

Third-term Commission on Poverty convenes ninth meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the ninth meeting of the third-term Commission on Poverty (CoP) this afternoon (January 21). Apart from discussing the Community Care Fund (CCF) programmes, members were also briefed on the implementation of transitional housing projects and supplementary analyses on the 2018 poverty situation, as well as the new initiatives to benefit people's livelihoods announced by the Chief Executive on January 14.

Members noted the implementation progress of various assistance programmes and the financial position of the CCF. The CoP endorsed launching two new assistance programmes and introducing a new drug under a medical assistance programme, as well as the proposed indicative budget for the CCF medical assistance programmes for 2020-21. Details of the resolutions are as follows:

New assistance programmes

(i) The CoP agreed to launch a programme to assist the Hong Kong Housing Society to refurbish Trackside Villas of the MTR Corporation Limited for "T-Home" transitional housing. It is anticipated that the refurbishment works will commence in the second quarter of 2020 in phases and the refurbished flats would be available for intake in the third quarter of 2020 at the earliest. With total funding of \$45.94 million, the project is expected to involve at most 252 units and benefit around 1 120 persons; and

(ii) In response to the invitation by the Chief Executive in the 2019 Policy Address, after agreeing to launch the One-off Living Subsidy for Low-income Households Not Living in Public Housing and Not Receiving CSSA programme at the meeting last October (the 2020 programme), the CoP endorsed the rollout of the programme again in January 2021 (the 2021 programme). The CoP agreed that the CCF Secretariat would issue letters to eligible households for the 2020 programme to confirm their eligibility, without the need for them to re-submit applications for the 2021 programme. In addition, households that become eligible for the 2021 programme as a result of change in their financial situation or living conditions can apply in phases starting from January 2021. The total funding for the 2021 programme is \$1,447.73 million and it is expected to benefit about 137 150 households (about 353 600 persons). The subsidy levels of the 2021 programme will be the same as those under the 2020 programme: \$4,500 for one-person households, \$9,000 for two-person households, \$12,500 for three-person households, \$14,500 for four-person households and \$15,500 for five-or-more-person households. The 2021 programme is expected to be launched and receive applications in January 2021.

Introduction of a new drug under the Subsidy for Eligible Patients to

Purchase Ultra-expensive Drugs (Including Those for Treating Uncommon Disorders) Programme

(iii) The CoP approved the introduction of the drug Dinutuximab Beta for the treatment of neuroblastoma to the Subsidy for Eligible Patients to Purchase Ultra-expensive Drugs (Including Those for Treating Uncommon Disorders) Programme. The Hospital Authority will implement the relevant arrangement upon registration of the drug. It is expected that 10 patients would benefit in the first 12 months after implementation. The introduction of the new drug could be covered by the approved budget and no additional funding is required.

CCF medical assistance programmes' indicative budget for 2020-21

(iv) The CoP approved the indicative budget for three CCF medical assistance programmes (the First Phase Programme of Medical Assistance Programmes, the Subsidy for Eligible Patients to Purchase Ultra-expensive Drugs (Including Those For Treating Uncommon Disorders) Programme and the Subsidy for Eligible Patients of Hospital Authority to Purchase Specified Implantable Medical Devices for Interventional Procedures Programme) for 2020-21 (from April 1, 2020, till March 31, 2021). The overall indicative budget for the programmes is \$986.95 million.

At the meeting, the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) briefed members on the work of the Task Force on Transitional Housing and the current situation and way forward for transitional housing projects. The Task Force on Transitional Housing (Task Force) led by the Under Secretary for Transport and Housing was established under the THB in June 2018 to provide one-stop cross-bureau and cross-departmental co-ordination and professional support for community organisations to implement the projects and commence works as soon as possible. Since its establishment, the Task Force has actively participated in and facilitated the implementation of community initiatives on transitional housing, providing a total of 10 000 units within the next three years. The Task Force is seeking approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council to approve a \$5 billion funding scheme to support transitional housing projects by non-governmental organisations. With cross-sectoral collaboration, the Government has identified adequate land for the transitional housing supply target announced by the Chief Executive in the 2019 Policy Address to provide 10 000 units within the next three years and will further increase the amount by 5 000 to a total of 15 000 units for the next three years to relieve the pressure on families living in unpleasant conditions and those waiting for public rental housing for a long time. Members supported the initiative on transitional housing and gave views on the future developments of transitional housing projects.

In addition, relevant bureaux briefed members on the new initiatives to benefit people's livelihoods announced by the Chief Executive in January 2020. Members noted the Government's efforts to respond to the aspirations of the grass roots and the underprivileged and expressed their views on the new initiatives. As a follow-up to the discussion at the last meeting, the Office

of the Government Economist and the Census and Statistics Department provided supplementary information on the socio-economic analyses on poor one-person households and the poverty statistics taking into account recurrent cash, non-recurrent cash and in-kind benefits in 2018. The supplementary information has been uploaded to the CoP's website (www.povertyrelief.gov.hk).