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Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 13 July 2009**

Task Force on Poverty

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the setting up of the Task Force on Poverty and the discussions held by the Panel on Welfare Services (the Panel) on the subject.

Commission on Poverty

2. The Chief Executive (CE) announced in the Policy Address 2005 that a commission on poverty to be chaired by the Financial Secretary (FS) would be established to alleviate poverty. The membership of the Commission on Poverty (CoP) was announced on 27 January 2005. Besides the official members including FS, Head of the Central Policy Unit, four Principal Officials responsible for health and welfare, home affairs, employment and education, the membership of CoP also comprised Legislative Council (LegCo) Members, businessmen, representatives from non-governmental organisations, and academics. The terms of reference of CoP were –

- (a) to study and identify the needs of the poor;
- (b) to make policy recommendations to prevent and alleviate poverty and promote self-reliance; and
- (c) to encourage community engagement, delineate responsibility between the Government, social welfare sector and community organisations, foster public-private partnerships and mobilise social capital in alleviating poverty.

3. CoP agreed to focus its work on four key areas, namely children/youth (preventing and tackling intergenerational poverty), working people (covering employment and welfare-to-work initiatives), the elderly (provision and delivery of various services) and the community (district-based approach and community engagement).

4. Prior to its dissolution on 30 June 2007, CoP submitted a report to the Government in June 2007 summarising its work and making a number of recommendations. The full report is available at CoP's website (<http://www.cop.gov.hk/eng/report.htm>).

Task Force on Poverty

5. Following the dissolution of CoP in June 2007 and the re-organisation of policy bureaux of the Government Secretariat with effect from 1 July 2007, the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) has been responsible for overseeing and coordinating poverty alleviation matters. In the 2007-2008 Policy Address, CE announced the setting up of an inter-bureau/departmental Task Force on Poverty headed by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare (SLW) to coordinate the cross-departmental efforts on poverty alleviation. The terms of reference of the Task Force on Poverty are –

- (a) to monitor the progress on implementing the recommendations of CoP;
- (b) to coordinate the Government's efforts in tackling poverty, in particular poverty-related issues which have cross policy implications;
- (c) to promote community engagement to tackle poverty and promote self-reliance; and
- (d) to consider studies, researches and analyses for enhancing the understanding of poverty, assessing the impact of poverty alleviation measures and providing input for policy formulation.

Past discussions by the Panel

6. When the Panel was briefed on the welfare initiatives in the CE's Policy Address 2007-2008 and Policy Agenda at the meeting on 15 October 2007, members were advised that the Administration had set up a Task Force on Poverty within the Administration, led by SLW and comprising representatives of relevant bureaux and departments, to oversee poverty alleviation matters and follow up on the poverty alleviation recommendations put forth by CoP.

7. Some members considered that the dissolution of CoP showed that the Administration lacked sincerity in tackling the problem of poverty. They also expressed disappointment at the Administration's failure to take forward poverty alleviation recommendations put forth by CoP. Members enquired about the concrete measures, timetable, and the additional resources for taking forward CoP's recommendations. Some members urged the Administration to set a target to reduce the number of low-income households in Hong Kong. A suggestion was also made for CoP to be re-established and led by the Chief Secretary for the Administration (CS). The new commission should follow up on the implementation progress of the CoP's recommendations and formulate new poverty alleviation initiatives.

8. The Administration advised that the Task Force on Poverty would monitor the progress of implementing the recommendations of CoP, coordinate efforts across the Government in tackling poverty, promote community engagement, promote self-reliance, consider studies, research and analyses necessary to enhance the understanding of poverty, assess the impact of poverty alleviation measures and provide input for policy formulation. Members were also advised that the Administration was studying how best to take forward some of CoP's recommendations, such as providing a "one-stop" employment service through strengthening the collaboration among the Labour Department, the Social Welfare Department and the Employees Retraining Board, and setting up a Child Development Fund to provide more development opportunities for children from a disadvantaged background.

9. At the meeting on 12 November 2007, members were briefed on the Administration's proposal to create one supernumerary post of Administrative Officer Staff Grade C in the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) for a period of three years. The incumbent would serve as the secretary to the Task Force on Poverty and provide support to the work on poverty alleviation. While members welcomed the proposal to create a dedicated post in LWB to support the poverty alleviation work, members were concerned about the absence of a concrete work plan for combating poverty. They were of the view that the Administration should also set out the specific targets for poverty alleviation and other related initiatives in the coming years. Some members considered the Administration's staffing proposal far from adequate to make any practical achievements on the poverty alleviation measures put forth by CoP, including the development of social enterprise which required inter-bureau/departmental collaboration. To this end, a more senior officer was needed to coordinate the Government's efforts on combating poverty.

10. The Administration advised that it attached great importance to poverty alleviation. LWB would work closely with the Task Force on Poverty to promote inter-departmental efforts on combating poverty, and SLW would oversee the overall progress of the work on poverty alleviation. The Task Force on Poverty would report regularly to CS, and LWB would keep LegCo informed of the work progress of the Task Force on Poverty.

11. At the meeting on 23 October 2008 when the Panel was briefed on the welfare initiatives in the CE's Policy Address 2008-2009 and Policy Agenda, members were advised that the Administration was committed to providing a safety net and different support services to cater for the basic needs of the poor and improve their livelihood. It sought to strengthen training and retraining to facilitate those who had the ability to work to join the labour market to achieve self-reliance and alleviate poverty. The Task Force on Poverty would continue to coordinate efforts across the Government in tackling poverty as well as monitor the progress of implementing the recommendations of the former CoP.

Relevant papers

12. A list of relevant papers is at the **Appendix**. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council's website (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>) for details.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
7 July 2009

Appendix

Relevant Papers/Documents

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Papers</u>
Panel on Welfare Services	15 October 2007	Administration's paper LC Paper No. CB(2)3/07-08(01) Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)358/07-08
	12 November 2007	Administration's paper LC Paper No. CB(2)254/07-08(06) Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)521/07-08
	23 October 2008	Administration's paper LC Paper No. CB(2)15/08-09(01) Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)321/08-09

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