

**For meeting
on 13 March 2000**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

“Promoting Self-reliance” Strategy

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the “Promoting Self-reliance” strategy that the Administration plans to introduce in 2000-2001.

BACKGROUND

2. The caseload and expenditure under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme increased rapidly in the 1990's¹. To ensure that the CSSA Scheme can continue to provide a safety net for those who cannot fend for themselves and discourage long term dependency on social security by those who are able and expected to work, the Administration reviewed the CSSA Scheme in 1998 to identify measures to encourage and help the employable recipients to find work and become self-reliant. A review report containing a package of proposals was published for public consultation in December 1998.

3. The final package of measures was introduced in June 1999. A major component of the package is the Active Employment Assistance (AEA) programme. Under the AEA programme, the caseworkers in Social Security Field Units (SSFUs) will provide active assistance to able-bodied unemployed CSSA participants to help them develop personal plans to find jobs, provide them information on employment services and retraining courses available and make necessary referrals for them. As the new arrangements require intensive manpower input from SSFU staff, the programme is being introduced in phases. Participants are also arranged to perform community work to provide them opportunities to contribute to the community and expand their social circles.

4. Since the introduction of the Active Employment Assistance (AEA) programme in June 1999, about 13 000 CSSA recipients have joined the programme and 900 of them (or 7% of total participants) had found jobs. The result compares favourably with the previous placement rate of 1% when CSSA unemployment cases were required only to register with the local employment

¹ Total CSSA expenditure increased from \$2.4 billion in 1993/94 to \$13.0 billion in 1998/99.

service of the Labour Department.

5. The initial results of the package of measures are encouraging. The unemployment caseload has dropped by 18% since June 1999. The total CSSA caseload has dropped by 2% during the same period.

PROMOTING SELF-RELIANCE

6. The success of the package of measures introduced in June 1999 clearly demonstrates that many employable recipients do not wish to rely on CSSA indefinitely; and with assistance, they can become self-reliant. To provide more direct assistance to able-bodied CSSA recipients to help them overcome barriers to work, and to prevent people from falling on to the CSSA net due to lack of support, the Administration has earmarked about \$200 million in 2000-01 for implementation of a "Promoting Self-reliance" strategy. Components of the package include:

Full Implementation of the AEA Programme

7. The AEA programme will be extended to cover all CSSA unemployment cases and low earning cases where the recipients are working part-time. It is expected that all unemployment cases will be covered by March 2001. Additional staff will be provided to ensure that all eligible cases will receive the additional assistance.

8. A voluntary programme will also be extended to single parent recipients and low earning CSSA cases where the recipients are already working full-time. The assistance provided in this programme includes up-to-date job market information, referrals for training and retraining opportunities to upgrade participant's work skills.

Intensive employment assistance programme for the unemployed

9. SWD will commission non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide tailor-made programmes to provide more intensive assistance to unemployment CSSA cases which have joined the AEA Programme for a longer period but have not yet secured employment. The intensive employment assistance services will include intensive job counselling, job matching and training. The intensive assistance will also be made available to single parents and low income earners who are interested in the additional assistance.

Special job attachment programme

10. SWD will invite NGOs in the welfare sector to provide job attachment opportunities for CSSA recipients. The objective of the programme is to provide employable CSSA recipients who have left the job market for a considerable period of time with opportunities to acquire work

skills and re-establish work habits. The job attachment opportunities will be created in addition to the regular posts that are covered by existing subvention. Participants will be given training allowance to cover additional expenses that may be incurred during the attachment period. The NGOs will also provide assistance to the participants in finding jobs.

Pilot project in conjunction with Labour Department (LD) and Employees Retraining Board (ERB)

11. SWD will work closely with the LD and the ERB to implement a pilot project to provide special retraining and job matching services to unemployed CSSA recipients. Selected CSSA recipients will be matched with job vacancies handled by the Local Employment Service of LD, including vacancies available under the Supplementary Labour Scheme will also be considered. ERB will provide the necessary training to equip the participants to take up the job opportunities.

Improvement to the arrangements for CSSA disregarded earnings

12. In view of the current labour market situation and to encourage able-bodied CSSA recipients to take up jobs, be they part-time or of low pay, the Administration will remove the requirements on minimum income and hours of work under the CSSA disregarded earnings arrangement. This relaxation will be subject to review after two years to assess its effectiveness in encouraging CSSA recipients to return to work.

Provision of additional home/community care services for the elderly

13. Some able-bodied adults have to rely on CSSA because they need to stay at home to take care of their frail or disabled family members. Provision of additional home/community care will free up these able-bodied adults to seek work. The Administration is conducting a review to identify ways to upgrade the existing community care and support services for the elderly and their family carers. The study will also look at the interface among home care, community care and residential care services for the elderly. The study will be completed in July 2000. The Administration has earmarked \$64 million for provision of additional services according to the results of the study.

Provision of additional services to enable service recipients to join/continue in the work force

14. Meanwhile, we will provide other services to help working parents, single parents and new arrivals to overcome barriers to work, join the work force or attend training. These include the following -

- (a) We will enhance child-care support for working parents. We will extend the opening hours in 100 subvented child care centres for

children under 6 and subvent 6 000 places under the After-School Care Programme for primary-school children between 6 and 12. This will help address the problem of children left unattended at home, and enable parents to join the work force or attend re-training programmes.

- (b) We will set up 4 pre-migration centres and provide 8 post-migration centres (including strengthening 4 existing ones and setting up 4 new ones) to help new arrivals both before and after their entry into Hong Kong integrate into the local community.
- (c) We will set up 5 teams of social work professionals to provide additional support and counselling services for single parents to help them overcome their problems, restore their resilience and become self-reliant.
- (d) We will establish 5 Family and Child Protective Services Units, which cover amongst their duties the provision of one-stop services for victims of acute domestic violence. These Units will help such victims handle their emotional problems, rebuild their self-esteem, recover from trauma and become self-reliant.

We believe that these services can help these vulnerable groups become self-reliant.

ADVICE SOUGHT

15. Members are requested to note the proposed package of services and give their views and comments.

Health & Welfare Bureau
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