

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2677/11-12
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 May 2012, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex

Members present : Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Chairman)
Hon WONG Sing-chi (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, SBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Member absent : Hon IP Wai-ming, MH

Member attending : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH

**Public Officers : Item IV
attending**

Mr Matthew CHEUNG
Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr Paul TANG
Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Ms Doris CHEUNG
Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr Stephen SUI
Commissioner for Rehabilitation
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Ms Rebecca PUN
Deputy Secretary for Transport & Housing
(Transport) 2
Transport and Housing Bureau

Ms Carolina YIP
Deputy Commissioner/Transport Services &
Management
Transport Department

Item V

Mr FUNG Pak-yan
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)
Social Welfare Department

Ms LUNG Siu-kit
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security)
Social Welfare Department

Mr NG Wai-kuen
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 1
Social Welfare Department

**Attendance by : Item V
invitation**

Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social
Work Officer Grade Branch

Mr Sam LEUNG Kin-hung
Chairman

Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social
Security Assistants' Branch

Mr CHAN Chun-wah
Chairman

Ms SHING Che-wun
Vice Chairman

Clerk in attendance : Miss Betty MA
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Ms Candice LAM
Senior Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Karen LAI
Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. Confirmation of minutes
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1911/11-12]

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2012 were confirmed.

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II. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1785/11-12(01)]

2. Members noted that the submission from 關注綜援低收入聯盟 regarding the disregarded earnings arrangement under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme had been issued since the last meeting.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1912/11-12(01) to (02)]

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration at the next meeting to be held on 11 June 2012 at 10:45 am -

- (a) Long-term social welfare planning; and
- (b) Progress of implementation of recommendations of the Lump Sum Grant Independent Review Committee.

4. Referring to the list of outstanding items for discussion by the Panel (LC Paper No. CB(2)1912/11-12(01)), the Chairman invited members' view on the Administration's proposals to delete items 12 to 14 from the list, although he personally considered that these items should be retained in the list for the Panel's follow-up in the next term.

5. Mr CHAN Kam-lam concurred with the Chairman's view. He suggested that the Administration should, in the meantime, be requested to provide members with progress reports on these three items.

6. Mr WONG Sing-chi envisaged that the Task Force on Poverty would conclude its work soon as the Chief Executive-elect had advocated the re-establishment of the Poverty Commission in the next term of Government. It was an opportune time for the Administration to provide members with the latest work progress of the Task Force on Poverty.

7. After discussion, the Chairman said that items 12 and 13 would not be deleted from the list of outstanding items for discussion, whereas item 14 would be deleted from the list after the Administration was requested to report on the work progress of the Task Force on Poverty.

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IV. Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1904/11-12(01), CB(2)1912/11-12(03),
CB(2)1935/11-12(01), CB(2)1936/11-12(01) and
CB(2)2008/11-12(01)]

8. Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") briefed members on the following salient features of the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities ("the Scheme"), and details of which were set out in the Administration's paper -

- (a) target beneficiaries of the Scheme were elderly people aged 65 or above and recipients under the CSSA Scheme aged between 12 and 64 with 100% disabilities and recipients of Disability Allowance ("DA") in the same age group, amounting to around 1.1 million people;
- (b) the target beneficiaries would be entitled to travel on general Mass Transit Railway ("MTR") lines, franchised buses and ferries anytime at a concessionary fare of \$2 a trip. The participating public transport operators would continue to absorb the cost of existing concessions voluntarily offered by them and the Government would provide additional resources, on an accountable and reimbursement basis, to cover the fare differential between the nominal fare and \$2;
- (c) given the technical complexity in upgrading the relevant fare collection systems of the transport operators concerned to implement the Scheme and the need to develop a new centralized settlement platform for calculating the public transport operators' fare revenue forgone and the reimbursement amount, the public transport operators concerned would be ready to implement the Scheme at different points in time; and
- (d) the Administration planned to seek funding approval from the Finance Committee ("FC") on 8 June 2012 and to amend Schedule 5 to the Disability Discrimination Ordinance ("DDO") (Cap. 487) by end-June 2012 to implement the Scheme.

