

For Information
on 14 December 2020

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

2020 Policy Address Policy Initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau

Introduction

The Chief Executive delivered her 2020 Policy Address on 25 November 2020. This paper sets out the new and on-going welfare initiatives pertaining to the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and Social Welfare Department (SWD) in the 2020 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement.

Summary of New Initiatives

2. The new welfare initiatives in the 2020 Policy Address and Policy Supplement are summarised as follows :

- Providing a new time-limited arrangement under the “Special Scheme of Assistance to the Unemployed” through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) system under which the total cash value of insurance policies of able-bodied CSSA applicants will be disregarded as assets during the one-year grace period in light of the pandemic (see paragraphs 3 and 4 below);
- Complementing the trial scheme of the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) of providing cash allowance for low-income households who have been waiting for public rental housing (PRH) allocation over a prolonged period of time by introducing a set of higher income limits for other eligible non-PRH households under the Working Family Allowance (WFA) Scheme (see paragraph 5 below);
- Providing additional residential respite places through the Bought Place Scheme for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities (see paragraph 7 below);

- Exploring the provision of residential respite service in special schools with a boarding section having vacant boarding places for graduates (see paragraph 7 below);
- Examining the feasibility of arranging severely mentally handicapped persons in need of pairing Day Activity Centre (DAC) services to receive services at their hostels subject to the availability of sufficient space (see paragraph 7 below);
- Incorporating the planning ratios of rehabilitation services concerned into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines in 2021-22 (see paragraph 8 below);
- Regularising the Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects (see paragraph 9 below);
- Stepping up efforts to effectively address manpower need of caring sector (see paragraph 10 below); and
- Reserving about 5% of the total gross floor area (GFA) in future public housing developments exclusively for welfare uses, in particular residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) which are much needed by the community (see paragraph 11 below).

Details of Policy Priorities/New Initiatives

Poverty Alleviation and Society Security

CSSA Scheme

3. The CSSA Scheme put in place by the Government has all along served its function as a safety net effectively. With the local unemployment rate continuing to rise since late 2019, the number of CSSA unemployment cases has also increased. Over the past 12 months (at end-October 2020), the total number of CSSA unemployment cases has recorded a nearly 55% increase, which shows that the CSSA Scheme is generally regarded as a safety net by the unemployed during the epidemic and economic downturn. To give more targeted support for the unemployed and their families who face immediate economic difficulties, the Government has launched the “Special Scheme of Assistance to the Unemployed” under the CSSA Scheme on 1 June 2020 for a period of one year to temporarily relax the asset limits for able-bodied persons by 100%.

4. To render further support to the unemployed, the Government will implement another time-limited new arrangement under the special scheme. Specifically, the cash value of insurance policies of able-bodied CSSA applicants will not be counted as assets during the grace period of one year. In other words, for unemployed CSSA applicants whose applications are submitted within the six-month period of the new arrangement, all insurance policies owned by them, irrespective of cash value, will not be counted in the asset test during the one-year grace period so as to assist more unemployed persons and their families to tide over the economic difficulties. It is proposed that the relevant expenditure should be met by the funding approved by the Legislative Council Finance Committee for the aforementioned special scheme on 18 April 2020. The Government will seek approval from the Finance Committee.

WFA Scheme

5. The Chief Executive announced in January 2020 that THB will launch a trial scheme to provide cash allowance to eligible low-income households who have been waiting for PRH for more than three years. To complement the said measure, the WFA Scheme will introduce a set of higher income limits for other eligible non-PRH households. The Government will announce the arrangements at an appropriate juncture.

Old Age Living Allowance (OALA)

6. In January 2020, the Chief Executive announced that the Normal and Higher OALA (currently at \$2,770 and \$3,715 per month respectively) would be combined and the higher payment rate would be adopted, as well as to significantly relax the asset limits of OALA (to \$500,000 for elderly singletons and \$750,000 for elderly couples). In light of the financial implications of the above measures, the timing of implementation will be reassessed.

Support for the Disadvantaged

Support for People with Disabilities and Their Carers

7. To enhance the support for persons with disabilities and their carers, the Government will from 2021 purchase over 40 places as designated residential respite service from residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs) participating in the Bought Place Scheme for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities; and explore the

provision of residential respite service in special schools with a boarding section having vacant boarding places for their graduates in need during long holidays. The Government will also, subject to the availability of sufficient space, examine the feasibility of arranging existing residents of Hostels for Severely Mentally Handicapped Persons in need of pairing DAC services to receive these services at their hostels. This could help protect the residents from the risk of COVID-19 infection while releasing DAC service places to persons with disabilities living in the community.

