

# SLW's speaking notes on welfare, poverty alleviation and children policy areas tabled at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following are the speaking notes of the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, on welfare, poverty alleviation and children policy areas tabled at the special meeting of the Legislative Council Finance Committee today (April 17):

Chairman and Honourable Members,

In 2023-24, government recurrent spending on social welfare is estimated to be \$121 billion, accounting for 21.6 per cent of the total recurrent government expenditure of the year, first amongst all policy groups. Compared with the revised estimate for 2022-23 of \$106 billion, there is an increase of about \$15 billion (14.1 per cent) in recurrent spending on social welfare. This reflects the Government's commitment to continuously supporting the disadvantaged. Now, let me highlight how the Labour and Welfare Bureau will make use of these resources.

## Elderly services

The recurrent government expenditure on elderly services this year is estimated to reach about \$15 billion, representing an increase of about 74 per cent over about \$8.6 billion compared to five years ago (i.e. 2018-19).

The Government will continue to implement various initiatives to strengthen residential care services, including provision of some additional 2 200 subsidised residential care places for the elderly this year, regularising the Residential Care Service Voucher Scheme for the Elderly and providing additional resources to EA2 homes of the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme to upgrade to meet the EA1 standards. To alleviate the shortage of nurses in the welfare sector, the Government will subsidise an additional 1 700 or more students to enrol in Enrolled Nurse (EN) (General) training in the next five years. Subsidised students are required to work as EN (General) in welfare services organisations recognised by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) after graduation for a continuous period of no less than three years.

With regard to community care and support services, the Government will provide 188 subsidised day care service places for the elderly this year and regularise the Community Care Service Voucher Scheme for the Elderly, which will increase by phases the number of beneficiaries from 8 000 at present to 12 000 in 2025-26. In addition, the Government will set up 16 new Neighbourhood Elderly Centres in the next five years and expand the service scope of a total of over 200 District Elderly Community Centres and Neighbourhood Elderly Centres this year to cover retirement planning and

promotion of gerontechnology. To support more discharged elderly patients to recover at home, the Government will expand the Integrated Discharge Support Programme for Elderly Patients by increasing the number of beneficiaries from about 33 000 to 45 000 per annum and the number of beneficiaries who can be referred to receive home support services from about 9 000 to 11 000.

The Government will enhance the Incentive Scheme to Encourage Provision of Residential Care Home for the Elderly (RCHE) Premises in New Private Developments by raising the gross floor area (GFA) of these private RCHEs that can be benefited and further exempting such GFA from the calculation of the maximum GFA of the relevant projects. We are drawing up the details with the Development Bureau, with a view to launching the enhanced measures in the second quarter of this year, which are to be reviewed after a three-year trial period.

### Cash assistance

The Government continues to support needy individuals and households through various cash assistance schemes and has been taking forward related enhancement measures. We merged the Normal and Higher Old Age Living Allowances with effect from September last year and will relax the absence limit under the pre-application one-year continuous residence requirement of the Social Security Allowance Scheme in the third quarter of this year.

This year's Budget proposed to provide an extra half-month allowance to eligible recipients of social security payments, which will involve an expenditure of about \$2,721 million and is expected to benefit about 1.63 million persons. Similar arrangements will apply to recipients of the Working Family Allowance. It is expected that some 70 000 households would benefit from this initiative, involving an expenditure of about \$116 million. We expect that the extra allowance would be disbursed a month after the passage of the Appropriation Bill 2023 by the Legislative Council (LegCo) at the earliest.

Overall, the estimated recurrent expenditure on cash assistance in this year amounts to about \$75.4 billion, which is about 40 per cent higher than that five years ago.