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9. The Chairman drew members' attention to Rule 83A of the Rules of Procedure regarding personal pecuniary interest to be disclosed.

Discussions

Target beneficiaries of the Scheme

10. Mr WONG Kwok-hing took the view that it was not appropriate to exclude persons with less than 100% disabilities (e.g. loss of function of one limb) and holders of the Registration Card for People with Disabilities ("RC") from the Scheme. He urged the Administration to conduct a comprehensive review of the definition of "severely disabled" under the DA Scheme and extend the coverage of the Scheme to persons with less than 100% disabilities and RC holders.

11. SLW said that there had been considerable discussion in the community on the eligibility criteria since the announcement of the Scheme. As regards the target group of persons with disabilities to benefit from the Scheme, consideration had been given to the discussion of the Subcommittee to Study the Transport Needs and Provision of Concessionary Public Transport Fares for Persons with Disabilities ("the Subcommittee") formed under the Legislative Council in 2005. The Subcommittee requested that, among others, concessionary public transport fares should be provided to recipients under the CSSA Scheme aged between 12 and 64 with 100% disabilities and recipients of DA in the same age group on the grounds that this group of people was in need of assistance and encouragement for social integration the most. Both the monthly Transport Supplement for persons with disabilities under the CSSA Scheme and for DA recipients as well as the MTR Corporation Limited ("MTRCL")'s own fare concession for persons with disabilities applied to this group of persons with disabilities.

12. While expressing understanding that the definition of "disability" under DDO was very broad, Dr PAN Pey-chyou was of the view that the Administration should develop a set of criteria specifically for the Scheme to enable persons with less than 100% disabilities, such as loss of one limb, to benefit from the fare concessions.

13. SLW said that the Administration noted the requests for relaxing the eligibility criteria to cover persons with less than 100% disabilities. Given that the Scheme would be non-means-tested and would incur a

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significant amount of recurrent public resources, the Administration would need to consider the implications with due care. Having regard to the complexity of the issues involved, the Administration's present priority was to launch the Scheme initially on three major modes of public transport as soon as possible. SLW added that the Administration would review the scope of the Scheme to consider whether it should be extended to cover other modes of public transport after the Scheme had been up and running smoothly. The Administration would also conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Scheme three years after it had been fully implemented to assess the long-term financial, transport and welfare implications.

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14. To assess the financial implications of relaxing the eligibility criteria of the Scheme to persons with less than 100% disabilities, Mr CHAN Kam-lam asked about the number of persons with disabilities in question. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung raised a similar concern, and requested the Administration to provide a breakdown of number of persons with disabilities by different levels of disabilities. SLW agreed to provide the information after the meeting.

(Post-meeting note: The requested information was provided by the Administration and circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2271/11-12(01) on 5 June 2012.)

15. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung took the view that the target beneficiaries of the Scheme should be extended to children with disabilities aged below 12 and RC holders.

16. SLW said that children aged below 12 were already eligible for the half-fare children concessions offered by public transport operators, and eligible children could also obtain subsidy from the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme ("STSS"). SLW stressed that the Administration would review the scope of the Scheme after it had been up and running smoothly and did not rule out the possibility of extending the Scheme to cover children under 12 years old with 100% disabilities.

17. As for RC holders, SLW pointed out that the purpose of issuing RC to persons with disabilities was to enable the cardholder to produce, when necessary, as a documentary proof of his/her disability status to facilitate the provision of prompt and appropriate assistance to them. RC was not associated with the provision of any welfare benefits. Commissioner for Rehabilitation added that the objective, target service users and eligibility

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threshold of RC were different from those of the DA Scheme. Application for RC was voluntary and there were currently some 60 000 RC holders, as compared with over 400 000 persons with disabilities and more than 1.1 million people suffering from chronic illnesses in Hong Kong as shown from the statistics released by the Census and Statistics Department in 2008. Given that there were a large number of potential applicants for RC and the fare concessions to be offered under the Scheme were non-means-tested, the Administration considered that the beneficiaries of the Scheme should be those persons with more severe disabilities.

