

**Minutes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting**

**26 November 2019 (Tuesday) at 10 a.m.
Conference Room on 15/F, North Point Government Offices,
333 Java Road, Hong Kong**

Present

Mr Lester Garson HUANG (Chairman)
Ms Sylvia CHAN May-kuen
Dr Gary CHENG Faat-ting
Mr CHUGH, Manohar Thakurdas
Mr Andy HO Wing-cheong
Mr IP Wai-ming
Mr Anthony KWAN Wai-ming
Dr Annissa LUI Wai-ling
Dr Gary NG Ka-wing
Professor Steven NGAI Sek-yum
Ms Cindy PUN Siu-fung
Mr Anthony WONG Kin-wai
Dr Loretta YAM Yin-chun
Ms Amarantha YIP Yun-wan

In Attendance

Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)

Ms CHANG King-yiu	Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Mr David LEUNG	Deputy Secretary for Labour & Welfare (Welfare) 1
Mr Johann WONG (For discussion items 1 and 3 only)	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2
Ms Manda CHAN (For discussion items 2 and 3 only)	Commissioner for Rehabilitation

Mr Andrew TSANG Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1

Mr Gordon CHONG Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 4
(For discussion item 1 only)

Ms Yen PUN Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Rehabilitation) Special Duty 1
(For discussion items 2 and 3 only)

Ms Rebecca CHEUNG Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)1C
(Secretary to SWAC)

Mr Adams WONG Executive Officer (Welfare) 1A

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Mr Gordon LEUNG Director of Social Welfare

Ms Michelle LAM Assistant Director (Social Security)
(For discussion item 1 only)

Mr KOK Che-leung Assistant Director (Rehabilitation & Medical Social Services)
(For discussion item 2 only)

Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency

Mr Donald NG Head, Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency
(For discussion item 1 only)

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University Consulting Team

Professor Hector TSANG Principal Investigator
(For discussion item 2 only)

Absent with apologies

Dr BAI Xue

Miss CHEUNG Sze-wing

Dr LAM James Joseph

Mr Armstrong LEE Hon-Cheung

Ms Anthea LO Wing-sze

Mr Daryl NG Win-kong

Dr Janice TSANG Wing-hang

Ms Eva WONG Ching-hung

Discussion Item 1: Review of ‘Pro-employment’ Measures and Other Improvement Measures under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

Members were invited to give comments on the paper on the Review of ‘Pro-employment’ Measures and Other Improvement Measures under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme. The Chairman and Members raised the following comments/questions –

- (a) There was a concern that the transportation and medical expenses of the CSSA recipients would increase significantly when they re-entered the job market and left the CSSA net subsequently. Consideration might be given to the provision of more subsidies/incentive to the CSSA recipients for encouraging them to secure employment/full-time jobs.
- (b) The Government might consider further reviewing the level of maximum disregarded earnings, as well as the amount for Temporary Financial Aid, so as to further encourage CSSA recipients to join the employment market.
- (c) Other than the provision of on-the-job training (OJT) allowance, more measures/programmes might be implemented to further encouraging employers to engage the elderly and middle-aged.
- (d) Consideration might be given to formulate policies in supporting and protecting part-time employees, as well as to implement more measures other than those on cash assistance with a view to better alleviating inter-generational poverty.

- (e) Consideration might be given to streamline the application procedures for the Working Family Allowance (WFA) Scheme.
- (f) There was an inquiry on whether a Report on the review of measures under the CSSA Scheme to encourage employment and related assistance schemes (the Review) would be available for setting out the Review outcomes and the rationale behind.

2. The Government gave the following response –

- (a) The CSSA Scheme provided a safety net for those who could not support themselves financially. The comprehensive allowance was designed to meet their basic needs. In respect of the Government's policy and initiatives on poverty alleviation, the Chief Secretary for Administration chaired the Commission on Poverty in taking forward proposals and measures on various fronts to strengthen support for different disadvantaged groups.
- (b) Able-bodied CSSA recipients would be referred to the Integrated Employment Assistance Programme for Self-reliance, under which one-stop integrated employment assistance services on family basis would be provided. Besides, the Government had also relaxed the application criteria for Temporary Financial Aid to cover more job seeking-related activities which was capped at \$2,000 per person per year. Furthermore, there was the Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme which helped low-income earners reduce their cost of travelling to and from work and encourages them to secure or stay in employment.
- (c) In respect of medical expenses, CSSA recipients were entitled to medical fee waiver for public healthcare. Besides, other financial assistance schemes for certain self-financed drug items and privately-purchased medical items through the Samaritan Fund would be available as a safety net for the CSSA recipients.
- (d) Under the Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged (EPEM), employers engaging job seekers aged 60 or above who were unemployed or had left the workforce were offered a slightly higher monthly OJT allowance of up to \$4,000 per employee for a period of six to 12 months. EPEM covered both full-time and part-time jobs. Furthermore, the Labour Department (LD) would launch a pilot scheme in 2020 to

encourage mature persons aged 60 or above, young people and persons with disabilities to undergo and complete OJT under its programmes (including the EPEM) through the provision of a retention allowance of up to 12 months, so as to help stabilise employment.

