

CE chairs sixth meeting of fourth-term Commission on Poverty (with photo)

The Chief Executive (CE), Mrs Carrie Lam, chaired the sixth meeting of the fourth-term Commission on Poverty (CoP) this afternoon (May 18). As the last CoP meeting within this term of Government, the meeting was briefed on the achievements of this term of Government in poverty alleviation and supporting the underprivileged.

Since assuming office, the current term of Government has all along adhered to the governance belief of building a compassionate and inclusive society through caring for children, supporting families, caring for patients, alleviating poverty and caring for the elderly. Many targeted measures were formulated and implemented in this regard, backed up by the needed resources. For example, the recurrent expenditure in social welfare (covering social security schemes and various welfare services) in 2022-23 has increased by 71 per cent over the past five years, from \$65.3 billion in 2017-18 to \$111.8 billion in 2022-23. The magnitude of the increase is the greatest among different terms of Government.

Since 2020, Hong Kong has been facing unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 epidemic. On top of recurrent cash measures, the Government introduced various one-off counter-cyclical measures to stabilise the economy and employment situation while alleviating the financial hardship of the grassroots. According to statistics released in November last year, the size of the poor population in 2020, after taking into account all cash and public rental housing benefits, was reduced substantially from the pre-intervention 1.65 million to 0.55 million, lifting some 1.1 million persons out of poverty and reducing the poverty rate by 15.7 percentage points. The poverty alleviation impact was very notable.

Mrs Lam said, "The CoP is an important partner of the Government in driving work in support of the underprivileged. Apart from providing valuable advice to the Government, the CoP has also allocated funding through the Community Care Fund (CCF) and the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund (SIE Fund) to support measures to plug existing gaps or launch pilot measures, fully demonstrating the collaboration between the community, business sector and the Government, as well as public participation.

"I served as the chairman of the CoP in my capacity as the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) under the previous term of Government for many years, and sincerely collaborated with Members and various non-government organisations. It is my pleasure to be able to personally chair the last CoP meeting of this term of Government. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the CoP for their contributions."

At the meeting, Members were comprehensively briefed on the poverty

alleviation policies and measures undertaken by the current-term Government in different major areas, including social security, employment support, unemployment assistance, and support for targeted groups. Details are set out at the Annex. In addition, the CoP was also briefed by relevant government departments on the latest progress of the following items:

(i) Since July 2017, the CCF introduced 23 new assistance programmes. The financial commitment of the CCF increased by 193 per cent to around \$20.8 billion. 1.23 million persons had benefitted, registering a cumulative increase of 80 per cent; and

(ii) Since July 2017, the number of projects funded by the SIE Fund has increased by 319 (close to 300 per cent), with the total amount of funding involved increasing by \$260 million (over 500 per cent) and the number of beneficiaries increasing by 260 000 (over 700 per cent). The SIE Fund also implemented two flagship projects, namely the Food Support Service IT Platform "FOOD-CO" and the Gerontechnology Platform, as well as the first Pay-for-Success project in Hong Kong to support non-Chinese speaking students to learn Chinese in kindergartens.

At the meeting, the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) also briefed Members on the latest findings of the survey on persons with disabilities (PwD). In 2020, there were around 534 200 PwD in Hong Kong (excluding persons with intellectual disabilities). The overall prevalence rate of PwD was 7.1 per cent. The Office of the Government Economist and the C&SD will compile the Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Disability 2020 based on the findings of the survey on PwD and analyse the poverty situation of PwD residing in domestic households with the poverty line analytical framework set by the CoP. The report is estimated to be published in the second half of 2022.

Members affirmed the overall achievements in the poverty alleviation work of the current-term Government, and hoped that the next term of Government would continue to care for the needs of the grassroots and address the issue of poverty. Mrs Lam sincerely thanked the CoP for actively participating in poverty alleviation work in the past, and providing constructive advice and recommendations to ensure that the Government's policies and measures could better meet the needs of different groups.

The CS is the chairman of the CoP. In view of the vacancy of the office of CS, today's meeting was chaired by the CE.

