

Transcript of remarks by CS on Budget

Following is the transcript of remarks by the Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, at a media session at the Legislative Council Complex after the Financial Secretary presented the Budget today (February 27):

Support Enterprises, Safeguard Jobs, Stabilise the Economy and Strengthen Livelihoods are the key directions of this year's Budget. On the premise of ensuring the stability of our public finances, the Budget adopts a forward-looking and strategic fiscal approach with the aim of nurturing industries, supporting enterprises, enhancing public services, improving people's livelihood and investing in the future. The Budget deserves the community's support.

i,Ÿ The recurrent expenditure for the three key livelihood areas, that is, education, health care and social welfare, is expected to reach \$255.5 billion, accounting for nearly 60 per cent of the Government's total recurrent expenditure or an increase of over 7 per cent over the last year's revised estimates. This demonstrates the current-term Government's commitment in supporting the needy and disadvantaged and also in building a harmonious, caring and inclusive community.

i,Ÿ This year's Budget introduces a number of important and forward-looking measures to foster the long-term development of Hong Kong, including, let me quote for examples:

i,² Earmarking \$10 billion to set up a public health stabilisation fund to ensure stable funding for public healthcare services and for coping with unexpected circumstances.

i,² Secondly, providing additional recurrent funding of over \$700 million for the Hospital Authority to increase the rate of allowance and salaries of front-line staff, the number of Advanced Practice Nurse posts as well as allied health professional posts, and also allocating additional resources to continue implementing the Special Retired and Rehire Scheme.

i,² Finally, allocating \$20 billion for the purchase of 60 properties for accommodating over 130 welfare facilities including day child care services centres, neighbourhood elderly centres, on-site pre-school rehabilitation services, etc, to address the problem of insufficient venues for welfare facilities. We expect 86 000 people will benefit.

i,Ÿ The Budget has also introduced a number of one-off measures to relieve people's burden, including tax deduction and an additional month of allowance for recipients of the CSSA, Old Age Allowance, Old Age Living Allowance, elderly allowance, Disability Allowance and, of course, Working Family Allowance and Work Incentive Transport Subsidy. Also, we will provide a one-off grant to each student in need amounting to \$2,500.

i,Ÿ I fully support this year's Budget and hope that the Legislative Council will pass the Appropriation Bill as quickly as possible so that the many important and caring measures can be implemented promptly for the benefit of the entire community.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)