Formulating Planning Ratios for Rehabilitation Services

8. For the sustainable development of rehabilitation services, the Government will incorporate the planning ratios of rehabilitation services concerned (including long-term residential care services, day rehabilitation services, pre-school rehabilitation services and community support services) into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines in 2021-22.

Regularisation of the Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects (service projects)

9. The service projects have been implemented since 2009, aiming at providing low-income persons who have temporary difficulties in meeting their basic food expenditure with short-term and basic food items for generally not more than eight weeks each time. To regularise the service from August 2021 onwards, the Government will earmark \$415 million a year in recurrent expenditure and will change the funding mode to Lump Sum Grant Subvention with enhancements in terms of increased professional manpower for the service operators and re-demarcation of the service boundary for individual operators. The resources required for the regularisation of the service will be sought through the draft Estimates in the context of the Appropriation Bill 2021.

Effectively Addressing Manpower Need of Caring Sector

10. The Government will step up the efforts in encouraging employers of the caring sector facing persistent manpower shortage to participate in the Employees Retraining Board's "First-Hire-Then-Train" Scheme, and consider adjusting the training and working hour arrangements under the Scheme to attract employees to join the sector and address the manpower need of the sector more effectively. Employers will be arranged to join the "Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged" of the Labour Department (LD) at the same time to apply for on-the-job training allowance. LD will also strengthen its liaison with employers with recruitment needs to

enhance job matching and organise more thematic job fairs to help job seekers secure employment.

Increasing the Supply of Social Welfare Facilities in Public Housing

11. The Government will invite the Hong Kong Housing Authority and Hong Kong Housing Society to work with the Development Bureau to explore reserving about 5% of the total GFA in future public housing developments exclusively for welfare uses, in particular RCHEs which are much needed by the community. LWB will discuss the implementation details together with Development Bureau and THB with a view to ensuring that the measure will not impact on the public housing supply and other supporting facilities. This may provide persistent supply of suitable social welfare facilities to satisfy the middle-term and long-term needs of the society.

On-going Initiatives

Children, Family and Youth Services

The Commission on Children

12. Since its establishment in 2018, the Commission on Children has made good progress on deliberating children-related Government policies and initiatives and monitoring their implementation, overseeing the Consultancy Study for developing a Central Databank on Children, and promoting the importance of children's well-being and development. The Commission has also launched the Funding Scheme for Children's Well-being and Development.

Strengthening After School Care Programme (ASCP)

13. In response to the keen demand for ASCP services, the Government announced in the 2019 Policy Address that a host of enhancement measures will be implemented, including adding 2 500 full fee-waiving subsidy places, relaxing application eligibility, streamlining means-test procedures, increasing subsidy level, providing extra subsidy for children with special education needs, etc.. In addition, the pilot scheme under the Community Care Fund is also regularised to provide 1/3 fee-reduction level for applicants with monthly household income above 75% but not exceeding 100% of relevant Median Monthly Domestic Household Income. More than 5 700

students and their families are expected to benefit from these measures which have been implemented in October 2020.

Strengthening Child Care Centre (CCC) Services

14. Regarding aided CCC service places, the Government has included the population-based planning ratio for subsidised CCC places in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines in March 2020 with a view to reserving suitable premises in housing development projects for CCC operations so as to better meet the service demands in the new community.

15. The Government has introduced the Child Care Centre Parent Subsidy in February 2020 to partially subsidise the CCC service fee afforded by parents directly, in order to alleviate their financial burden. The existing manning ratio of qualified child care workers in day and residential CCCs on top of meeting the minimum statutory requirement has been improved. In light of the enhanced manning ratio, the Subsidy for Further Manpower Enhancement was introduced in 2019-20, raising the subsidy level of aided standalone CCCs from 20% to 34%.

16. To further enhance day child care services, ten CCCs (involving about 900 aided CCC places) have been planned for provision in the coming three or four years through different development projects (e.g. Land Sale Programmes, Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses, development or redevelopment of public housing estates and urban renewal projects). In addition, SWD plans to provide an additional 1 000 long full day child care service places in phases from 2021-22 through the purchase of premises initiative.

