

**For discussion on
14 November 2011**

**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Additional Funding for Short-term Food Assistance Service**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on our proposal to seek additional funding for the continuation and enhancement of the short-term food assistance service (the service).

Background

2. On 5 December 2008, the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved the Administration's proposal to allocate \$100 million for the service. Since February 2009, five non-governmental organisations commissioned by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) have been operating service projects to help people who have temporary difficulty coping with basic food expenditure.

3. As the service is meant to help people tide over urgent and short-term needs, users normally receive dry rations (such as canned food) for up to six weeks. That said, the service operators may extend the assistance period and provide fresh and frozen food, hot meals, hot meal coupons, baby food, baby formula, etc., to meet the special needs of individual users. People with longer term difficulties are referred to other services or assistance schemes as appropriate.

Progress of the service

4. The service has been running smoothly so far. The five operators and their local partners have set up 413 service points all over the territory, of which 116 are also venues for food distribution. By the end of September 2011, they had served over 63 000 persons in total.

Need for continuation and enhancement of the service

5. SWD has been monitoring the service closely. While service demand has been fluctuating over the past two years, it is rising steadily in the recent months, from around 1 870 users per month before February 2011 to around 2 550 thereafter.

6. Meanwhile, there have been calls for service enhancement to better meet the need of the users. For instance, it is considered desirable that fresh and nutritious food be provided to service users (in particular children) on a more regular basis.

7. As some service operators have practical difficulties in storing and distributing fresh food, they may have to give service users food or hot meal coupons which can be redeemed at designated food stalls, supermarkets and restaurants instead.

8. To benefit the service users as soon as possible, SWD has implemented the service enhancement measures as set out in paragraphs 6 and 7 above since late October 2011. Given the increasing demand of the service and taking into account implementation of the enhanced measures, SWD estimates that the remaining balance (\$36.5 million as at September 2011) may only last until the beginning of 2012. Additional resources are therefore needed to continue with the enhanced service.

9. In his 2011-12 Budget, the Financial Secretary reserved an additional \$100 million for the service. This can finance the enhanced service up to the end of 2013.

Way forward

10. Subject to Members' views, we will seek the Finance Committee's approval for allocating an additional \$100 million to continue with the enhanced service at its meeting of 16 December 2011.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
November 2011