

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1255/09-10
(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/MP

Panel on Manpower

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Thursday, 14 January 2010, at 5:00 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, BBS, JP
Hon CHAN Kin-por, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou
- Members absent** : Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP
- Public Officers attending** : Item I

Mr Matthew CHEUNG Kin-chung, GBS, JP
Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Mrs Cherry TSE LING Kit-ching, JP
Commissioner for Labour

Mr Stanley NG Ka-kwong, JP
Assistant Commissioner for Labour (Employment
Services)

Ms Betty NG Shuk-fong
Senior Labour Officer (Employment Services)
(Transport Support Scheme)
Labour Department

**Attendance
by invitation** : Dynamics Islands

Mr Felix WU Pat-lun
Spokesperson

Individual

Mr Bill TANG Ka-piu
Islands District Council member

The Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions

Mr LAM Chun-sing
Director of Social Affairs Committee

Individual

Mr LEUNG Li
Sai Kung District Council member

職工盟青少年義工隊(新界西)

Miss CHOW Pik-ching
Youth Volunteer

Friends of Yuen Long

Mr KEUNG Kwok-wai
Committee Member

Tin Shui Wai Social Concern Group

Miss LOK Sau-chun
Committee Member

Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions

Mr WONG Chun-pong
Organizing Secretary

Society for Community Organization

Mr NG Wai-tung
Community Organizer

Concern Travelling Assistance League

Mr KONG Ping-yiu
Representative

Concern Singleton Right Group

Mr LAM Chiu
Representative

Casual Worker Concern Group

Ms HUANG Dai-hua
Representative

Housing Concern Group

Mr SO Tze-hin
Representative

Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs

Ms LAW Pui-shan
Policy Research Officer

倩慧舍

Ms LAI Mei-ngan
Member

Pastoral Centre for Workers (New Territories)

Mr YU Siu-po
Programme Officer

San Po Kong Workers' Group Alliance

Ms LEE Ka-fung
Vice Chairman

Pastoral Centre for Workers (Hong Kong)

Mr KONG Kwai-sang
Assistant Programme Officer

The Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions - Rights & Benefits Committee

Mr TANG Cheung-shing
Committee Member

Tin Shui Wai Women Development Concern Group

Miss SO Wai-yee
Committee

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Mariana CHAN
Chief Officer, Policy Research and Advocacy

Concerning CSSA Review Alliance

Mr LEE Tai-shing
Chief Committee Organizer

天水圍北交通關注組

Ms CHEUNG Sin
Resident Representative

Community Development Alliance

Mr CHAN Yu-cheung
Project Worker

Hong Kong Domestic Workers General Union

Miss FUNG Ka-yan
Representative

Individual

Miss TANG Wai-kuen

Civic Party

Mr Bill LAY
Exco Member

Neighbourhood and Worker's Service Centre

Mr WONG Yun-tat
Representative of Organization

葵芳邨民生權益關注組

Mr LAI Chi-po
Representative of Concern Group

Kwai Chung Estate Striving for Transportation Allowance
Concern Group

Miss WONG Pui-hing
Representative of Concern Group

葵涌邨基層關注組

Miss Vincci WONG
Representative of Concern Group

葵盛東交通事務關注組

Mr CHOW Wai-hung
Representative of Concern Group

Hong Kong Buildings Management and Security Workers
General Union

Miss TAM Yuen-yan
Secretary

The Lion Rock Institute

Mr Andrew SHUEN
Research Director

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress
of Hong Kong

Mr LAU Kwok-fan
Central Committee Member

Clerk in attendance : Mr Raymond LAM
Chief Council Secretary (2) 1

Staff in attendance : Miss Josephine SO
Senior Council Secretary (2) 1

Mr Ian CHOW
Council Secretary (2) 1

Ms Kiwi NG
Legislative Assistant (2) 1

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I. Transport Support Scheme

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)717/09-10(01)-(12), (14), (17)-(19), (23)-(25), (30)-(31), (33), (35)-(44), CB(2)744/09-10(01) and CB(2)771/09-10(01))

Members noted that the Transport Support Scheme ("TSS") was launched on 25 June 2007 on a one-year pilot basis as one of the poverty alleviation measures to provide time-limited transport subsidy to needy job seekers and low-income employees living in four designated remote districts, namely, Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, North and Islands districts, to find jobs and work across districts. Under TSS, two types of allowances were made available to eligible applicants, namely, a Job Search Allowance ("JSA") of up to \$600 payable on a reimbursement basis to cover transport expenses incurred in job search, and On-the-Job Allowance ("OTA") of \$600 per month for up to 12 months. The eligibility criteria for JSA and OTA included, among others, a threshold on personal asset value of no more than \$44,000, a threshold on monthly income of no more than \$6,500, and the requirement to work 72 hours or more a month.