Enhancing Flexible Forms of Child Care Services

17. The Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project was enhanced in January 2020 to strengthen the child care services provided by home-based child carers. SWD has also launched the Project on Child Care Training for Grandparents in November 2019, providing 1 200 places to equip grandparents or grandparents-to-be with contemporary child care knowledge and skills.

18. The Government has completed a feasibility study in April 2020 on the provision of after school care service for children aged three to six in suitable welfare facilities with a proposed way forward of revamping mutual help child care centres (MHCCCs) to provide after school care service for pre-primary children. SWD will re-engineer the 19 MHCCCs in phases from 2020-21 onwards through additional provision of social workers and

supporting staff to further meet the child care needs in the community.

Launching the Pilot Scheme on Social Work Services for Pre-primary Institutions

19. For early identification of and to provide assistance for pre-primary children and their families with welfare needs, the Government has allocated \$989 million from the Lotteries Fund to launch a three-year pilot scheme from the 2018/19 school year to provide social work service in phases for about 150 000 pre-primary children and their families in 725 subsidised/aided Pre-primary Institutions (including aided CCCs, kindergartens (KGs) and KG-cum-CCCs) in Hong Kong. To help chart the way forward, SWD has commissioned the City University of Hong Kong in December 2019 to conduct an evaluation study on the mode of operation and performance of the pilot scheme.

Enhancing Co-parenting Support for Divorced/Separated Parents and Their Children

20. In October 2019, SWD had set up five Specialised Co-parenting Support Centres, operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in five clusters, i.e. Hong Kong, Kowloon East, Kowloon West, New Territories East and New Territories West, to provide divorced parents and their children with one-stop co-parenting support services, including co-parenting counselling and parenting co-ordination service, structured parenting groups or programmes, child-focused counselling, groups or programmes, as well as children contact service.

Strengthening Residential Child Care Services

21. To support and protect those children lacking proper care by their families and young persons with behavioural or emotional problems, the Government would continue to increase in phases the number of residential child care places. SWD has reprovisioned a boy's home with school for social development on-site to Tuen Mun District in October 2019, and its capacity was increased by 45 places in the first phase. 30 and 24 additional small group home places plus four and three additional places of emergency/short-term care in small group homes are planned for provision in New Territories East¹ and Hong Kong East respectively in 2022-23. SWD has also implemented the environment improvement programme for small group homes in 2019-20. Allocation of Lotteries Fund have been

¹ The 30 additional small group home places and four additional places of emergency/short-term care in small group homes (four small group homes in total) are planned for provision in 2020-21 in Chun Yeung Estate, Fo Tan. As Chun Yeung Estate has been used as a quarantine centre, the schedule of service commencement of the small group homes will need to be postponed accordingly.

approved for 14 small group homes in the first phase.

22. SWD provides 240 additional foster care places in phases from 2017-18 onwards. As at 1 August 2020, the addition of 60 foster care places, including 20 foster care (emergency) places, was provided under the first phase of the exercise. An annual additional amount of about \$3.7 million on clinical psychological service is allocated starting from October 2020 to provide timely assessment and stop-gap intervention for children under foster care with special needs and/or emotional and behavioural problems while they are waitlisted for long-term clinical psychological service.

Supporting Pre-school Children with Special Needs

23. To provide early support for pre-school children with special needs, the Government has regularised the On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services (OPRS) from October 2018. The number of service places has increased in phases from about 3 000 under the pilot scheme in 2015 to over 8 000 in the 2020/21 school year. The Government has plans to further increase the number of service places to 10 000 by the 2022/23 school year. For Special Child Care Centres and Early Education and Training Centres, the Government will increase the number of service places by about 1 200 to about 6 700 in total in 2019-20 to 2021-22. In addition, to support children awaiting assessments by the Child Assessment Centres under the Department of Health and those assessed as only having mild developmental problems, the Government has in the 2020/21 school year launched a 20-month “Pilot Project on Tier 1 Support Services in Kindergartens / Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres” in about 80 KGs / KG-cum-CCCs participating in OPRS.

Combating Domestic Violence

24. The Government does not tolerate domestic violence and has been dealing with the problem through a three-pronged strategy, viz. prevention of domestic violence, supporting victims of domestic violence and providing specialised services and crisis intervention. The Government will continue to allocate resources in enhancing specialised and support services, including providing support services for victims of domestic violence and changing batterers’ abusive attitude and behavior through counselling and psycho-educational services.

Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF)

25. Since its establishment in 2002, a total amount of \$1.3 billion was injected into CIIF, including an injection of \$500 million earlier this year to support social capital development projects (including community support

projects for residents of new public rental housing estates). As at October 2020, CIIF has provided/committed funding of about \$787 million to 444 projects launched by 306 agencies/service units. Besides, we have regularised the community support programme for new public rental housing estates through CIIF with effect from April 2019 to help the new residents and families integrate into the community as soon as possible.

Strengthening Support for Ethnic Minorities (EMs)

26. SWD has commissioned NGOs to set up three outreaching teams with employment of EM staff on Hong Kong Island, in Kowloon and the New Territories to proactively reach out to EMs and connect those in need to mainstream welfare services. The outreaching teams will also provide case counselling, groups and activities for EMs. The outreaching team services were launched in March 2020. Apart from this, SWD provided additional resources for an NGO since January 2020 to raise EMs' awareness of domestic violence and sexual violence through community education programmes, and encourage victims to seek help.

27. SWD launched a three-year Ethnic Minority District Ambassador pilot scheme in nine districts with higher EM population in October 2020, which aims to employ more EMs in SWD and NGOs, enhance EM services provided by district centres/service units, and co-ordinate and deepen communication and co-operation with relevant stakeholders.

Continual Implementation of Enhanced Measures for District Support Scheme for Children and Youth Development

28. SWD will continue to implement the enhanced measures for the District Support Scheme for Children and Youth Development to provide 10 000 annual quotas of cash assistance at the ceiling of \$2,000 so as to better cater for the development needs of deprived children and youths at the district level.

Poverty Alleviation and Social Security

CSSA Scheme

29. The 2019 Policy Address announced a series of measures to improve the CSSA Scheme. These measures included increasing the maximum rent allowance (MRA) significantly, raising the maximum level of the monthly disregarded earnings substantially, strengthening employment support services, extending a range of supplement and special grants (including the grant to cover telephone charges, the grant to cover cost of glasses and the

grant to cover cost of dental treatment, etc.) to eligible non-elderly able-bodied recipients, etc. The above involve an additional expenditure of \$1 billion per year. The Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved the relevant proposal in May 2020. Among other things, SWD has raised the MRA since 1 July 2020.

WFA Scheme

30. To enhance the support for non-CSSA low-income working households, the Government introduced the WFA Scheme in April 2018 to implement a series of improvement measures to the then Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme. The 2019 Policy Address also announced the increase of all WFA payment rates. The relevant proposal was implemented starting from the claim month of July 2020. As the Government continues to improve the WFA Scheme, the number of its active recipients reached about 56 000 as at end-September 2020, doubling the number before the improvements.

31. Meanwhile, the Chief Executive announced in February 2020 the provision of a one-off special allowance under the Anti-epidemic Fund to eligible beneficiary household under the WFA Scheme and means-tested Student Financial Assistance for pre-primary, primary and secondary students. The disbursement of the special allowance commenced in batches in June 2020, benefiting about 200 000 households, involving about \$900 million.

OALA

32. The Government launched the Higher OALA (currently at \$3,715 per month) in June 2018. As at end-October 2020, over 540 000 persons were receiving this allowance. Taking into account the about 50 000 recipients under the Normal OALA (currently at \$2,770 per month), the entire OALA was benefitting over 590 000 elderly persons, which is the most popular social security payments among the elderly population.

33. Separately, the Government introduced OALA under the Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme in January 2020. As at end-October 2020, there were over 12 000 portable OALA recipients living in the two provinces.

Care for the Elderly

34. The Government's objective in elderly services is to enable our senior citizens to live in dignity and provide suitable support for them to

promote their sense of belonging, sense of security and sense of worthiness. The Government will continue to offer hardware and policy support to promote “active ageing” while taking care of the service needs of frail elderly persons. The Government strives to provide appropriate long-term care services for those elderly persons in need under the policy of promoting “ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up”. We will continue to implement the recommendations set out in the Elderly Services Programme Plan.

Supporting Ageing in Place for the Elderly

35. The Government implemented the Third Phase of the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly in October 2020, and provided an additional 1 000 vouchers under the pilot scheme to bring the total to 8 000. The Government also provided an additional 1 500 service quota under the Integrated Home Care Services (Frail Cases) in October 2020 and will provide an additional 1 500 service quota in 2021. The Government will continue to strengthen community care and support services for the elderly.