### Enhance pre-school rehabilitation services

The SWD, with funding support from the Lotteries Fund, launched from August 2020 the Pilot Project on Tier 1 Support Services in pre-primary institutions to provide early intervention services for children awaiting assessment by Child Assessment Centres or assessed to have borderline developmental problems, and provide support for their parents and teachers. Since the Pilot Project enjoyed tremendous success, the Government will regularise the Tier 1 Support Services with effect from September 2023. The coverage of the Tier 1 Support Services will also be expanded from around 80 pre-primary institutions at present to nearly 900 and such services will be integrated with On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services, so as to offer comprehensive and timely assistance to pre-school children with different levels of special needs through inter-disciplinary service teams under a

school-based and integrated approach. This measure will incur an annual expenditure of about \$170 million.

#### Enhance support for carers

Carers devote much time and energy to supporting elderly persons and persons with disabilities so that they can continue to live in the community. In recognition of their contributions, the Government will step up its efforts to cater for carers' various needs. On financial support, the Government will regularise the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of Elderly Persons from Low-income Families and the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities and the amount of monthly allowance will increase from \$2,400 to \$3,000 starting from October 2023, involving an annual expenditure of about \$430 million. The Government will also set up a 24-hour dedicated carer support hotline in the third quarter of 2023, with professional social workers rendering emergency support, emotional counselling and outreaching services.

#### Targeted poverty alleviation

For tackling the poverty problem, the current-term Government adopts the strategy of targeted poverty alleviation by directing resources to those most in need. The Strive and Rise Programme is the first targeted poverty alleviation initiative to help underprivileged junior secondary school students (particularly those living in subdivided units) through tripartite collaboration among the Government, the business sector and the community. The SWD has earmarked \$72.6 million this year to implement and promote the Programme, including establishing an "alumni club" for mentees who have completed the first round of the Programme to sustain and expand the social network between mentees and mentors as well as implementing the second round of the Programme. The Government has also appointed the new-term Commission on Poverty to study and identify any other target groups for poverty alleviation, and provide views and suggestions to the Government, so that targeted poverty alleviation initiatives and policies can be formulated to cater for the needs of different underprivileged groups in order to achieve the effects of alleviating poverty or helping them rise above poverty. We will report the progress to the Subcommittee on Reforming the Poverty Alleviation Policies and Strategies of the LegCo later.

#### Child protection

The Government is taking forward at full steam the setting up of a mandatory reporting mechanism for child abuse cases, with the target of introducing a bill into the LegCo in the first half of this year. The measures in the pipeline to dovetail with the new legislation include enhancing the Government's enforcement and support capacity; providing appropriate training to practitioners in the relevant professions; and strengthening the promotion and public education work on child protection. To this end, an additional full-year provision by the Government is about \$24.2 million.

To better care for children lacking of parental care and those with

emergency care needs, the SWD has completed the review of the residential child care and related services. The SWD has commenced follow-up of the improvement recommendations for the first phase of the review, which covered residential child care centres and residential special child care centres for children aged below 6, with an additional full-year provision of about \$80 million for improving the manning ratio of child care workers, increasing frontline support staff and introducing professional support, increasing the service places of residential child care services and stepping up inspection and enforcement efforts. The SWD has completed the second phase of the review last month, which covered children institutions for other age groups and foster care services, etc, and will proactively follow up the improvement recommendations.

Chairman, this concludes my opening remarks. Members are welcome to raise questions.

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## Opening remarks by SDEV on works policy areas at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following is the opening remarks (English translation) by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, on works policy areas at the special meeting of the Legislative Council Finance Committee today (April 13):

Chairman,

While the epidemic situation has subsided, Hong Kong is now at the crucial stage of advancing from stability to prosperity. Over the period, the Chief Executive has repeatedly stressed the need to vigorously pursue economic growth and improve people's livelihood. As such, we need to take forward various infrastructure projects to improve people's livelihood and spur economic development, thereby enhancing Hong Kong's long-term competitiveness. The above are also a major direction of works policy areas under the Development Bureau (DEVB).