Views of deputations and the Administration's response

2. Mr Felix WU Pat-lun presented the views of Dynamics Islands as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(02)).
3. Mr LAM Chun-sing presented the views of the Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(04)).
4. Mr LEUNG Li, member of Sai Kung District Council ("DC"), presented his views as detailed in his submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(05)).
5. Mr KEUNG Kwok-wai presented the views of Friends of Yuen Long as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(08)). He added that the requirement to work at least 72 hours a month should be relaxed and the amount of allowances should be increased.
6. Miss LOK Sau-chun presented the views of Tin Shui Wai Social Concern Group as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(09)).
7. Mr WONG Chun-pong presented the views of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(10)).
8. Mr NG Wai-tung presented the views of Society for Community Organization as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(11)).

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9. Mr KONG Ping-yiu presented the views of Concern Travelling Assistance League as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(11)).
10. Mr LAM Chiu resented the views of Concern Singleton Right Group as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(11)).
11. Ms HUANG Dai-hua presented the views of Casual Worker Concern Group as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(11)).
12. Mr SO Tze-hin presented the views of Housing Concern Group as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(11)).
13. Ms LAW Pui-shan presented the views of Hong Kong Catholic Commission for Labour Affairs as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(12)).
14. Ms LAI Mei-ngan of 倩慧舍 said that TSS should continue as residents in remote areas had a genuine need for transport subsidy. In addition, the requirement to work at least 72 hours a month should be relaxed so that part-time workers would also be eligible to apply. She expressed concern that applicants admitted under TSS would easily exhaust the \$600 allowance for JSA, given that they had to search jobs frequently because of the difficulty in securing permanent employment.
15. Mr YU Siu-po presented the views of Pastoral Centre for Workers (New Territories) as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(14)).
16. Ms LEE Ka-fung of San Po Kong Workers' Group Alliance said that she was a low-income worker not eligible for TSS because she lived in Wong Tai Sin and worked in Wanchai. In view of the recent increase in fares by various public transport operators, her transport cost for home-and-work commuting increased. She suggested that TSS should be extended to workers of other districts.
17. Mr KONG Kwai-sang of Pastoral Centre for Workers (Hong Kong) said that TSS should be operated on a long-term basis and extended to workers of other districts. In addition, the requirement to work at least 72 hours a month should be relaxed so that part-time workers who had difficulty in finding a full-time job would also be eligible to apply.
18. Mr TANG Cheung-shing presented the views of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (Rights and Benefits Committee) as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(17)).

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19. Miss SO Wai-ye presented the views of Tin Shui Wai Women Development Concern Group as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(18)).
20. Ms Mariana CHAN presented the views of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(19)).
21. Ms CHEUNG Sin presented the views of 天水圍北交通關注組 as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(23)). She said that as an insurance agent, she was deprived of the right to apply for TSS despite she had met all the eligibility criteria.
22. Mr CHAN Yu-cheung presented the views of Community Development Alliance as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(24)).
23. Miss FUNG Ka-yan presented the views of Hong Kong Domestic Workers General Union as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(25)).
24. Miss TANG Wai-kuen expressed concern about when the result of the TSS review would be available and whether TSS would continue.
25. Mr Bill LAY of the Civic Party said that the Administration should extend the one-year subsidy duration of TSS, operate it on a long-term basis, extend it to other districts and relax its eligibility criteria. In addition, the allowances should be adjusted upward having regard to the fare increases by various public transport operators.
26. Mr WONG Yun-tat of Neighbourhood and Worker's Service Centre said that TSS should be extended to workers of other districts, such as Kwai Tsing and Sham Shui Po. In addition, the eligibility criteria for applying for TSS should be relaxed by lowering the thresholds on personal asset value and on monthly income. The Administration should also monitor the fare increases of public transport.
27. Mr LAI Chi-po presented the views of 葵芳邨民生權益關注組 as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(30)).
28. Miss WONG Pui-hing presented the views of Kwai Chung Estate Striving for Transportation Allowance Concern Group as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(31)).
29. Miss Vincci WONG presented the views of 葵涌邨基層關注組 as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(31)).

