

4. At its meeting on 10 February 2014, the Administration consulted the Panel on Welfare Services ("Panel") on the proposed features of the Pilot Scheme. Some Members expressed support for the Pilot Scheme, and asked about the maximum amount of carer allowance per month under the Scheme. The Administration advised that the amount of carer allowance was suggested to be set at \$2,000 per month for each eligible carer who had provided at least 80 hours of care-giving work per month and met other eligibility criteria for the Pilot Scheme. For those carers who took care of more than one elderly person at the same time, each of them might claim up to \$4,000 per month, subject to the hours of care-giving being no less than 120 hours per month.

5. Some Members were concerned about the Administration's assessment of whether the proposed levels of carer allowance mentioned in paragraph 4 above would weaken the sense of family obligation or diminish the virtue of filial piety. The Administration advised that according to the information provided by The University of Hong Kong, no study in this regard had been conducted in Asia. It was hoped that the experience gained from the Pilot Scheme would enlighten the Administration on this aspect.

6. Some Members, however, considered that the carer allowance was only a small amount of financial supplement for carers from low-income families and would not have any adverse impact on the sense of family obligation or virtue of filial piety. A lenient approach should therefore be adopted in providing the allowance. Noting that the Administration proposed to set the monthly household income limit of the Pilot Scheme at or below 75% of the Median Monthly Domestic Household Income, these Members called on the Administration to relax the income limit or remove the income assessment requirement in the long run.

7. The Administration advised that unlike some carer allowance schemes in other places, the conditions proposed for the Pilot Scheme were more lenient. The Pilot Scheme did not require a carer to be a family member of the elderly person being taken care of. Neither did the elderly person concerned need to sign and confirm the hours of care-giving. The proposed minimum hours of care-giving mentioned in paragraph 4 above would also be less than those of similar schemes in the United Kingdom ("UK") and Australia. Many other places including UK, Canada and some states in the United States of America had adopted a means test for carer allowance schemes. To enable effective use of limited public resources, the Administration considered that carers under the Pilot Scheme should be subject to income assessment.

8. Some Members noted with concern that recipients of carer allowance could not at the same time receive Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") or Old Age Living Allowance ("OALA"). These Members considered that such restriction was unacceptable and would force carers of elderly persons to give up certain financial assistance. The Administration explained that CCF (which launched the Pilot Scheme) aimed to provide assistance for the needy who fell outside or not covered by the safety net. As such, people receiving CSSA or OALA were not eligible for the carer allowance.

9. Regarding the interface between the Pilot Scheme and subsidized community care services for the elderly ("CCS"), the Administration advised that for elderly persons who were being taken care of by carers under the Pilot Scheme, they might apply or continue to apply for subsidized CCS. Service providers of subsidized CCS would make professional assessment on the service mix applicable to such elderly persons, taking into account the care-giving provided by the carers and having regard to the circumstances of individual cases. For example, if an elderly person was being taken care of by a carer at home, his/her service provider might recommend less personal support services (e.g. home-making, meal delivery, escort, etc.) or might not recommend any full-time day care services. Some Members considered that such arrangement ran counter to the Administration's objective of enabling elderly persons to remain members of the community for as long as possible. Some other Members held the view that the Pilot Scheme should not affect CCS and home care services received by the elderly persons who were being taken care of by carers. The Administration advised that the Pilot Scheme did not necessarily affect CCS and home care services received by the elderly persons concerned.

10. Some Members held the view that the two-year pilot period of the Pilot Scheme should be shortened to one year. Some other Members considered that having regard to the extensive discussion in the community on the subject matter, the Administration should swiftly implement a carer allowance scheme on a regular basis. As for the coverage of the Pilot Scheme, some Members were of the view that it should be expanded to benefit more carers, and no cap should be imposed on the number of beneficiaries if the Scheme was regularized after the pilot period.

11. In response to Members' views and concerns about the proposed features of the Pilot Scheme, the Administration advised that an evaluation of the implications and effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme would be conducted during the two-year pilot period. Feedback from beneficiaries, non-governmental organizations, interested groups, service providers, etc., on the Pilot Scheme would be collected. Depending on the review outcome of the Pilot Scheme, the Administration would consider whether changes to the parameters of the Pilot Scheme should be made.

Implementation and review of the Pilot Scheme

12. At its meeting of 11 June 2014, the Council passed a motion urging the Administration to, among others, formulate a dedicated policy on carers of elderly persons in the three major directions of training, support and accreditation, thereby perfecting the existing LTC policy based on "ageing in place". According to the Administration, various measures had been taken to provide support for carers of elderly persons, including the launch of the Pilot Scheme in end-June 2014.

13. Some Members expressed concern about the implementation progress of the Pilot Scheme, such as the number of beneficiaries and withdrawal cases as well as reasons for the withdrawal. The Administration advised that as at March 2015, SWD had issued about 20 300 invitation letters of the Pilot Scheme, and received about 2 870 applications for the carer allowance. Among these applications, 1 700 applicant carers had been assessed to be eligible, while 388 were found ineligible and 441 were still being processed. A total of 82 carers had withdrawn from the Pilot Scheme, with the major reasons that the elderly persons under care started to use residential care services or had deceased. Other carers had withdrawn because they started to receive CSSA/OALA or there was a change of circumstances regarding the carers or the elderly persons under care. According to the Administration, as at end-June 2015, there were 1 972 beneficiaries under the Pilot Scheme which involved a disbursement of around \$35.54 million.

14. Some Members considered that carers of persons with disabilities and persons with chronic illness should not be excluded from the Pilot Scheme given that such carers were also under great stress and in need of support. According to the Administration, the Chief Executive had announced in his 2016 Policy Address that CCF would be invited to introduce a pilot scheme to provide a living allowance for low-income carers of persons with disabilities. Noting that the experience of the Pilot Scheme would facilitate the Administration to formulate policies on carer allowance in future, these Members called on the Administration to provide a timetable for reviewing the Pilot Scheme. The Administration advised that in October 2014, SWD commissioned the Sau Po Centre on Ageing of The University of Hong Kong to assist in conducting the review of the Pilot Scheme. SWD would keep in view the development and outcome evaluation of the Pilot Scheme and consider the way forward in the light of the review findings. The Administration will brief the Panel on the implementation progress of the Pilot Scheme at its meeting on 15 February 2016.

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
5 February 2016

Appendix

Relevant papers on Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of the Elderly Persons from Low Income Families

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	10 February 2014 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	11 June 2014	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 6-76 Progress Report
Subcommittee on Poverty	23 June 2014 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Subcommittee on Poverty	16 December 2014 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	2 April 2014	Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016 Pages 146-147, 1020-1021 and 1840
Subcommittee on Poverty	21 July 2015 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Subcommittee on Poverty	20 October 2015 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	25 January 2016 (Item I)	Agenda