18. Mr Ronny TONG expressed concern whether it would be in breach of DDO if the provision of fare concessions was limited to persons with 100% disabilities only. Mr TONG urged the Administration to extend the scope of the Scheme to persons with disabilities who were physically immobile, and in a broader perspective to review the definition of "disability".

19. SLW responded that while the Scheme could rely on the exception provision in section 50 of DDO as a defence for unlawful disability discrimination under DDO, to minimize the risk of legal challenge under DDO against the Scheme, the Administration would make legislative amendments to Schedule 5 to DDO to put it beyond doubt that the provision of the proposed public transport fare concessions would not constitute a contravention of DDO. SLW stressed that the Administration had noted members' concern about the definition of the term "disability" under the DA Scheme and would take this into account in the review of both the Scheme and the DA Scheme.

20. Mr Frederick FUNG considered that the eligibility criterion of 100% disabilities for the purpose of the Scheme was too stringent. In his view, the beneficiaries of the Scheme should cover persons with disabilities who were incapable of earning a living. SLW reiterated that after the Scheme had been up and running smoothly, the Administration would review the scope of the Scheme.

21. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung remained of the view that the Scheme should be extended to cover children with disabilities aged below 12. Mr LEUNG moved the following motion which was seconded by Mr Frederick FUNG -

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"本事務委員會要求政府立即擴展公共交通票價優惠計劃至12歲以下的殘疾小童。"

(Translation)

"That this Panel requests the Government to immediately extend the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme to disabled children aged below 12."

22. Mr CHAN Kam-lam pointed out that a concessionary fare of \$2 per trip under the Scheme might indeed be higher than the existing half-fare concessions being offered to children aged below 12. If so, he did not see the need to extend the Scheme to cover children with disabilities aged below 12. In the absence of the relevant statistics, he was unable to support the proposed motion for the moment.

23. The Chairman put the motion to vote. Five members voted for the motion, one member abstained and no member voted against it. The Chairman declared that the motion was carried.

Review of the Scheme

24. Noting that the Administration would conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the Scheme three years after its full implementation, Mr CHAN Kam-lam said that the timing should be advanced to one year after the launch of the Scheme with a view to examining whether the Scheme should be extended to cover persons with less than 100% disabilities and elders aged 60 to 64. Mr Ronny TONG, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung and Mr Frederick FUNG raised similar requests.

25. SLW advised that the comprehensive evaluation to be conducted in 2016 would seek to assess the long-term financial, transport and welfare implications of the Scheme. As explained earlier, the Administration would review the scope of the Scheme, including whether it should be extended to cover other modes of public transport, after it had been up and running smoothly.

Implementation timetable of the Scheme

26. Noting that MTRCL would be ready to implement the Scheme in end-June 2012, Mr CHAN Kam-lam asked why franchised bus companies

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could only roll out the Scheme around mid-September 2012 while the New Lantao Bus Company (1973) Limited ("NLB") and franchised ferry operators would only be ready in the first quarter of 2013.

27. Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)¹ explained that beneficiaries under the Scheme would have to make use of the Octopus system to enjoy the concessionary fare. Since MTRCL had been offering concessionary fares to both the elderly and persons with disabilities by making use of the Octopus system, the technical enhancement required for implementing the Scheme was less complex. As for franchised buses, the operators would need sufficient time to enhance and modify the fare collection systems so as to recognize the Personalized Octopus Card with "Persons with Disabilities Status". Since 5 800 franchised buses were involved and that installation and testing works could only be conducted at buses when they were not in service so as not to affect their daily operation, the process would take time. Given the technical constraints of the present fare collection systems of NLB and the ferry operators, they would have to enhance the existing systems to cater for implementation of the Scheme. In addition, NLB and the ferry operators would need to rely on a new centralized settlement platform to be developed in order to calculate their fare revenue forgone and apply for reimbursement from the Government.

28. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung urged the early implementation of the Scheme to enable the elderly and persons with disabilities to enjoy the concessionary fares as soon as possible. Specifically, the Administration should advance the implementation timeline given that ferry services were the only mode of public transport for those living on outlying islands.

29. SLW pointed out that making use of the Octopus system and the new centralized settlement platform would provide an efficient means for the Government to process and verify public transport operators' reimbursement applications. Given that certain ferry services had not yet been installed with the Octopus system, these operators concerned would only be ready to implement the Scheme after installation of the necessary software and hardware. The Administration would continue to liaise with public transport operators concerned with a view to expediting the implementation of the Scheme.

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Participating public transport operators

30. Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered that the Scheme should be extended to cover the tram services in the light of the high patronage of elderly commuters. He estimated that the additional financial implications of the extension of the coverage would be around \$1 million each month only. Mr WONG strongly urged the Administration to actively consider extending the coverage of the Scheme to tram services. Ms LI Fung-ying shared a similar view and called on the Administration to extend the Scheme to cover other transport modes as early as practicable.

31. SLW appreciated that the Hong Kong Tramways Limited had assumed its corporate social responsibility and had been offering elderly concessionary fare voluntarily. SLW said that since the elderly tram fare for a single journey was lower than the proposed concessionary fare of \$2, the Scheme did not apply to trams in this regard. SLW further said that the Administration's priority was to implement the Scheme on the three major modes of public transport, i.e. MTR, franchised buses and ferries, which accounted for about 72% of the daily public transport patronage in 2011. He reiterated that the Administration would review whether to cover other modes of public transport in the Scheme after it had been up and running smoothly.

Elderly-friendly fare policies

32. Pointing out that some public transport operators were currently offering fare concessions to the elderly aged 60 or above and eligible person with disabilities, Ms LI Fung-ying sought clarification on whether such concessions would continue after the launch of the Scheme. The Chairman asked whether the existing fare concessions offered by public transport operators on specified days would continue. Mr WONG Sing-chi asked about the arrangement under the Scheme for those journeys currently offering concessionary fares at or below \$2.

33. SLW advised that public transport operators would continue to absorb the cost of existing concessions that they had been voluntarily offering to the elderly and eligible persons with disabilities. Deputy Commissioner/Transport Services & Management added that the public transport operators concerned had undertaken that the existing fare concessions to elders, including half-fare concessions to elders aged 65 and above and special fare concessions to elders aged 60 to 64 (offered by

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Citybus Limited (Franchise for Hong Kong Island and Cross Harbour Routes) only), would continue. While journeys which offered concessionary fares at or below \$2 would not be covered under the Scheme, the public transport operators concerned would continue to provide and absorb the cost of such existing concessions. In addition, the revenue forgone in relation to the elderly fare concessions on Wednesdays, Saturdays and public holidays (which were not Sunday) currently offered by MTRCL would continue to be absorbed by MTRCL, and the Government would reimburse the revenue forgone, i.e. the fare differential between the nominal fare and \$2, on the other days after the implementation of the Scheme.

34. In anticipation of additional patronage after the implementation of the Scheme, Mr WONG Sing-chi appealed to public transport operators to provide more elderly-friendly facilities and step up publicity campaigns to promote a caring and inclusive society. SLW responded that the Administration had been encouraging public transport operators to be elderly-friendly by providing appropriate facilities in stations and on trains/buses to address the needs of the elderly.

35. In summing up the discussion, the Chairman said that the Panel generally supported the Administration in seeking funding from the FC. Nevertheless, the Administration should take note of members' view on extending the Scheme to cover other public transport modes and persons with less than 100% disabilities. To facilitate members' future consideration on extending the Scheme to children with disabilities aged below 12, the Chairman requested the Administration to provide information on the number of children with disabilities aged below 12, together with the percentage of those attending schools.

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(Post-meeting note: The requested information was provided by the Administration and circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2271/11-12(01) on 5 June 2012.)