Infrastructure development

We are actively implementing capital works projects. With appropriate planning, the projects will all be implemented in a timely and orderly manner. The Government's annual expenditure on capital works will gradually increase from about \$80 billion at present to exceed an estimated amount of \$100 billion in the next few years. Taking together other projects to be implemented in both public and private sectors, the annual total construction volume of Hong Kong will reach the level of \$300 billion. As land and housing supply has always been the top priority of the work of the Government, the

Northern Metropolis and the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands will be the foothold for Hong Kong's strategic development as well as the new engine for Hong Kong to scale new heights. Overall speaking, we believe the whole construction industry is entering a golden age full of opportunities.

However, the huge construction volume will put the industry's capacity to its great test. We are also facing the challenges of an ageing workforce, declining productivity, high construction costs and site safety issues. Therefore, to address these challenges, we will lead the construction industry to reform through innovation, professionalisation and revitalisation. Strengthening public works project governance and cost management is also the goal of our work. We will also actively enhance the training of construction personnel and adopt innovative technology to enhance project governance, improve works quality and site safety performance.

#### Manpower resources of the construction industry

Regarding manpower resources of the construction industry, we will address the future manpower demand by intensifying our efforts to implement various measures such as strengthening training and promoting technology application in the future. In the Budget Speech of this year, as you would notice, we proposed allocating a total of \$107 million for launching two pilot schemes. We are collaborating with the Vocational Training Council, Construction Industry Council (CIC) and other institutions for implementing these two schemes, with a view to providing on-the-job training allowance for new entrants to the construction industry. One of the schemes will subsidise in-service personnel to enrol in part-time construction-related degree programmes so as to enhance their academic qualifications; and the other one will subsidise personnel in construction safety-related work to take safety officer courses. The two schemes are expected to benefit about 1 000 and 300 trainees respectively.

In addition, we are making reference to the Construction Manpower Forecast released by the CIC in February this year to assess how to address manpower needs of the construction sector through a multi-pronged strategy. We have publicly stated that our target is to complete the assessment and present a holistic strategy for addressing manpower needs of the sector by mid-2023. Relevant work is in progress according to the target timeframe. We will communicate with the industry and make an announcement in due course.

#### Application of innovative technologies

Regarding the application of innovative technologies, we hope to apply this method as much as possible to enhance productivity, reduce manpower demand and improve safety. Specifically, we have mentioned in the Budget the following three initiatives:

(1) earmarking \$30 million to conduct a study on establishing the Building Testing and Research Institute. This initiative is crucial because apart from research and development (R&D) activities for innovative materials, construction methods and technologies, the centre will also devise standards, conduct testing and provide accreditation to spearhead innovation in the

construction industry. It is also hoped to set a high standard in the world and to align our country's construction standards with international standards;

(2) earmarking \$30 million for conducting a study on the construction of the first advanced construction industry building at a site of about three hectares in Tsing Yi. The funding will be used to carry out planning and preliminary design work as well as advising on its mode of operation. We hope it can serve as a model for future construction industry production to be housed and operated in these advanced construction industry buildings. We hope the conceptual idea for the facility in Tsing Yi will allow operators to set up steel reinforcement bar prefabrication yards, processing sites for Multi-trade Integrated Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing (MiMEP), and other advanced manufacturing yards; and

(3) earmarking \$15 million for studying the supply chain of the Modular Integrated Construction (MiC) and putting in place measures to strengthen the supply chain of MiC modules, such as the manufacturing, transportation, storage and accreditation of modules. We will also explore the provision of manufacturing and storage sites in the Northern Metropolis.

Speaking of innovation and technology, I must also mention site safety. We have required the adoption of Smart Site Safety System (SSSS) in capital works contracts with contract sum exceeding \$30 million. For private works, we have recently announced an increase in the subsidy under the Construction Innovation and Technology Fund to promote the installation of SSSS in private works sites.

Other work and conclusion

Apart from the above, the scope of work of DEVB's Works Branch is very extensive, including tree management and heritage conservation that were raised by Members. In the coming year, various works departments have their own priority tasks, which will be outlined in the respective Controlling Officer's Reports.

