

Third-term Commission on Poverty convenes sixth meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the sixth meeting of the third-term Commission on Poverty (CoP) this afternoon (July 16).

The CoP endorsed the launch of three proposed new assistance programmes and the proposed extension of two existing assistance programmes of the Community Care Fund (CCF).

New assistance programmes

(1) The CoP agreed to launch the Pilot Scheme on Subsidy for Conversion of School Premises for Transitional Housing – Lok Sin Tong Primary School to facilitate the Lok Sin Tong Benevolent Society Kowloon to convert the premises of its primary school in Kowloon City to provide transitional social housing for no less than three years. The pilot scheme, with an overall provision of \$13.04 million, is expected to provide about 50 units and benefit around 180 people;

(2) The CoP agreed to launch the Subsidy to Purchase and Construct Modular Housing to enable the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) to implement its Modular Social Housing Pilot Scheme – Yen Chow Street Project. Under the pilot scheme, the HKCSS will purchase and build modular housing in order to provide transitional social housing. The pilot scheme, with an overall provision of \$99.92 million, is expected to provide about 205 units and benefit around 420 people; and

(3) The CoP agreed to launch the Digital Terrestrial Television Assistance Programme. HKCSS will be engaged as the overall implementation agent to help analogue television (TV) households with financial difficulties obtain digital TV receivers so that they can continue to access local free TV programmes after the switching off of analogue TV broadcasts on November 30, 2020. The assistance programme, with an overall provision of \$456.45 million, is expected to benefit around 160 000 eligible households.

In addition, the CoP agreed in principle to launch the Assistance Programme to Improve the Living Environment of Low-income Subdivided Unit Households and the overall provision of \$287.04 million of the programme. The programme seeks to provide a one-off subsidy for low-income households living in subdivided units (SDU) to improve their living environment through carrying out minor improvement/repair works, purchasing furniture and household goods as well as pest control services. HKCSS will be the overall implementation agent and will partner with various non-governmental organisations to procure the needed goods and services for eligible households. Having regards to members' comments, the Social Welfare Department will review and revise the details of the programme, including the maximum level of allowance eligible for households of different sizes

benefitting from the programme. The revised details will be circulated to members after the meeting.

Extension of existing assistance programmes

In addition, the CoP endorsed the extension of the Pilot Scheme on Raising the Maximum Level of Disregarded Earnings for Recipients with Disabilities under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme for 12 months till end-September 2020 to continue to raise the maximum level of disregarded earnings for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients with disabilities to encourage them to secure employment. Under the pilot scheme, the total disregarded earnings of a disabled CSSA recipient from employment is at a maximum of \$4,000 per month (i.e. the additional disregarded earnings is up to a maximum of \$1,500 per month). The CoP also endorsed an additional funding provision of \$6.81 million, making the revised total provision \$54.06 million; and

The CoP also endorsed the extension of the Pilot Scheme on Providing Subsidy for Higher Disability Allowance Recipients in Paid Employment to Hire Carers for 12 months till end-September 2020. The extension will continue to provide a monthly subsidy of \$5,000 for existing eligible beneficiaries to hire carers to assist them in travelling between their home and workplace (not applicable to persons working from home), thereby encouraging them to sustain employment. No additional funding provision is required for the extension of the pilot scheme.

At the meeting, members also noted the implementation progress of various assistance programmes and the financial position of the CCF. The CoP endorsed the increase of audit fees of \$80,000 under the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme due to its extension. Members also noted the evaluation report on the completed Incentive Scheme to Further Encourage CSSA Recipients of the Integrated Employment Assistance Programme for Self-reliance to Secure Employment, conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong and commissioned by the Social Welfare Department.

To further encourage able-bodied CSSA recipients aged between 60 and 64 to continue entering the labour market, the Government has pledged to review measures to encourage employment under the CSSA Scheme in 2019. The Labour and Welfare Bureau briefed members on the guiding principles and considerations of conducting the review, along with the Government's enhancement measures on CSSA and other cash assistance schemes in recent years. Members expressed views on the direction of the review exercise and made suggestions concerning the review.

Members were also briefed on the sustainability assessment system of the HKSAR Government.