

Matching Procedures conducted in respect of CSSA recipients

Introduction

Under existing provisions, CSSA customers' temporary absence from Hong Kong up to 60 days for an able-bodied recipient and 180 days for an elderly or disabled recipient in a year will not affect the payment of assistance. However, payment will be suspended or adjusted if the specified absence limit is exceeded for a specified yearly period.

Present arrangement

2. The movement records of people entering into and departing from Hong Kong are maintained in the Immigration Control Automation System (ICAS) of the Immigration Department (Imm. D). For the purpose of checking CSSA recipients' absences from Hong Kong, SWD, while complying with the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance [PD(P)O], provides the Imm. D on a monthly basis with recipients' Hong Kong Identity Card numbers in the form of an electronic tape for matching against the movement records captured by the ICAS in the previous month. Imm. D will return relevant absence records of the matched cases, also in the form of an electronic tape to SWD for follow up actions. The statistical figures on data matching are in the Annex.

Data matching is needed to protect public funds

3. Where it is established through data matching that the CSSA recipient has been away from Hong Kong for longer than the prescribed limit, suspension or re-assessment of payment will be arranged and amount of overpayment, if any, will be recovered. The matching procedure serves as an effective means to prevent the loss of public funds as it helps to identify overpayment to CSSA recipients as early as possible.

Notice given to concerned CSSA recipients

4. To comply with the requirements of PD(P)O, a CSSA recipient whose absence from Hong Kong has exceeded the permissible limit of the CSSA

Scheme will be given a written notice specifying the reason and stop payment action to be taken and inviting him/her to contact staff of SWD within 7 days to show cause why stop-payment of the CSSA benefits should not be taken. Stop payment will be arranged upon the expiry of the 7-day period if the recipient does not respond or show cause why stop-payment should not be taken.

Verification of the matching results

5. If the matching results appear to be problematic in some way, verification will be made with the Imm. D or the CSSA recipients concerned. In line with the provisions of the PD(P)O, all our clients can apply to make data corrections in respect of their personal data.

Whether SWD should limit the government departments/parties for the purpose of matching the data of CSSA recipients

6. The Audit Commission published an audit review on the 'Administration of the CSSA and SSA Schemes' in April 1999. The purpose of the Audit was to assess the effectiveness of the administration of the two social security schemes and to identify improvement opportunities. Audit was of the view that the degree of checking currently undertaken by staff of SWD to verify CSSA applicant's income and asset was not sufficient. This is because if the applicant fails to disclose all his resources or changes in circumstances, it will be difficult for staff of SWD to determine his eligibility for assistance and overpayment may be involved. For example, in the course of the Audit review, Audit conducted two trial data matching exercises viz matching CSSA beneficiaries with the government payroll and imprisonment records held by the Correctional Services Department (CSD). Audit discovered that there were seven cases where the beneficiaries had not fully disclosed their civil service incomes to SWD while 589 persons who were serving time in CSD's penal institutions unknown to SWD would lead to overpayment. In the light of this observation, Audit recommended that, as far as it is cost-effective, SWD should extend data matching procedures to more government departments/organizations.

7. To guard against the abuse of social security benefits, SWD has undertaken to follow Audit's recommendations and actively explore the

feasibility of data matching with parties proposed including data matching with the Treasury, CSD and the Land Registry.

Compliance with the requirements of PD(P)O

8. SWD will continue to comply with all the requirements of the PD(P)O, SWD will seek approval from the Privacy Commissioner before carrying out any matching exercise, and comply with legal requirements regarding follow-up action on matched cases and will ensure that customers' personal data are collected or retained in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Ordinance.

Social Welfare Department

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Statistical Figures on Data Matching for the period April 1998 to March 1999

	Total no. of CSSA recipients at the end of the month	No. of CSSA recipients identified through matching procedures as having exceeded the limits on absence from Hong Kong	%
Apr.98	301,544	16,940	5.6%
May.98	311,916	13,859	4.4%
Jun.98	320,704	14,089	4.4%
Jul.98	328,153	8,741	2.7%
Aug.98	336,743	9,054	2.7%
Sep.98	344,317	6,464	1.9%
Oct.98	352,865	9,102	2.6%
Nov.98	362,765	9,333	2.6%
Dec.98	368,623	14,377	3.9%
Jan.99	374,615	13,286	3.5%
Feb.99	377,734	23,141	6.1%
Mar.99	382,454	16,721	4.4%
Total :		155,107	
Average :	346,869	12,926	3.7%