Meeting of the Ethnic Minorities Forum

21 April 2016 at 3:00 p.m.

30/F Conference Room, Southorn Centre, Wan Chai

**Present**

**Government representatives**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Assistant Director of Home Affairs (3) | Mrs Candy Yeung  (Chairperson) |
| Chief Executive Officer (3),  Home Affairs Department | Mr KY Cheng |
| Principal Assistant Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs | Mr DC Cheung |

**Representatives of public bodies**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Senior Equal Opportunities Officer,  Equal Opportunities Commission | Mr Raymond Ho |

**Representatives of non-government organisations**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Caritas – Hong Kong | Mr Bill Lay |
| Christian Action | Mr Gary Tang |
| Hong Kong Christian Service | Mr Kwok Nai Yeung |
| Hong Kong Community Network | Ms Cheung Ying Ying |
| Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor | Ms Claudia Yip |
| Hong Kong Integrated Nepalese Society Limited | Mrs Gurung Pushpa |
| Hong Kong Nepalese Federation | Ms Rita Gurung |
| Hong Kong SKH Lady MacLehose Centre | Mr Jonathan Chan |
| Hong Kong Unison | Ms Phyllis Cheung |
| Human Welfare Services | Mr Shakeel Ahmed Qaimkhani |
| India Association Hong Kong | Mr Arun Nigam |
| Indian Businessmen’s Association | Mr Gul T Mirpuri |
| International Social Service Hong Kong Branch | Ms Adrielle M Panares |
| Khalsa Diwan Hong Kong (Sikh Temple) | Mr Gurmel Singh |
| Lok Sin Tong Benevolent Society, Kowloon | Ms MY Tsoi |
| New Home Association | Mr Chan Yee Fei |
| Society for Cultural Integration | Ms Kayla Tam |
| The Hong Kong Council of Social Service | Ms Lynn Law |
| The Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council | Ms Crystal Cheng |
| The Zubin Foundation | Mr James Thomson-Sakhrani |
| United Muslim Association of Hong Kong | Mr SJ Raghbi |
| Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service | Mr Lam Chun Ming |
| Yuen Long Town Hall | Mr Johnny Chan |

**Other attendees**

*For Agenda Item 1*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Head, Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency | Mr Esmond Lee |
| Principal Executive Officer (Working Family Allowance Office), Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency | Ms Teresa Cheung |

*For Agenda Item 2*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Centre-in-charge, CHEER Centre | Ms Wayne Wu |
| Coordinator (Interpreter/Translator), CHEER Centre | Mr Dewan Chirag Rai |

**Secretary**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Senior Executive Officer (RRU),  Home Affairs Department | Mr Alfred Shum |

1. **Introduction**
   1. Mrs Candy Yeung, Assistant Director of Home Affairs, chaired the Ethnic Minority Forum (the EM Forum) for the first time and welcomed attendees to the meeting. Since some attendees were new to the meeting, the Chairperson explained that the purpose of this Forum is to provide a platform for ethnic minority (EM) groups and service providers to share experience and discuss frontline issues relating to the provision of government services to EMs while the Committee on the Promotion of Racial Harmony (CPRH) would discuss EM matters from the policy perspective. This EM Forum would meet at least once a year, supplemented by other activities such as visits as appropriate.
2. **Promotion of the Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme to ethnic minorities by Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency (WFSFAA)**
   1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr Esmond Lee of the WFSFAA briefed attendees on the Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme (the Scheme), with a PowerPoint presentation.
   2. Issues raised by attendees and the discussions were summarised below:

**(a) Reaching out to the EM community**

* + 1. Representatives of EM organisations welcomed the Scheme and indicated that they could assist in reaching out their communities. Mr Lee said that several community briefings had been arranged in April and additional briefings could also be organised for individual organisations upon request.
    2. Representatives of NGOs serving EMs said their clients had encountered difficulties in completing the application forms for the Scheme and asked if WFSFAA staff could assist in the process. Mr Lee pointed out that since the Scheme was a recurrent one, it was important to teach the applicants how to fill in the forms as they would need to file applications once every six months. With regard to the practical support offered by WFSFAA, Mr Lee said that applicants might visit their Kwun Tong office in person and his staff would also visit support service centres for EMs to conduct briefings for prospective applicants on how to fill in the forms.
    3. A representative said that it was not easy to reach out potential applicants as some of them could only be reached by home visits. Mr Lee replied that it would be more effective if NGOs could help gather potential applicants so that WFSFAA staff could give a briefing to them in their centres at appointed times.
    4. The Chairperson suggested in addition to briefings for individual organisations, NGOs might also consider arranging potential applicants to attend the community briefings to be conducted by WFSFAA.

*(Post-meeting notes: The schedule of community briefings was sent to all attendees on 22 April 2016.)*

**(b) Beneficiaries of the Scheme**

* + 1. An attendee said some single persons were disappointed that they were not covered by the Scheme. Mr Lee replied that the present scheme targeted families of two or more members. Nevertheless, WFSFAA would take all relevant aspects into account in the policy review to be conducted next year (i.e. one year after the implementation of the Scheme).
    2. An attendee asked whether late applications would be entertained. Mr Lee replied that a phased application approach had been adopted for families of different sizes. WFSFAA would be flexible in handling late applications so long as they were received by end July 2016 for the first round of applications.
    3. An attendee suggested that WFSFAA should set a target for the number of applicants. Mr Lee replied that it had been estimated that the Scheme would benefit around 200 000 low-income working families but there was no fixed target as it was up to eligible families to decide whether to apply or not, having regard to their circumstances. He added that a policy review would be conducted on the Scheme. One of the issues to be addressed was the effectiveness of the Scheme.

