

LCQ16: Support measures for frontline cleansing and security workers

Following is a question by the Hon Gary Zhang and a written reply by the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, in the Legislative Council today (May 11):

Question:

Regarding the support measures for frontline cleansing and security workers (frontline workers) under the sixth round of the Anti-epidemic Fund launched by the Government in February this year (support measures), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the latest progress of the item of Support Cleansing and Security Staff Engaged by Government, Hong Kong Housing Authority and Hong Kong Housing Society Service Contractors in Anti-epidemic Efforts under the support measures; whether the Government has put in place a mechanism to ensure that the contractors concerned will all submit applications in respect of this item, so as to safeguard the receipt of the relevant allowance by their frontline workers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given that under the support measures, frontline workers engaged under private property management in the property management sector and the frontline workers under those organisations mentioned in (1) may each be provided a monthly allowance of \$2,000 for a period of five months (i.e. from February to June), but it is learnt that during that period, there may be housing estates replacing their property management companies, what measures are put in place by the Government to avoid omission on the part of the property management companies concerned in respect of applying for the allowance for their frontline workers during the transitional period; and

(3) as I have learnt that the Government has undertaken to accord equal treatment to all by including in the coverage the relevant frontline workers of some organisations (e.g. the MTR Corporation Limited and the Airport Authority Hong Kong) who have been left out in the support measures, of the latest coverage of the support measures?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Chief Secretary for Administration's Private Office, the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) / the Home Affairs Department (HAD), the Development Bureau (DEVB), the Education Bureau (EDB), the Environment Bureau (ENB), the Food and Health Bureau (FHB), the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB), we provide a consolidated reply to the Member's question as follows:

(1) The Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (FSTB) proposed to reserve funds under the sixth round of the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF 6.0) to implement a support measure to provide allowance to frontline cleansing workers, toilet attendants and security workers working in government premises, public areas and public housing estates engaged under service contracts of Government departments, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HS). The measure aims to provide financial support in recognition of their anti-epidemic efforts and committed services during the severe epidemic.

The measure is implemented for five months from February to June 2022, during which a monthly allowance of \$2,000 will be provided. The procuring departments of the Government, the HA and the HS (collectively known as the departments) are responsible for implementing the measure and disbursing the monthly allowance through the service contractors to the outsourced workers concerned.

Frontline workers and contractors are not required to submit application for the allowance. The departments will obtain the headcount of frontline workers eligible for the allowance (including part-time or relief workers) from their contractors on a monthly basis, after which relevant funding will be disbursed through the contractors to the outsourced workers concerned. The departments have entered into agreements with their contractors to ensure that the latter disburse the allowance, with a view together with the monthly payroll, to the eligible frontline workers. After the contractors' disbursement of the allowance to the eligible workers, the contractors are required to submit written records to the departments to confirm that the allowance has been received by eligible frontline workers. The departments will conduct random checks based on the written records provided by the contractors to ensure that all allowances passed to the contractors have been disbursed to the frontline workers.

Since the implementation of the measure, more than 70 departments have disbursed over \$430 million of allowance through their contractors to the outsourced workers who performed duties in February, March and April, with the monthly number of beneficiaries being over 72 000 frontline workers.

(2) For the support measure coordinated by the FSTB in part (1) above, if there is a replacement of service contractor engaged by the department during the implementation of the measure, the relevant department will enter into a new agreement with the new contractor separately to continue the disbursement of monthly allowance in accordance with the arrangements in part (1) above to the relevant frontline workers engaged by the new contractor (i.e. frontline workers and contractors are not required to submit application for the allowance).

As for the Anti-epidemic Support Scheme for Environmental Hygiene and Security Staff in the Property Management Sector (ASPM) under AEF 6.0 launched by the HAD, its objective is to provide frontline property management (PM) workers performing duties relating to environmental hygiene

or security in private residential, composite (i.e. commercial cum residential), industrial and commercial (including shopping malls) building blocks (collectively known as eligible building blocks), including the following frontline PM workers in eligible building blocks:

- (i) those employed by PM companies (PMCs) or owners' organisations;
- (ii) those employed by premises within eligible building blocks; and
- (iii) those employed by cleansing / security service contractors or their subcontractors (including part-time or relief workers), including those serving the so-called "three-nil buildings" (i.e. buildings that do not have owners' corporations or any form of residents' organisations, or have not engaged PMCs), each with a monthly allowance of \$2,000 for five months (i.e. February to June 2022).

During the subsidy period, if an eligible building block replaces PMC, the new PMC may, even though it has not officially commenced provision of service to the eligible building block, submit application by the application deadline (i.e. May 31, 2022) for its frontline PM workers employed given its imminent management responsibility of that building. The implementation agency of the ASPM (i.e. the Property Management Services Authority (PMSA)) will disburse allowance according to the number of frontline PM workers and number of service months as stated in the application. When that PMC officially starts providing PM service to the eligible building block, if there is any change in the actual number of frontline PM workers employed by the PMC, the PMSA will adjust the amount of allowance based on the supplementary information provided by the PMC. For instance, PMSA will disburse additional allowance in case of new recruits, or claw back surplus allowance in case of reduction in manpower, in order to ensure the proper use of public funds.

The HAD and PMSA have been implementing a series of publicity work on ASPM, including issuing press releases, informing PMCs via emails, organising briefing sessions, placing advertisements on radio and newspapers, publicising on PMSA's social media platforms, setting up a thematic website etc., to appeal to PMCs to submit applications for their eligible frontline PM workers.

(3) We have consulted the relevant bureaux. In addition to the support measures mentioned in parts (1) and (2) above, upon further consideration by the relevant bureaux and departments of the actual situation of frontline workers under their purview, the FHB, the EDB, the THB, the LWB, the DEVB and the ENB have introduced a series of measures from March 2022 onwards to provide a monthly allowance of \$2,000 to frontline cleansing and security workers of various sectors for a period of five months, including:

- (i) cleansing and security workers engaged by the service contractors of the Hospital Authority;
- (ii) cleansing and security staff engaged by post-secondary education

institutions, non-government schools and kindergartens (and their service contractors);

(iii) cleansing and security workers engaged by local public transport operators (including the MTR Corporation Limited, franchised bus operators, franchised and licensed ferry operators, the Hong Kong Tramways Limited, green minibus operators and non-franchised bus operators);

(iv) cleansing and security workers employed by a company which is a licensee or franchisee of the Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK), or a company which is a holder of an operating permit issued by AAHK, or the contractors of the aforesaid companies, and work at the Hong Kong International Airport;

(v) cleansing and security workers engaged by welfare services units operated by non-government organisations through their service contractors;

(vi) cleansing and security staff engaged by non-government works contractors (as well as their sub-contractors) for working in construction sites;

(vii) cleansing and security workers engaged by the two power companies;

(viii) drivers and assistants of drivers of municipal solid waste and domestic sewage collection vehicles; and

(ix) frontline recycling staff.

It is estimated that the above measures could benefit about 80 000 cleansing and security workers.

Moreover, the HAB will consider, where feasible and appropriate, whether to further enhance the support measure above to cover more frontline workers.