- (e) As at end-September 2019, there were about 46 000 ‘active households’ under the WFA Scheme, which represented a 67% increase as compared to the number of beneficiaries of the last claim period of the previous Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme in March 2018. This demonstrated that the WFA Scheme was more effective in assisting non-CSSA working household with lower income. The Government would continue to put in more effort in the promotion of the WFA Scheme and consider streamlining the application procedures as appropriate.
- (f) In respect of the Review, the Government undertook in early 2019 to complete a review on the ‘pro-employment’ measures under the CSSA Scheme within the year, with a view to providing stronger work incentives and support for able-bodied recipients. In this regard, the SWD had set up an inter-departmental working group chaired by the Director of Social Welfare, with members from the LWB, the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the LD and the Employees Retraining Board. Views presented by stakeholders in relevant sectors had been taken into account in the Review process. Besides, the Review process and the Review recommendations with justifications had been made public when these were presented to the Welfare Services Panel of the Legislative Council and the SWAC, etc.

Discussion Item 2: Formulation of a New Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan

3. Members were invited to give comments on the paper. The Chairman and Members raised the following comments –

- (a) Views of stakeholders should be taken into account in the formulation of the new Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan (RPP) for better addressing respective needs.
- (b) Consideration might be given to setting up an inter-departmental management arrangement for better long term planning and

prioritisation of services for persons with disabilities.

- (c) Long term planning of manpower provision and training for allied health professionals would be required to meet the projected demand for rehabilitation services. It was suggested that tertiary institutions in Hong Kong should have a role in training the needed professionals and service providers should implement staff retention measures.
- (d) It was suggested that community facilities should be made more accessible to persons with disabilities. Consideration might also be given to providing more accessible transport services for persons with disabilities.
- (e) Consideration might be given to reviewing the positioning and scopes/contents of different pre-school rehabilitation services for children with special needs. More emphasis could be put on the early identification of and intervention for these children. More promotion of the Special Needs Trust should also be conducted.
- (f) Consideration might be given to implementing initiatives to encourage employers to adopt family-friendly measures for parents of children with special needs.
- (g) Consideration might be given to promoting and encouraging the employment of persons with disabilities among employers.
- (h) More planning would be required on the provision of support services to family members and carers of persons with disabilities.
- (i) Consideration might be given to consolidating relevant information provided on different platforms to facilitate stakeholders to obtain required information in a more convenient and accessible manner. More public education should be carried out to promote the concept of “inclusion” as well.

4. The Government and the consulting team gave the following response –

- (a) The Government attached importance to the views and comments made by stakeholders in the public engagement exercise for the

formulation of the new RPP. Specifically, the exercise comprised three stages, namely, Scoping, Formulation of Recommendations and Consensus Building. Taking into account the views received, consideration was being given to extending the consultation period of the current Consensus Building Stage (i.e. the final stage) to provide more time for stakeholders and the public to submit their views and comments on the new RPP. The vision, strategic directions and recommendations of the new RPP had been formulated based on the major views received from stakeholders and the public during the public engagement exercise.

- (b) Concerning the manpower situation of the social welfare sector, the Government had implemented a number of measures to enhance the supply of allied health professionals, nursing staff and front-line care staff for meeting service needs. The high-level Human Resources Planning Commission, chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, had been consolidating resources and efforts of the Government and sectors concerned to examine, review, and co-ordinate policies and measures on human resources in a holistic manner.
- (c) The Government had adopted the approach of “implementation of enhancement measures as and when they are ready” for the strategic recommendations of the new RPP. Under the four proposed strategic directions, the Government would keep track of the implementation of the various recommendations and make appropriate adjustments as necessary, so as to render the new RPP a “living document”.
- (d) For the strategic recommendations related to “accessibility”, the Government had engaged a separate consultant to conduct a research with respect to six selected cities. As a next step, site investigation would be conducted in Hong Kong, with the assistance of persons with disabilities as “assessors” to provide users’ views on enhancing accessibility for persons with disabilities in the context of Hong Kong.
- (e) The new RPP had included a strategic recommendation on information transfer from pre-school rehabilitation service units to primary schools to enable kindergarten children identified as having special needs to receive early attention and appropriate support when they proceeded to Primary One.

- (f) There was a number of strategic recommendations on employment support for persons with disabilities. Specifically, for facilitating the development of social enterprises concerned, the Socially Caring Leasing Arrangements, which accorded priority to eligible NGOs and social enterprises in renting government premises, had been implemented.
- (g) For self-help organisations, the new RPP had included a strategic recommendation on the continuous review of support for these organisations to promote self and mutual support among persons with disabilities and their carers.
- (h) Concerning the manpower for rehabilitation services, the new RPP had included strategic recommendations on increasing manpower supply by exploring measures to facilitate the recruitment of service workers, their retention, and improvement of working conditions, etc.

Discussion Item 3: Welfare-related Initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address (PA) and PA Supplement

5. Members were invited to note the welfare related initiatives in the PA and PA Supplement.

SWAC Secretariat
February 2020