Chairman, I will not elaborate further. My team and I shall be happy to respond to further questions from Members.

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**13th CPPCC Vice Chairman and Director  
of Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office  
of State Council Mr Xia Baolong**

## arrives Hong Kong for inspection visit

The Vice Chairman of the 13th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and Director of the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council, Mr Xia Baolong, arrived in Hong Kong today (April 13) for his six-day inspection visit.

After arrival, Mr Xia met with the Chief Executive, Mr John Lee.

In the afternoon, Mr Xia met with the Non-official Members of the Executive Council and listened to their views.

Subsequently, Mr Xia met with senior officials of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region led by Mr Lee. Mr Xia was briefed on the work of the Government, and in-depth exchanges were made. Attending the session included the Secretaries of Departments, Deputy Secretaries of Departments, as well as all the Secretaries and Permanent Secretaries of Bureaux.

Mr Xia will continue his inspection visit tomorrow.

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## Opening remarks by SDEV on planning and lands policy areas at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following are the opening remarks (English translation) by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, on planning and lands policy areas at the special meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Finance Committee today (April 13):

Chairman,

In 2023-24, the priority tasks on the Planning and Lands portfolio under the purview of the Development Bureau will follow the principle of enhancing quantity, speed, efficiency and quality.

Enhancing speed and efficiency in increasing land supply

According to the supply forecast of developable land promulgated in October last year, the supply of spade-ready sites will reach 3 280 hectares in the next 10 years. Nearly half of the supply comes from two strategic development projects. This includes 1 300 ha contributed by the "spade-ready

sites" at the Northern Metropolis and 300 ha contributed by the reclaimed land at the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands to be ready during this 10-year forecast period.

In addition to providing more than 500 000 new housing units, the Northern Metropolis is also the new engine for the development of Innovation and technology (I&T) and other industries. The Government is pressing ahead with the relevant studies, planning and development, and a number of New Development Area projects are under construction stage. We will soon commence consultation on the planning progress of the San Tin Technopole, the flagship I&T project in the region. Moreover, we will continue to provide support to the Steering Committee on the Northern Metropolis and the Advisory Committee on the Northern Metropolis chaired by the Chief Executive and the Financial Secretary respectively. We are making preparations for the establishment of the Northern Metropolis Co-ordination Office to strengthen the governance system for the Northern Metropolis.

To tie in with the development of the Northern Metropolis, we will roll out progressively for tender three industrial sites near Yuen Long Industrial Estate and two industrial sites in Hung Shui Kiu from this year to develop multi-storey buildings for modern industries. It is expected that around 720 000 square metres of floor space will be provided. The developers will be required to set aside 30 per cent of the floor space of these buildings to be taken up by the Government, so as to accommodate the brownfield operators displaced by clearance exercises. We hope to take forward these pilot projects and will conduct a market sounding exercise later this month before we begin inviting tender for individual sites.

Regarding the Kau Yi Chau Artificial Islands project, I appeal to the understanding of the Members as I will go through this project when talking about the Works portfolio in the next meeting session.

As regards the development of Tseung Kwan O (TKO) Area 137 and TKO Area 132, we are considering the views collected when consulting the district earlier on and, in particular, the concerns from the community about the proposed six public facilities in TKO Area 132. We noted such concerns and will commence the environmental impact and other technical assessments, during which we will examine whether the reclamation area off the area could be minimised through slope-cutting and some of these facilities could be relocated into carven.

Separately, with the support from the Panel on Development earlier on, we aim to seek funding approval from the LegCo within this year to kick-start the planning and engineering study for Lung Kwu Tan reclamation and Tuen Mun West area. It is hoped that the reclamation works could commence in 2027 or even earlier.

Apart from forging ahead with the provision of "spade-ready sites" for the construction of public housing, we will secure land for the production of no less than 72 000 private housing units in the coming five years, which is of a scale nearly double that of the previous five-year period. The land will

be made available to the market through the Land Sale Programme and railway property developments. This projection has yet to take into account the supply from the Urban Renewal Authority and private developments. We are confident that private housing land supply will remain steady and stable.