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30. Mr CHOW Wai-hung presented the views of 葵盛東交通事務關注組 as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(33)).

31. Miss TAM Yuen-yan presented the views of Hong Kong Buildings Management and Security Workers General Union as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(35)).

32. Mr Andrew SHUEN presented the views of the Lion Rock Institute as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(36)).

(Post-meeting note: The submission received after the meeting was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)825/09-10 on 26 January 2010.)

33. Mr LAU Kwok-fan presented the views of Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)744/09-10(01)).

(Post-meeting note: The submission received after the meeting was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)818/09-10 on 25 January 2010.)

34. Miss CHOW Pik-ching presented the views of 職工盟青少年義工隊 (新界西) as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(06)). She suggested that the requirement to work 72 hours or more a month should be relaxed so that part-time workers would be eligible for TSS. She proposed specifically that those who worked 36 to less than 72 hours a month should be entitled to \$300 allowance under OTA and those who worked less than 36 hours a month should be reimbursed for the actual amount of transport expenses incurred.

35. Mr Bill TANG Ka-pui, member of Islands District Council, presented his views as detailed in his submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)717/09-10(03)).

36. Mr LEE Tai-shing of Concerning CSSA Review Alliance said that the Administration should extend the one-year subsidy duration of TSS, operate it on a long-term basis and relax its eligibility criteria, having regard to the fare increases by various public transport operators and possible increase in food prices. In addition, the ceiling of \$600 for JSA should be removed so that workers would be reimbursed for the actual amount of transport expenses incurred.

37. SLW gave a consolidated response to the issues raised by the deputations as follows -

- (a) TSS was recommended by the then Commission on Poverty. It was meant to be a time-limited incentive scheme offering

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transport allowance to encourage needy job seekers and low-income employees living in the four designated remote districts of Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, North and Islands to "go out" and seek jobs or work across districts. The proposals to extend TSS to the 18 districts and to provide the subsidy on a permanent basis would depart from the policy intention of TSS;

- (b) the original plan was to offer the subsidy for a period of up to six months. In response to requests from the community for relaxation of the eligibility criteria under TSS and to allow more needy people to benefit from TSS, a number of relaxation measures were introduced in July 2008. Such measures included expanding the scope of TSS to cover intra-district travels within the four designated districts and lowering the income threshold from \$5,600 to \$6,500 per month. The subsidy period was also extended from six to 12 months;
- (c) there were sound reasons for confining TSS to the four designated districts. The paucity of job opportunities vis-à-vis the economically active population in that district and higher transport costs were the rationale for the choice of the four designated districts. The eligibility criteria for admission to TSS were also reasonable by any standard. The threshold on personal assets of value not exceeding \$44,000 was far less stringent than that under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme which was set at \$22,500 for single person cases. The minimum of 72 hours a month required of the applicants to work for was far less than that of a full-time worker who usually worked for over 200 hours a month;
- (d) admitted TSS applicants who had not exhausted their 12 months' entitlement of allowances were still eligible to receive OTA within a period of 24 months. As TSS still remained in place, residents in the four designated districts who met the eligible criteria could still apply for TSS;
- (e) extending TSS to all other districts on a long-term basis would in effect turn the subsidy into another form of income supplement. Paying the subsidy on a long-term basis would change the nature of TSS; and
- (f) the Administration was working in full swing to assess the effectiveness of TSS. This special meeting arranged by the Panel provided a useful forum for the Administration to listen to public views. The Administration attached importance to the views expressed by the deputations. It was analyzing the relevant statistics and would take these views into account when mapping

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out the way forward. At this stage, the Administration had no pre-emptive view on the way forward.

38. In response to the concern raised by Ms CHEUNG Sin of 天水圍北交通關注組, Senior Labour Officer (Employment Services) (TSS) ("SLO") explained that an insurance agent who was self-employed would not be covered by TSS. If an employer-employee relationship could be established between Ms CHEUNG and her company, she would be eligible for TSS. As there were no details of Ms CHEUNG's case, SLO suggested Ms CHEUNG to seek assistance from the Labour Department if necessary.

Discussion

39. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that the deputations had unanimously given the view that TSS should be operated on a long-term basis, extended to cover all low-income workers in the territory and relax its eligibility criteria. In his view, TSS should continue as long as the problem of poverty was not resolved. He enquired about the purpose of the Administration's review of TSS, if SLW considered that the existing TSS and its eligibility criteria were all reasonable.