36. The Chairman added that the Panel would hold a special meeting on 25 May 2012 to gauge the views of deputations on the Scheme.

(Post-meeting note: The special meeting was re-scheduled to 29 May 2012.)

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V. Workload and challenges faced by Social Security Assistants
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1912/11-12(04) to (07)]

37. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration) ("DDSW(A)") advised that the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") fully recognized the concerns raised by the Social Security Assistant ("SSA") grade staff about the manpower situation and workload of the grade. The Administration was mindful of the work pressure of the SSA grade staff arising from performing the dual role of service provider and gatekeeper. To alleviate the work pressure of the SSA grade staff, a number of improvement measures had been introduced, such as strengthening the Computerised Social Security System ("CSSS") and re-engineering the workflow of the Social Security Field Units ("SSFUs") under SWD. SWD would continue to review the workload of frontline staff of SSFUs, examine the need for additional posts and deploy manpower resources as appropriate, as well as organise training courses and support programmes to meet staff's needs.

38. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Sam LEUNG of the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social Work Officer Grade Branch said that the Social Work Officer ("SWO") grade staff shared the concerns of SSA grade staff. Pointing out that SSA grade was responsible for conducting investigation into and assessment of various types of social security cases serving over 1 100 000 recipients, the service manpower situation of SSA grade should be addressed without delay. Mr LEUNG added that while SWO grade staff in Integrated Family Service Centres would, in the light of the welfare needs of the service users, make referrals and recommendations on applications for CSSA and Social Security Allowance ("SS Allowance"), SSAs in SSFUs would assess the applicants' eligibility for assistance in accordance with the Social Security Manual of Procedures, which contained internal guidelines for social security staff inaccessible by the SWO grade staff. This had resulted in frustrations of SWO grade staff if the referrals were eventually rejected.

39. Ms SHING Che-wun of Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social Security Assistants' Branch ("SSA Branch") advised that in 2011, the SSA grade was responsible for handling and processing CSSA and SS Allowance applications and cases involving over 1.1 million recipients. It was not appropriate for SWD to make manpower projection for the grade simply based on the number of cases without taking into account the complexity of the cases concerned. Ms SHING appealed to SWD to consider creating a new supervisory rank for the SSA grade to

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strengthen the management and supervision of the grade.

40. Mr CHAN Chun-wah of SSA Branch added that while the implementation of CSSS was useful for planning purpose, it could not replace the manual procedures for processing applications for CSSA and SS Allowance or assessing the welfare needs of the applicants, and thereby fully alleviating the work pressure of SSA grade staff. To better understand the workload of SSA grade staff, SWD might consider conducting a log study on the workload of the grade in order to establish a set of objective indicators, similar to the exercise held in 1995.

41. DDSW(A) said that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to set a manning ratio on the number of cases handled by each SSA grade staff owing to the different natures and levels of complexity of various types of social security cases, and SWD's obligation to timely handle all the CSSA and SSA applications received. As a matter of fact, SWD had introduced various measures to help relieve the workload of SSAs, such as re-engineering the workflow of SSFUs and expediting the recruitment process for filling vacancies. DDSW(A) further said that the creation of a new supervisory rank would need to be fully justified from the level of responsibility and complexity of the work handled by the grade, genuine and persistent difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff of the grade etc., instead of merely from the angle of workload and staff manpower. While it might not be an opportune time for considering the creation of a new supervisory rank, the Administration would keep in view the issue.

42. Mr WONG Sing-chi expressed concern about the negative attitude of some SSA grade staff in handling and processing CSSA and SS Allowance applications and cases.

43. DDSW(A) said that SWD attached great importance to the work attitude of frontline staff in SSFUs. Acknowledging the difficulties of SSAs in playing a dual role of service provider and gatekeeper, SWD had organized training courses on customer services regularly so as to enhance staff's knowledge and skills at work as well as strengthen their skills in handling stress at work. DDSW(A) further said that should there be complaints against the attitude of SWD staff, SWD would conduct investigation and bring to the attention of all staff concerned on areas for improvement.

