

Chief Executive welcomes passage of funding application for sixth round of Anti-epidemic Fund by LegCo

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, welcomed the passage of the Government's funding application for the sixth round of the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council (LegCo) today (February 15) and tasked the relevant Government departments with implementing the various support measures at full steam.

"I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the LegCo Finance Committee for its expeditious approval of the funding application of \$27 billion for the sixth round of the AEF today, after around four and a half hours of discussion, upon the receipt of the Government's formal funding application submitted to the Committee yesterday. It is testimony to the LegCo Members' readiness to address the pressing needs of the people and the co-operative spirit between the executive and the legislature to serve members of the public in a pragmatic manner," Mrs Lam said.

"Faced with the aggravating situation of the fifth wave of the epidemic, the Government appreciates the impact brought about by the extension of tightened social distancing measures on various sectors. Following the announcement of the various support schemes under the fifth round of the AEF in early January, it announced the sixth round on January 27 to provide further support. I note that many LegCo Members have expressed the hope in their remarks that applications under each of the schemes could be handled in an expeditious and less stringent manner. I have requested the Government departments involved in the execution of various schemes to seriously consider Members' views so as to maximise the benefits. In fact, as at February 11, about one-third of the funding under the fifth round of the AEF, or around \$1.1 billion, has been disbursed to the eligible enterprises and individuals."

The sixth round of the AEF comprises 48 schemes which are estimated to benefit 67 000 businesses, operators of 40 000 transport tools and 750 000 individuals. Overall, the relief measures under the sixth-round of the AEF belong to the following four categories: (i) relief for premises that are required to be closed or have their business significantly restricted by the tightening of social distancing measures; (ii) relief for businesses that are hard hit by the pandemic and indirectly affected by the tightening of social distancing measures; (iii) support for individuals working in the hard-hit business and frontline staff who have been making contributions to anti-epidemic efforts; and (iv) support for the short-term/temporarily unemployed.

Mrs Lam added, "The sixth round of the AEF is modelled on the previous measures while seeking to cover as many as practicable businesses and individuals not benefitted previously, with the same objective of providing

targeted support in the simplest and quickest way. In the planning process, we have seriously made reference to the views of the LegCo Members and the trades, and, with a more compassionate attitude, endeavoured to plug gaps in dealing with the businesses and individuals in need of support. Of the funding applied for, over 60 per cent will be directly disbursed to individuals, and a one-off allowance will be offered for the first time to those who are subject to short-term or temporary unemployment.

"In addition to the AEF, the Government has rolled out various relief measures through the 2020-21 and 2021-22 Budgets to tide the businesses and individuals affected over difficult times. I note that the LegCo Members have also put forward suggestions in the consultation sessions conducted by the Financial Secretary earlier on the forthcoming Budget. The Financial Secretary will deliver the 2022-23 Budget on February 23 and I believe that he will take into account the suggestions when formulating it.

"With the full support of the Central Government and the co-operation of the community, the Government will stand up to the challenge with unwavering determination and strong faith to lead Hong Kong out of the epidemic. May I once again appeal to members of the public to stay confident during this difficult time, support the Government's anti-epidemic work, and get vaccinated as soon as possible or in a timely manner to facilitate the implementation of the 'vaccine pass' initiative to be launched later this month. Let us all join hands to fight the epidemic."