

# Fourth-term Commission on Poverty convenes fourth meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the fourth meeting of the fourth-term Commission on Poverty (CoP) this afternoon (June 15).

Members noted the implementation progress of various assistance programmes and the financial position of the Community Care Fund, and endorsed the following two proposals:

## 1. Enhancement of the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme

Launched in September 2012, the programme provides free removable dentures and related dental services, including oral examination, scaling and polishing, filling, tooth extraction and X-ray examination, to low-income elderly persons who are users of the homecare services subvented by the Social Welfare Department. The programme was subsequently extended to cover all Old Age Living Allowance recipients in phases.

Following the Chief Executive's announcement to enhance the programme in her 2020 Policy Address, the CoP agreed to enhance the programme as follows:

- (i) Allowing elderly persons aged 75 or above who received dental services under the programme at least five years ago to receive free removable dentures and/or other related dental services for a second time;
- (ii) Including the removal of bridges or crowns and the provision of root canal treatment in the free dental services covered by the programme; and
- (iii) Increasing the maximum amount of subsidy for dental services for each elderly beneficiary from the existing \$18,680 to \$26,080. The maximum amount of subsidy would be adjusted annually according to the established mechanism.

In light of the enhanced arrangement, the programme will be extended by 19 months until September 30, 2023. The CoP agreed to increase the budget of the programme by \$866.75 million. The total budget approved will increase from \$1,392.67 million to \$2,259.42 million, including administrative fees of \$77.86 million.

## 2. Additional funding for the programme Provision of Subsidy to Needy Primary and Secondary Students for Purchasing Mobile Computer Devices to Facilitate the Practice of e-Learning

The CoP approved a provision of \$415.54 million in April 2018 to launch the programme in the 2018/19 school year to relieve the financial burden on students from low-income families under the development of the "Bring Your Own Device" policy in schools by providing a subsidy to needy primary and secondary students for purchasing mobile computer devices to facilitate their practice of e-learning. The programme would run for three years until the end

of August 2021.

Since the local outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in early 2020, many students needed to use mobile computer devices for e-learning at home before full resumption of class. To this end, the Education Bureau had been handling applications for the programme flexibly and accepting applications submitted by all public sector primary and secondary schools implementing e-learning for their eligible students. In the 2020/21 school year, some 870 schools participated in the programme, with over 140 000 students receiving subsidy for purchasing mobile computer devices and involving about \$568 million of subsidy. Compared with the 2018/19 school year (the corresponding figures were 188 schools, 13 856 student beneficiaries and \$49.2 million of subsidy), the participation rate and the amount of subsidy in the 2020/21 school year increased substantially.

Under the COVID-19 epidemic, the number of participating schools and student beneficiaries of the programme were higher than expected. In this regard, the CoP agreed to allocate \$286 million additionally to the programme. The total financial commitment of the programme amounted to \$701.54 million, of which the administrative fees of \$11.54 million remained the same.

At the meeting, Members were briefed on the findings of the report of the Task Force for the Study on Tenancy Control of Subdivided Units. Members noted that the Task Force considered in principle that the Government should implement suitable tenancy control on subdivided units (SDUs) to safeguard the interests of grass-root tenants of SDUs, including the formulation of a "standard tenancy agreement" with mandatory terms, providing security of tenure to existing tenants and capping the rate of rent increase on tenancy renewal. The Task Force also recommended that the tenancy control measures on SDUs be effected through legislation.

Members noted that the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) is following up on the legislative proposals to introduce tenancy control on SDUs. To this end, the THB has been working at full steam on the drafting of the enabling legislation, and aims to introduce the relevant bill into the Legislative Council (LegCo) within the current legislative session. Members also shared their views and suggestions regarding the details of the proposals.

Members were also briefed on the latest progress of the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund (SIE Fund). Members noted that the LegCo approved in April 2021 the injection of a further \$500 million of funding into the SIE Fund to further address the needs of society through promoting social innovation and nurturing social entrepreneurship. As at May 2021, over \$474 million had been allocated to take forward 304 projects under the three priority areas, namely "Innovative Programmes", "Capacity Building" and "Research", benefiting over 280 000 people in need. Members affirmed the work of the SIE Fund and expressed the hope that the SIE Fund could continue to introduce measures in response to the needs of society.