44. Mr CHAN Chun-wah of the SSA Branch drew members' attention to

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the overstretched manpower situation of the SSA grade. He said that in 1994, there were some 610 SSA grade staff serving about 150 000 recipients of CSSA, whereas the corresponding figures in 2011 were some 900 staff members serving more than 400 000 recipients. The SSA grade was overwhelmed by the increasing workload and higher public expectation.

45. Referring to the findings of the survey conducted by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University on the working conditions and work pressure of the SSA grade in SWD, Dr PAN Pey-chyou noted with concern that the increase in number of CSSA recipients had outweighed the increase of manpower in the SSA grade by almost two folds since 1995. Dr PAN urged SWD to enhance communications with the staff concerned so as to implement appropriate measures to relieve the workload of SSAs as well as organise training courses and support programmes for staff.

46. DDSW(A) said that SWD had since 2000 implemented the new CSSS to simplify work process, enhance service quality and alleviate the work pressure on the SSA grade staff. Hence, the manpower requirements of SSFUs in the time period as cited in the survey findings were no longer applicable to the present day situation. DDSW(A) assured members that SWD had an established mechanism to review the deployment of frontline staff of SSFUs and would seek additional resources for additional posts as appropriate.

[To allow sufficient time for discussion, the Chairman directed the meeting be extended for 15 minutes.]

47. Ms LI Fung-ying said that in the absence of objective criteria for measuring the workload of SSAs and their stress at work, she cast doubt about the effectiveness of the improvement measures to relieve the workload of SSAs. Ms LI also called on the Administration to consider enhancing the communications and cooperation between SSA and SWO grades in making referrals of applications and cases of CSSA and SS Allowance such that the processing and vetting procedures for such cases could be simplified.

48. DDSW(A) said that there was clear delineation of responsibility between social work and social security staff in SWD. Owing to the nature and complexity of social security cases, it was considered necessary for the social security staff to conduct independent investigation and

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assessment of these cases, even though they were referred and recommended by case social workers, in order to ensure the consistency in approving applications and safeguard the prudent use of public money.

49. The Chairman expressed concern about the heavy workload of the SSA grade staff. He noted with concern that the average caseload of SSA grade staff in SSFUs in 1995 and 2011 was 300 and 350 respectively. Apart from a nominal increase in the number of caseload, the complexity of the cases and public expectation had increased significantly over the past years. To relieve the workload of the SSA grade, the Chairman made the following suggestions. First, the Administration should allocate more resources to increase the SSA grade establishment and deploy experienced staff to handle complicated cases. Second, to streamline the workflow, SWD should consider creating social worker posts in SSFUs such that the welfare needs of applicants for CSSA and SS Allowance could be followed up by social workers in the same service unit. The Chairman further said that the manpower situation of the SSA grade was further overstretched as a result of the high vacancy rates. To reduce staff wastage, consideration should be given to improving the promotion prospects of the SSA grade staff. In his view, SWD should consider accepting applications for transfer to the Social Security Officers ("SSOs") from SSA grade.

50. On the last point, DDSW(A) clarified that SSO and SSA were two different grades. Currently, SSAs meeting some prescribed requirements could apply for the post of SSOII through in-service appointment exercise, and a number of SSAs had been appointed to SSOII recently through such a mechanism.

VI. Report of the Subcommittee on Retirement Protection
[LC Paper No. CB(2)1942/11-12]

51. The Chairman said that the Subcommittee on Retirement Protection had completed its work and submitted its report to the Panel. Members endorsed the recommendations of the Subcommittee in its report. The Chairman advised that the Panel would seek the approval of the House Committee on 18 May 2012 for the priority allocation of a debate slot to the Chairman of the Subcommittee under Rule 14A(h) of the House Rules for moving a motion to take note of the Subcommittee report at the Council meeting of 6 June 2012.

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VII. Any other business

52. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:00 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
16 August 2012