

LCQ16: Workload and manpower of Social Security Officers

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Chiang Lai-wan and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (February 27):

Question:

Recently, some Social Security Officers (SSOs) employed by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) have relayed to me that as the Government has implemented in recent years quite a number of new policies and measures relating to the social security programmes (such as introducing the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) and the Higher OALA, raising the eligible age for elderly Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and providing one-off extra allowances to recipients of social security payments), which is coupled with a continuous rise in the number of elderly persons due to increasing average life expectancy, the workload of SSOs has become increasingly heavy. However, the Government has not increased the establishment of the SSO grade accordingly, resulting in a tremendous increase in their work pressure. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) Of the respective numbers of SSO II and SSO I currently employed by SWD;
- (2) Of the respective average numbers of Social Security Assistants supervised by each of the officers at the two ranks mentioned in (1) (supervision ratios) (i) in each of the past 10 years and (ii) at present; whether there are currently guidelines specifying the supervision ratios;
- (3) Whether there are currently guidelines specifying the specific methods for calculating the manpower requirements for the various ranks in the SSO grade; and
- (4) Whether it has assessed the adequacy of current manpower at the various ranks in the SSO grade; if so, of the outcome, and whether it will increase the manpower?

Reply:

President,

In recent years, the Government has introduced a number of social security measures (including rolling out of the Normal Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) and the Guangdong Scheme in 2013, and the Higher OALA and the Fujian Scheme in year 2018) to provide targeted support to needy persons. In view of the implementation of various programmes, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) would seek additional manpower resources according to service needs so as to cope with the corresponding work.

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) As at end-January 2019, there are 81 Social Security Officer I (SSO I) posts and 310 Social Security Officer II (SSO II) posts in the SWD.

(2) and (3) When estimating the manpower requirement of Social Security Officers (SSOs), the SWD takes into account the anticipated work of administration and supervision required, and the procedures and complexity involved in vetting various types of cases. The manpower ratio between ranks/grades is not the sole basis of estimation. The SWD does not set a so-called supervision ratio between SSOs and Social Security Assistants (SSAs).

Based on the above principle, establishment of manpower for the above ranks/grades each year from 2014-15 to end-January 2019 is provided below:

Rank/Grade Financial year*	SSO I	SSO II	SSA Grade
2014-15	77	289	1 319
2015-16	77	288	1 317
2016-17	78	294	1 331
2017-18	79	298	1 351
2018-19 (As at end-January 2019)	81	310	1 389
The increase in the 5- year period (from 2014-15 to end- January 2019)	4 (5.2%)	21 (7.3%)	70 (5.3%)

*Figures as at the end of the financial year

(4) The SWD has been reviewing the manpower of the SSO grade from time to time, and has implemented various measures to provide appropriate support for its staff according to the actual work requirements. These measures include creating new posts subject to the availability of resources, conducting risk management studies to enhance resource allocation and efficiency, and improving the workflow and streamlining procedures, etc. The SWD will continue to maintain close communication with its staff of the social security grades, and stay attentive to their job arrangements and staffing situation so as to ensure efficient delivery of services to the public by the department.