

SLW's speaking notes on welfare and women policy areas tabled at LegCo Finance Committee special meeting

Following are the speaking notes of the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, on welfare and women policy areas tabled at the special meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Finance Committee today (April 14):

Chairman and Honourable Members,

In 2022-23, government recurrent spending on social welfare and women's interests is estimated to be \$111.8 billion, accounting for 19.8 per cent of the total recurrent government expenditure of the year, second only to health amongst all policy area groups. Compared with the revised estimate for 2021-22 of \$97.4 billion, there is an increase of about \$14.4 billion (14.7 per cent) in recurrent spending on social welfare. This reflects the Government's commitment to supporting the disadvantaged. Now, let me highlight how the Labour and Welfare Bureau will make use of these resources.

Elderly services

The recurrent government expenditure on elderly services in 2022-23 is estimated to reach about \$14 billion, representing an increase of about 82 per cent over about \$7.7 billion in 2017-18. In 2022-23, the Government will provide some additional 1 580 subsidised residential care places for the elderly, including 380 places provided by contract homes and subsidised homes, around 1 200 additional EA1 places to be purchased through the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme (EBPS), as well as 164 subsidised day care service places for the elderly.

The Government has also allocated additional resources to strengthen residential care services for the elderly through various initiatives, including regularising the Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly, and increasing the number of vouchers from 3 000 to 4 000 starting from 2022-23; regularising the Pilot Scheme on Multi-disciplinary Outreaching Support Teams for the Elderly starting from mid-February 2023, so as to continue to provide outreach support services for elderly persons of private residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) to address their social and rehabilitation needs, and to continue to provide speech therapy service for elderly persons with swallowing difficulties or speech impairment in contract RCHEs (including the Day Care Units attached to the contract RCHEs) and self-financing RCHEs/nursing homes. In addition, the Government will commence negotiation with EA2 homes of the EBPS starting from 2022-23 on variation of service agreements, so as to enhance their quality to EA1 standards through additional resources.

With regard to community care services, the Government will regularise

the Pilot Scheme on Home Care and Support for Elderly Persons with Mild Impairment to provide continued support to about 4 000 elderly persons in need, and the speech therapy services for about 7 200 service places in Enhanced Home and Community Care Services to support elderly persons with swallowing difficulties or speech impairment.

As for new elderly facilities, construction of the Multi-welfare Services Complex in Kwu Tung North New Development Area will be completed in 2022. It will provide 1 750 residential care places and 40 day care service places for the elderly. The contract home in Queen's Hill Development Project in Fanling will also provide an additional 150 residential care places for the elderly. In addition, a Neighbourhood Elderly Centre will be set up in Tuen Mun Area 54 to provide community support services to about 400 elderly persons and carers in the area per year. The above-mentioned three new elderly facilities are expected to commence services in the second half of 2023.

Cash welfare

The current-term Government has improved cash welfare significantly, including launching the Higher Old Age Living Allowance (OALA), introducing enhancements to the Working Family Allowance Scheme, and fully implementing a series of measures to improve the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme. The total estimated recurrent expenditure on cash welfare in 2022-23 amounts to \$70 billion, more than 60 per cent higher than that of 2017-18. The Government will merge the Normal and Higher OALA in the second half of 2022, so that the more lenient asset limits of the Normal OALA will be adopted across-the-board, and eligible applicants will receive payment at the Higher OALA rate.

Furthermore, the Financial Secretary has proposed in the 2022-23 Budget to provide an extra allowance to eligible social security recipients equal to half a month of payment, which will involve an additional expenditure of about \$2,384 million and is expected to benefit about 1.48 million persons. Similar arrangements will apply to recipients of the Working Family Allowance. It is expected that some 72 000 households will benefit from this initiative, involving an additional expenditure of about \$117 million. We expect that the extra allowances would be disbursed to recipients a month after the passage of the Appropriation Bill 2022 at the earliest.

Regularisation of the Pilot Scheme on Social Work Service for Pre-primary Institutions

For early identification of and to provide assistance to pre-primary children and their families with welfare needs, the Government will regularise the Pilot Scheme on Social Work Service for Pre-primary Institutions upon its completion in July 2022. The service covers around 780 aided/subsidised pre-primary institutions, including aided/subsidised child care centres, kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres, for 150 000 pre-primary children and their families. The annual expenditure will be over \$410 million.

Review of the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project

Under the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project launched in 2008, service operators recruit child carers to provide families in their neighbourhood with flexible day child care services at home, as a way to foster the spirit of mutual help in the community. To better meet the keen demand for day child care services, the Government will review the implementation mode and effectiveness of the project, including the need for home-based child carers to undergo certified training and the level of their pay, with a view to enhancing service quality as well as attracting more people to become home-based child carers. The review is expected to be completed by mid-2023.

Rehabilitation services

The Government will continue to strengthen residential care services and community support for persons with disabilities. Starting from October 2022, we will provide soft meals for about 6 700 persons with disabilities receiving subsidised residential care and community rehabilitation services to cater for their ageing needs and swallowing problem. Starting from March 2023, we will also regularise the Pilot Scheme on Professional Outreaching Teams for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities, under which social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, clinical psychologists and others provide free multi-disciplinary outreaching services for about 4 000 residents of private residential care homes for persons with disabilities. These two measures will involve recurrent expenditure of around \$113 million.

Women's development

In 2022-23, the Government has earmarked around \$42.1 million to promote women's interests and support the work of the Women's Commission (WoC). These include the provision for assisting the WoC in implementing the "Capacity Building Mileage Programme", and allocating funding for women's groups to implement programmes that are conducive to women's development.

Chairman, this concludes my opening remarks. Members are welcome to raise questions.