The Residential Care Services

36. The Government will continue to adopt a multi-pronged approach to increase residential care places for the elderly. We are planning to implement 45 development projects to construct 53 new contract homes by phases from 2020-21 onwards, providing about 8 400 residential care places for the elderly (including 5 100 subsidised and 3 300 non-subsidised places). At the same time, the Government has commenced the purchase of additional 5 000 EA1 places under the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme (EBPS) in 2019-20 to increase the supply of subsidised residential care places for the elderly and enhance the overall service quality of private RCHEs. In addition, we will continue to implement the Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly (RCSV)² and the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong³ to provide an additional choice for elderly persons in need of residential care services. The Pilot Scheme on RCSV was extended for three years in March this year till March 2023.

² The Pilot Scheme adopts the “money-following-the-user” approach to provide a maximum of 3 000 vouchers to offer an additional choice for elderly persons in need of residential care services, and an incentive to RCHEs to enhance their services.

³ The Government has earmarked the funding for provision of a total of about 180 places in the Hong Kong Jockey Club Shenzhen Society for Rehabilitation Yee Hong Heights in Shenzhen and the Hong Kong Jockey Club Helping Hand Zhaoqing Home for the Elderly in Zhaoqing. The actual number of places purchased for each year will depend on the number of participants.

Promoting Gerontechnology

37. The Government launched the \$1 billion Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care in December 2018. Thus far, three tranches of grants totalling over \$200 million have been approved, subsidising about 970 eligible elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure or rent over 4 200 technology products, thereby improving the quality of life of service users as well as reducing the burden and pressure on care staff and carers.

Updating of the Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services

38. The Sau Po Centre on Ageing of The University of Hong Kong (the Consultancy Team) commissioned by SWD has completed the updating of the assessment tool and the long-term care service matching system of the Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services (SCNAMES). To optimise SCNAMES, SWD and the Consultancy Team have participated in 18 conferences and sharing sessions to exchange views with different stakeholders. More than 2 000 individuals attended these sessions. Having carefully considered the views of the stakeholders, SWD and the Consultancy Team have further refined SCNAMES, and obtained the support of the Project Steering Group of the Project on Enhancement of the Infrastructure of Long-term Care in Hong Kong, which is responsible for overseeing and steering the implementation of the Project, on 31 August 2020. SWD is currently updating the computer system and relevant procedure manual, as well as arranging training courses for accredited assessors, with a view to implementing the updated SCNAMES in 2021.

Navigation Scheme for Young Persons in Care Services (Navigation Scheme)

39. The Government rolled out the Navigation Scheme in July 2015, providing a total of 1 000 training places in several years starting from 2015-16 to encourage young persons to join the elderly and rehabilitation care services. As at September 2020, a total of 1 158 trainees were recruited. SWD will provide a total of 1 200 training places within five years starting from 2020-21, and enhance the existing scheme, including expanding the age range of trainees, reducing the number of weekly working hours of trainees and raising their salaries, to attract more young people to join the social welfare care sector. Over 380 trainees have been recruited so far under the enhanced Navigation Scheme.

Support for Women

Facilitating the Development of Women

40. The Government, in collaboration with the Women's Commission and the community as a whole, will continue to promote the well-being and interests of women through a three-pronged strategy, namely the provision of an enabling environment, empowerment of women and public education, while continuing the promotion of gender mainstreaming and its application when formulating policies and programmes.

Support for the Disadvantaged

Persons with Disabilities and Rehabilitation Programme Plan

41. The Rehabilitation Advisory Committee completed its work in formulating a new Persons with Disabilities and Rehabilitation Programme Plan (RPP) and submitted the new RPP to the Government in June 2020, which outlines four strategic directions as underpinned by 20 themes and 62 strategic recommendations to respond to the service needs of persons with disabilities. In July 2020, the Government announced acceptance of the new RPP in principle and will, taking account of the readiness of individual strategic recommendations, continue to adopt the approach of "implementation as and when ready" in implementing the recommendations in the short and medium-to-long terms.

Enhancing Community Support Services

42. Considering that many persons with disabilities have expressed their wishes to continue living at home so as to postpone their admission to residential care homes (RCHs), the Government has been progressively enhancing community support services for persons with disabilities. During 2019-20 and 2021-22, the number of Parents/Relatives Resource Centres will be increased from 12 to 19, number of Support Centres for Persons with Autism will be increased from three to five, number of District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities will be increased from 16 to 21, and Home Care Services will be provided for an additional 1 800 persons with disabilities living in the community.