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#### Streamlining procedures

On streamlining procedures, we are working closely with the LegCo Bills Committee on the scrutiny of the bill (Development (Town Planning, Lands and Works) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill 2022), with a view to seeking for its passage within this year as early as possible. Moreover, we are currently reviewing several development-related administrative procedures. After tapping the industry's views earlier on, we will promulgate the streamlining measures for aspects including the procedures concerning the felling and compensatory planting of trees as well as processing of general building plan submissions progressively starting from mid-2023 as committed, so as to remove barriers for the industry. The establishment of Dedicated Processing Units by the Buildings Department in March this year to expedite the approval process of general building plans submissions for high-yield private residential projects with 500 units or above is one of such measures.

Furthermore, we will formulate implementation plan for extending the standard rates approach for charging land premium to agricultural land in the New Territories and regularising the standard rates arrangement for redevelopment of old industrial buildings. We will introduce a bill into the LegCo in the latter half of this year to streamline the arrangement for extension of land leases.

#### Building a liveable city

As for the harbourfront development, we will continue to develop a continuous and connected harbourfront and high-quality public open spaces along both sides of Victoria Harbour. In the next few years, harbourfront promenades will mainly be developed in Kowloon, in particular in Kai Tak and Cha Kwo Ling areas. Works for the Round-the-Island Trail around Hong Kong Island will commence progressively from this year onward, with the target of connecting 90 per cent of the Trail within five years. In addition, we are going to gather public views on how to amend the Protection of the Harbour Ordinance in order to enhance harbour facilities, etc, and plan to introduce the amendment bill into the LegCo in the first half of next year.

Lastly, we had earlier put forward some proposals for updating and streamlining the compulsory sale regime, as well as enhancing the protection for minority owners. The public consultation exercise is in progress. We plan to submit an amendment bill in the latter half of this year. To align the land registration system in Hong Kong with those adopted in other advanced cities, we will also introduce into the LegCo early next year an amendment bill for the implementation of title registration system on new land first.

The above is a brief report. I appeal to the continuous support from the Members of the Council, as the DEVB will introduce several bills into the

LegCo in the future and take forward a number of land creation projects.

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## [CHP investigates suspected food poisoning case related to calcium oxalate raphide](#)

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (April 13) investigating a case of suspected food poisoning and reminded the public not to pick or consume wild plants and to beware of vegetables containing calcium oxalate raphide to avoid food poisoning due to accidental consumption of giant alocasia.

The female patient, aged 59, developed burning sensation of mouth, lip pain and swelling, as well as throat discomfort shortly after consuming a wild taro at home in Tai Po today. She attended the Accident and Emergency Department of Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital on the same day and was later admitted for further treatment. She is now in a stable condition. The clinical diagnosis was suspected calcium oxalate raphide poisoning.

Initial investigations revealed that the wild taro the patient had consumed was picked near her residence today. The CHP's investigation is ongoing.

Taro is a popular ingredient used to prepare various dishes and desserts. However, some plants look like taro (e.g. giant alocasia) but contain toxins which can cause food poisoning. Consuming plants containing calcium oxalate raphide (a needle-shaped crystal of the chemical) can injure the skin and mucous membranes and cause irritation, such as numbness and burning sensation of the tongue, mouth and lips, and swelling of the tongue and lips. Consumption of vegetables accidentally mixed with calcium oxalate raphide-containing plants may also cause food poisoning.

Members of the public should take heed of the following when consuming vegetables:

- Do not pick or consume wild plants;
- Purchase vegetables from reliable suppliers; and
- Remove any plants mixed with edible vegetables and wash them thoroughly before cooking and consumption.

â€‹The public may visit the pages on [Food Poisoning Related to the Giant Alocasia](#) and [Calcium Oxalate Food Poisoning](#) of the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for more information and health advice.