40. Dr LAM Tai-fai said that the community's aspiration towards TSS was very clear. He supported further improving TSS by extending it to other districts, relaxing its eligibility criteria and increasing the level of allowances. He pointed out that residents in the four districts could not afford to pay rent in the urban areas and hence chose to live in remote areas. The travelling expenses to and from remote areas were high. TSS should be continued as it ensured a steady subsidy for low-income employees and provided them with an incentive for work without the need to resort to CSSA. Dr LAM enquired when the review of TSS would be completed.

41. Mr Frederick FUNG said that following the relaxation of TSS to allow eligible persons living and working in the same designated remote districts to apply for subsidy, TSS had become discriminatory to low-income earners in other districts such as Sham Shui Po. In his view, TSS was indeed an income supplement for low-income workers. If a person exhausting his 12 months' entitlement for TSS was still earning below \$6,500 per month, he had a genuine need to be subsidized for a longer period.

42. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the implementation of TSS in 2007 announced by Mr Henry TANG, the then Financial Secretary ("FS"), was a result of political trade-off for the purpose of passing the Appropriation Bill 2007. If the Administration was sincere about helping low-income employees, it should continue to provide transport subsidy in view of the growing problem of in-work poverty and the rising Consumer Price Index.

43. Mr IP Wai-ming said that SLW's response did not provide any concrete answer on the future of TSS or the timetable for completing the review. The

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Administration should admit that TSS was an income supplement and address the concerns raised by the deputations at this meeting. He said that the Chief Executive ("CE"), in his Question and Answer Session held earlier that day, had undertaken to help low-income workers.

44. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that CE had earlier remarked that he and SLW attached importance to the views to be given by the deputations at this meeting, and the Administration would improve TSS. He considered that CE's remarks implied that TSS would not be abolished. Mr WONG enquired whether the Administration would continue to accept new applications under TSS from the four remote districts and whether SLW had relayed to FS, who was preparing the 2010-2011 Budget, to continue with the operation of TSS.

45. Dr PAN Pey-chyou said that owing to poor town planning, there were relatively fewer job opportunities within the four remote districts and the public transport costs to and from those districts were relatively high. In addition, the financial tsunami had aggravated the problem of income disparity. Given the favourable financial position of the Government in recent years, Dr PAN requested the Administration to consider the possibility of continuing TSS and extending it to the entire territory.

46. Mr WONG Sing-chi enquired whether the views of the deputations had inspired SLW to map out the way forward for TSS and about the chance to continue TSS. He further asked whether the review of TSS was pending the Budget speech to be delivered by FS.

47. In response to members, SLW said that -

- (a) the meeting provided a valuable forum to further understanding between the Government and the public. Some suggestions proposed by the deputations were quite specific while others were rather general. The Administration would adopt an objective and open attitude towards the views expressed by the deputations. The purpose of the meeting was to listen to public views and not to make a decision on the future of TSS. The Administration would need time to examine these proposals together with other proposals already received;
- (b) CE's remarks made earlier that day indicated that the Administration attached importance to TSS and the problem faced by low-income workers. At present, CSSA already provided income supplement to eligible low-income households and some 16 000 families had benefited from it;
- (c) TSS, which still remained in place, would continue to accept new applications from residents of the four remote districts. However, admitted TSS applicants who had exhausted their 12 months'

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entitlements would no longer be eligible for the transport allowances;

- (d) the Administration had agreed to allow eligible people working and living in the same district to apply for allowances under the relaxed TSS having regard to members' concerns that the territorial coverage of the four remote districts were large and intra-district travels could also entail a relatively high transport cost. The measure should not be considered discriminatory against residents in other low-income districts (such as Sham Shui Po) as the objective of TSS was to encourage residents in the four remote areas to "go out" and seek jobs or work across districts;
- (e) pending the conclusion of the review on TSS, the current TSS would continue. At present, the review of TSS was in full swing. Apart from evaluating whether the policy objective of TSS had been achieved, the review would also cover an assessment of the overall effectiveness of TSS, the case processing procedures and practices adopted by non-government organizations participating in administering TSS, and the modus operandi, control and monitoring measures; and
- (f) at this point in time, the Administration had no preconceived views, and thus was not in a position to give any indication, on the way forward for TSS. The Administration would take all relevant factors, including members' views and suggestions of different quarters of the community, into consideration in mapping out the way forward for TSS.

48. The Chairman thanked the deputations for attending the meeting. She said that given the time constraint, deputations who had further views to give could forward supplementary submissions to the Panel.

49. The meeting ended at 7:08 pm.