Enhanced Employment Support for Persons with Disabilities

43. The Government is committed to implementing various measures to promote employment of persons with disabilities and has increased, with

effective from 1 September 2020, the on-the-job training allowance payable to the employers who hired persons with disabilities under the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) of LD, to further encourage them to hire persons with disabilities. The maximum allowance payable to the participating employers was increased from \$51,000 to \$60,000. In addition, LD, starting from 1 September 2020, launched a pilot scheme on providing retention allowance to encourage persons with disabilities who got employment under WOPS or by the referral of Selective Placement Division to stay in their jobs, thereby stabilising employment. Under the scheme, persons with disabilities will be granted a retention allowance of \$3,000 if they stay in the job for three consecutive months, and will thereafter receive an additional allowance of \$1,000 each month for staying in the job. The maximum payment period is nine months with amount of retention allowance up to \$9,000 in total.

Continuing to implement the Child Development Fund (CDF)

44. Since its establishment in 2008, a total of \$900 million has been injected into CDF. Up till now, CDF has utilised about \$580 million to roll out eight batches of NGO-run projects and six batches of school-based projects, benefiting more than 20 000 grassroots children. The seventh batch of school-based projects has been rolled out this month which are expected to benefit more than 300 new participants. The performance of CDF projects has achieved the expected results. The operators generally demonstrated their abilities to implement CDF projects according to the stipulated requirements in respect of matching of mentors and donations, implementation of targeted savings programmes and personal development plans.

Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged (PFD)

45. Since the inception of PFD in 2005, the Government has been promoting cross-sectoral collaboration and providing grants that match donations from business organisations to subsidise welfare projects helping the disadvantaged. A total of \$1.2 billion (comprising the \$800 million for the regular portion and the \$400 million for the dedicated portion for after-school learning and support programmes) has been injected into PFD. PFD has launched 13 rounds of application under the regular portion, approving matching grants of about \$493 million to implement 1 024 welfare projects and benefiting more than 1 million disadvantaged persons. PFD has also launched six rounds of application under the dedicated portion, approving matching grants of about \$220 million to implement 318 projects and benefiting about 100 000 primary and secondary school students. A new round of application will be launched by the end of 2020.

Review on Enhancement of Lump Sum Grant Subvention System

46. The Task Force for Review on Enhancement of Lump Sum Grant Subvention System (the Task Force) was set up in November 2017 to conduct a review on how to optimise the Lump Sum Grant Subvention System (LSGSS). The Task Force, chaired by the Director of Social Welfare, comprises a wide range of representatives. The Task Force formally established eight areas⁴ as the scope of the review in June 2018.

47. The Task Force has preliminarily completed its review on six areas and came up with 42 recommendations. The Task Force will continue its review on the remaining two areas (i.e. areas (b) Review of staffing establishment and subvention benchmarks and (d) Pay structures, staff turnover rate and vacancies), listen to and consider in detail the views of all stakeholders to recommend measures to enhance LSGSS. The entire review is expected to be completed by the first quarter of 2021 the earliest.

Welfare Premises Planning

48. The Government has all along been adopting a multi-pronged approach to identifying suitable sites or premises for the provision of more welfare services which are in acute demand.

49. The Government has launched two Phases of the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses to encourage NGOs to better utilise their own sites, through expansion, redevelopment or new development, to provide or increase those welfare facilities considered by the Government as being in acute demand.

50. Moreover, the Government has obtained the funding approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council on 30 June 2020 to purchase premises for the provision of welfare facilities using \$20 billion. We have already kickstarted the purchase exercise.

⁴ The scope of the review includes the following eight areas :

- (a) Operating environment of NGOs under LSGSS;
- (b) Review of staffing establishment and subvention benchmarks;
- (c) Use of Lump Sum Grant/Provident Fund reserve and financial planning;
- (d) Pay structures, staff turnover rate and vacancies;
- (e) Funding and Service Agreement (FSA)-related activities and flexibility provided for NGOs;
- (f) Mechanisms for reviewing FSAs and NGOs' service performance assessment;
- (g) Transparency and public accountability; and
- (h) Communication and participation of stakeholders.