**(c) Calculation of income and assets**

* + 1. An attendee enquired about the eligibility and the computation of income for casual workers or those who had unstable income. Mr Lee replied that casual workers and self-employed persons were welcome to apply but they needed to fill in a supplementary form to provide details of their earnings.
    2. Noting that self-occupied residential flats were excluded from the calculation of assets, an attendee asked whether a similar exemption could be extended to business vehicles owned by the applicants. Ms Teresa Cheung of the WFSFAA replied that only the market value of vehicles (i.e. the depreciated value or the net asset value of a mortgaged vehicle) would be included in the calculation.

1. **Telephone interpretation service and translation service of ethnic minority languages by CHEER Centre**
   1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr Kwok Nai Yeung of Hong Kong Christian Service and Ms Wayne Wu of the CHEER Centre briefed attendees on the telephone interpretation service and translation service, with a PowerPoint presentation.
   2. Issues raised by attendees and the discussions were summarised below:

**(a) Interpretation service to facilitate EMs’ access to public services**

* + 1. An attendee suggested that there should be a central place like the Race Relations Unit to coordinate matters relating to EMs. The Chairperson explained that while HAD provided secretariat service to the CPRH and the EM Forum, it was not the coordinating body for all EM matters within the Government. Since various Government bureaux and departments have been providing a range of services and programmes under their respective policy area to meet the needs of EMs, comments and enquiries from attendees would be referred to the relevant parties. The main task of HAD was to provide support services to help EMs integrate into the community.
    2. Mr D C Cheung said that the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau (CMAB) issued the Administrative Guidelines on Promotion of Racial Equality (the Guidelines) to provide guidance to bureaux, departments and other public authorities to promote racial equality and ensure equal access. This enabled departments to decide how best they could serve EMs. Relevant departments had drawn up their own checklists of measures which were posted on CMAB’s website. The public could approach the departments concerned directly using the contact information on the checklists.
    3. Attendees expressed concern about the utilisation of CHEER’s telephone interpretation and translation service by certain departments and those requests which were not fulfilled. Mr D C Cheung explained that different departments might adopt a different approach to meet the needs of EMs. For example, a department employing its own EM staff would have lower demand for external interpretation service. CMAB had been sharing good practices with departments and would keep the subject under review.
    4. A representative of an NGO shared his experience in operating the interpretation service for the Hospital Authority. He said that his organisation handled more than 950 requests a month. He pointed out that according to their guidelines, interpretation service would always be provided to a patient upon request and the medical staff would only be involved in verifying the details of the medical appointments.

**(b) Interpretation service for emergency services**

* + 1. An attendee enquired about the handling of emergency calls to 999 Control Centre from EMs who did not speak English and Chinese. Ms Wayne Wu told attendees that for non-emergency cases, CHEER Centre collaborated with the Hong Kong Police Force to offer the TRANSLINK service in report rooms of 10 Police stations. However, the CHEER Centre did not have the expertise and hence would not handle emergency calls.

*(Post-meeting notes: The Secretariat has enquired with the Police about the handling of 999 calls from EMs who did not speak English and Chinese. The Police replied that, in handling cases in which the caller's first language is not Chinese or English, Regional Command and Control Centres (RCCC) officers will as far as possible obtain the necessary details of the cases from the caller in order to determine the nature of cases in accordance with internal guidelines. For emergency cases, RCCCs will try all possible means to ascertain the location of the caller and immediately dispatch police officers to provide assistance to the caller in person at the scene. The Police has in place stringent operational guidelines for RCCC officers to determine whether a call is emergency or not as well as the nature of cases, with a view to ensuring proper handling of all cases.)*

**(c) Quality of translators and interpreters of EM languages**

* + 1. Attendees commented that the quality of translation and interpretation service in the market was diverse because an accreditation system was lacking. Furthermore, the lack of interpretation service between Chinese and EM languages also discouraged the use of interpretation service by public service providers.
    2. An operator of a support service centres for EMs commented that the assistance provided by public service providers was inadequate and, hence, many EMs sought escort service from them. However, the centres also encountered capacity problem as it was difficult to employ interpreters who were conversant in English, Chinese and their native language.
    3. Mr D C Cheung remarked that it was linguistically easier to translate between commonly spoken EM languages in Hong Kong and English than Chinese. With regard to training and accreditation, he suggested that the Secretariat could look for more information from the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) or the Education Bureau (EDB).

*(Post-meeting notes: According to the ERB website, the ERB in collaboration with Christian Action offers three subsidised interpreter training courses for interpretation between English and Hindi, Nepali or Urdu. The courses have been registered under EDB’s Qualification Register. They are quality-assured and recognised under the Qualification Framework as QF Level 2.)*

1. **Any Other Business**
   1. An attendee shared with the meeting about her concerns on EM children with special education needs. Mr Raymond Ho of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) said that he had met the organisation concerned and referred their enquiries to EDB for follow-up. The Chairperson noted that special education fell under EDB’s purview and the attendee agreed that the subject matter be referred to EDB for follow up.

*(Post-meeting notes: The Secretariat has referred the enquiries to EDB.)*

* 1. An attendee informed that meeting that the Zubin Foundation had published the Race for Opportunity: Diversity List 2016 in March with the objective of mobilising EMs to serve on government boards and committees. The Chairperson welcomed the Zubin Foundation’s efforts and said that the list had been circulated within Government bureaux and departments.
  2. For the date of next meeting, attendees would be duly informed nearer the time.

**Home Affairs Department**

**September 2016**