Anti-Epidemic Measures

51. On the anti-epidemic front, the Government will continue to adopt various measures to support service organisations, their staff and service users. Since January 2020, SWD has provided welfare service units (including RCHEs and RCHDs) with five rounds of special allowance⁵ for procurement of personal protective equipment (including face masks) and sanitising items. From February to December 2020, SWD has distributed a total of 20 million face masks to residential service units (including RCHEs and RCHDs) in 16 batches for use by their staff. SWD also distributed more than 8 million face masks to all RCHEs and RCHDs in July and August 2020 for use by their residents who were in need. SWD launched the Anti-virus Coating Spray Subsidy in May 2020 under the Anti-epidemic Fund to support all the RCHEs and RCHDs (around 1 100 in total) to apply anti-virus coating spray in their premises. To further strengthen infection control, SWD launched in November 2020 a new round of the aforementioned Subsidy for RCHs and extended the Subsidy to cover around 300 day care units of elderly and rehabilitation services.

52. In addition, SWD has distributed more than 700 000 face masks every month to service units (including day service units and residential service units other than RCHEs and RCHDs) of NGOs for use by their service users since August 2020. SWD has also distributed a total of about 1.6 million face masks to relevant day service units between May and July, as well as 240 000 non-reusable face shields to home-based care service units in May for use by their staff. Altogether three tranches of special allowance for manpower support were provided to RCHs and home-based care service units for arranging manpower to maintain daily operations in the event that their staff were put under compulsory quarantine or were in need of medical treatment as confirmed cases of COVID-19. In addition, SWD provided a special allowance for the staff of subsidised RCHs, amounting to 10% of the monthly salary of an employee with a cap at \$4,000, for four months.

53. To facilitate early identification and treatment of infected staff members and arrangement of quarantine for close contacts, and strengthen the protection of residents of RCHs, SWD commissioned a testing laboratory to conduct four rounds of COVID-19 tests for staff of RCHEs, RCHDs and nursing homes from mid-July to early-November 2020. In the fourth round of exercise, apart from staff of RCHs, testing was also arranged on a trial basis for some residents of the aforementioned institutions, namely (i) newly admitted residents; (ii) residents who needed to go out for medical purposes, rehabilitation training, work or other reasons; (iii) service users of day

⁵ The special allowance was provided at a rate of \$5,000 or \$3,000 per round for the first two rounds, and \$10,000 or \$6,000 for the third to fifth rounds.

care/rehabilitation services units attached to RCHs; and (iv) other residents who were willing to undergo testing. In the first to fourth rounds of the tests, the laboratory collected and tested around 32 600, 26 100, 26 900 and 59 100 specimens respectively. SWD launched the fifth round of testing on 11 November 2020 which was completed in end-November 2020.

54. Since September 2020, SWD has further extended the Targeted Group Testing Scheme to provide free COVID-19 testing service for staff of other welfare service units with a higher risk on a voluntary participation basis. The Scheme covers staff of selected types of services including day care, home care, day training and residential care services for children and juveniles, women, street sleepers and drug abusers, etc. The testing exercise was completed in mid-November 2020 and the laboratory collected deep throat saliva specimen samples from around 8 300 staff of 880 welfare service units concerned.

55. In order to safeguard the health of residents and staff members of RCHs, the Secretary for Food and Health issued a compulsory testing notice in accordance with Section 10(1) of the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) on 30 November 2020, requiring persons who are employed by and will be on duty at RCHEs, RCHDs, nursing homes and day service units attached to the premises of RCHs⁶ between 15 and 21 December 2020 (including full-time, part-time and relief staff), or persons who will provide services to residents or users through hire-of-service contracts with RCHs and the aforementioned units between 15 and 21 December 2020, to undergo free COVID-19 testing⁷ between 1 and 14 December 2020 in any of the Community Testing Centres set up by the Government⁸ or to arrange tests themselves, according to the requirements and procedures specified in the notice. The sample provided must not be taken by the person being tested.

56. The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health advises all workers who provide home-based and centre-based services in the community to take appropriate precautionary measures to minimise the risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19. CHP has issued “Guidelines for Home-based Services for the Prevention of Coronavirus disease (COVID-2019)” and “Guidelines for Centre-based Services for the Prevention of Coronavirus disease (COVID-2019)”. SWD has also reminded all concerned service units to make reference to these guidelines. For RCHs to grasp the development of the COVID-19 epidemic and latest information and

⁶ The RCHEs in Mui Wo and Cheung Chau and a day service unit attached to one of them are excluded.

⁷ Polymerase chain reaction-based nucleic acid tests.

⁸ Apart from Community Testing Centres, the Government may set up temporary testing centres as necessary. Staff may also visit the temporary testing centres in accordance with the requirements specified in the notice to undergo free COVID-19 testing.

guidelines related to infection control as soon as practicable, SWD has forwarded a total of 10 letters from the CHP since January 2020, and has reminded RCHs to continue to step up various infection control and personal and environmental hygiene measures with reference to the “Guidelines for Residential Care Homes for the Elderly or Persons with Disabilities for the Prevention of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)” issued by CHP.

57. In order to support private and self-financing RCHEs and RCHDs in stepping up infection control measures during August to September 2020, SWD has provided a checklist on infection control measures to RCHs and invited them to conduct self-assessments. Visiting Medical Practitioner Service teams were also arranged to visit RCHs to give advice on improving infection control having regard to their actual situation and equip the staff with anti-epidemic knowledge and skills, so as to further enhance the awareness and skills of frontline staff in infection control, improve the general environmental hygiene of RCHs and reduce the spread of infectious diseases. In addition, SWD is exploring feasible ways with relevant departments to improve indoor ventilation of private RCHs.

58. In view of the financial difficulties arising from the prolonged suspension of service of CCCs during the COVID-19 epidemic, the government has provided two rounds of 4-month special grants under the Anti-epidemic Fund to help CCCs tide over the financial hardship. The first round of special grants at a total of \$245.8 million covering the period from February to May 2020 were disbursed to 551 CCCs. Grants totalling \$130 million have been earmarked for providing the second round of 4-month special grants, i.e. from September to December 2020, for CCCs. The first two tranches of payment covering September to November were made to 547 CCCs and 546 CCCs respectively at a total of \$91.9 million in October and November 2020 respectively. The last tranche of payment will be made before end-December. SWD also provided special allowance to welfare service units (including service units providing day care services on a co-payment basis under the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly) so as to help them tide over financial difficulties arising from the suspension or reduction of services.

59. In order to provide relief for interest class instructors who have lost much of their income owing to the service suspension of subvented welfare units, SWD has launched two phases of the “Scheme on Relief Grants for Interest Class Instructors Hired by Organisations Subvented by the Social Welfare Department”. The first phase (Scheme I) with application period from mid-May 2020 to end-July 2020 has benefited 4 142 eligible interest class instructors, each with a one-off relief grant of \$7,500 provided. Relief grants at a total of around \$31 million were disbursed. The second phase

(Scheme II) was launched on 9 October 2020 to provide another one-off relief grant of \$5,000 for each of the interest class instructors who are beneficiaries of Scheme I having lost further income as a result of the continued suspension of service under the persistent epidemic situation, as well as new eligible applicants. The application period of Scheme II will end on 16 December 2020.

60. In order to remove the concern of potentially infected persons from coming forward to take COVID-19 tests that they would suffer from financial hardship whilst being hospitalised in public hospitals for COVID-19 treatment, SWD has from 27 November 2020 opened for eligible Hong Kong residents to apply a one-off ex-gratia cash allowance of \$5,000. Applicants have to be currently employed but not entitled to paid sick leave or are self-employed, who are Hong Kong residents confirmed by the Department of Health to have contracted COVID-19 locally on or after 22 November 2020, and are facing financial hardship whilst being hospitalised in public hospitals for COVID-19 treatment. Applicants are not required to undergo any specific means test, but they have to declare that they meet the aforementioned eligibility criteria and provide basic information about their current employment. SWD will assess the applications and may seek to verify relevant information with concerned government departments, the Hospital Authority or the applicants' employers as appropriate.

61. In light of the development of the epidemic, we need to set up quarantine centres (QCs) for elderly and disabled residents who became close contacts of confirmed cases of COVID-19 at RCHEs and RCHDs. From April to July 2020, SWD has set up three QCs at Hong Kong PHAB Association Jockey Club PHAB Camp, Helping Hand Cheung Muk Tau Holiday Centre for the Elderly and AsiaWorld Expo (AWE) respectively, providing a total of 740 beds. Personal care, nursing and health services are provided for elderly and disabled persons under the quarantine period. Up to and including 3 December 2020, a total of 642 residents were served. The operation of the QC at the Holiday Centre for the Elderly ceased upon expiry of the lease contract on 29 October 2020. At present, there are a total of 680 beds provided by the remaining two QCs among which 160 beds in AWE are for reserve.

Conclusion

62. The Government attaches great importance to social welfare services and has been investing substantial resources in this area. Recurrent expenditure on social welfare in the financial year of 2020-21 is estimated to be \$93.9 billion, accounting for 19.3% of the recurrent expenditure of the

Government as a whole. The Government will continue to plan for and deliver suitable social welfare services through strengthening collaboration with different sectors of the community.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
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