Committee on the Promotion of Racial Harmony

Notes of the meeting on 14 January 2016

**Present**

**Home Affairs Department (HAD)**

Mr Jack Chan (Chairman) Deputy Director

Mrs Candy Yeung Assistant Director

Mr Alfred Shum (Secretary) Senior Executive Officer

**Official Members**

Mr D C Cheung Principal Assistant Secretary

Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau

Miss Yik Wai King Principal Information Officer (Local Promotion) Information Services Department

Ms Ng Yin Yi, Elaine Education Officer (Placement and Support)2 Education Bureau

Ms Lo Yin Wah, Clara Labour Officer (Employment Services)

Labour Department

**Non-official Members**

Mr Dewan Saiful Alam

Mr Mohamed Ibramsa Sikkander Batcha

Mr Brian Chau

Mr Kul Prasad Gurung

Dr Sharmila Gurung, MH

Ms Ho Wai-yee, Lucilla

Mr Hameed Jalal

Ms Rosalia Kamariah Kesuma

Mr Mohammad Liaqat

Mr Amirali Bakirali Nasir, JP, MH

Dr Rizwan Ullah

Mr Yeung Chuen Chow, Thomas

**In Attendance**

For Agenda Item (3)

Ms Reddy Ng Principal Economist (5), Economic Analysis and Business Facilitation Unit of Financial Secretary's Office

Mr David Chan Senior Economist (4), Economic Analysis and Business Facilitation Unit of Financial Secretary's Office

Mr Ken Chan Research Analyst (2), Economic Analysis and Business Facilitation Unit of Financial Secretary's Office

Mr Osbert Wang Assistant Commissioner (Economic 3), Census and Statistics Department

Dr Billy Li Senior Statistician (Social)1, Census and Statistics Department

For Agenda Item (4)

Mr Esmond Lee Head, Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency

Ms Teresa Cheung Principal Executive Officer(Working Family Allowance Office), Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency

Mr Raymond Ho Senior Equal Opportunities Officer, Ethnic Minorities Unit, Equal Opportunities Commission

**Absent with apologies**

Dr Theresa Cunanan

Ms Bungon Tamasorn

1. Introduction
   1. The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting and congratulated Mr Brian Chau and Mr Thomas Yeung for receiving the Secretary for Home Affairs’ Commendations.
2. Confirmation of the notes of discussion on 21 July 2015
   1. The notes of the last meeting held on 21 July 2015 were confirmed.
3. Matters arising from the meeting on 21 July 2015
   1. There was no matter arising from the meeting on 21 July 2015.
4. Poverty Situation of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong by Economic Analysis and Business Facilitation Unit of Financial Secretary’s Office
   1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms Reddy Ng of the Economic Analysis and Business Facilitation Unit (EABFU) briefed Members on the poverty situation of ethnic minorities (EMs) in Hong Kong with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation.
   2. Issues raised by Members and the discussions were summarised below:
      1. In response to a Member’s enquiry on the effectiveness of the poverty alleviation measures on overall EMs, Ms Ng explained that the actual impact of recurrent cash policy intervention could be underestimated because only major relevant intervention items were included in the 2011 Population Census data. She added that the effectiveness could be more fully assessed when more data from the 2016 Population By-census, with enhanced data collection, became available.
      2. Members were interested in data to be collected by the Census & Statistics Department (C&SD) in the 2016 Population By-census. Dr Billy Li of C&SD said that more data on household income, government financial assistance received and language proficiency would be collected. This would facilitate the analysis of the relationship between the poverty situation and the ability to read and write English and Chinese.
      3. Members noted that high dependency ratio and low labour force participation rate were relevant to poverty. It was suggested that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) could be invited to give a presentation on their services for children and the elderly.
      4. A Member suggested families of different ethnicities might need different poverty alleviation measures. Another Member commented that the high cost of living in Hong Kong could be a root cause. In response, Ms Ng explained that the Commission of Poverty had adopted a relative poverty concept and the poverty line, at 50% of the median monthly household income before policy intervention, would normally rise in tandem with economic growth. She considered that the Low Income Working Family Allowance (LIFA) Scheme would help alleviate the poverty situation in those large South Asian families.
   3. The Chairman thanked for the presentation made by Ms Ng.
5. Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme by Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency
   1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Esmond Lee of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency (WFSFAA) briefed Members on the Low-income Working Family Allowance (LIFA) Scheme with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation.
   2. Issues raised by Members and the discussions were summarised below:
      1. On the eligibility of the Scheme, a Member expressed concern that causal workers might not be able to provide the required documentary proof such as employment contracts and certification of working hours. Mr Lee replied that WFSFAA would adopt a flexible approach in handling the applications while observing the audit requirements. Alternative proof such as a self-declaration statement might be accepted. A Member also commented that the minimum monthly working hours of 144 was high and this would pose difficulties to homemakers. Mr Lee explained that the level was set after much discussion and deliberations and the Government had pledged to conduct a policy review one year after the implementation of the Scheme.
      2. A Member enquired whether there was any mechanism similar to that of the CSSA Scheme to ensure that recipients of the Child Allowance would provide adequate support to their children. Mr Lee said that LIFA served a different purpose which was to encourage low-income families to engage in active employment by providing them with some financial assistance. There was no restriction on the use of the allowance.
      3. To attract more EM families to apply for LIFA, a Member suggested that seminars could be conducted at *madressas*[[1]](#footnote-1) where Muslims gathered to pray. Other members suggested mobilising community-based NGOs to promote the Scheme and involving schools attended by EM children. Other suggestions included helping EM applicants to fill in the application forms and reminding them about the importance of providing true and accurate information. The Chairman said that HAD could assist in promoting the Scheme through the Race Relations Unit website and other established channels. In addition, WFSFAA was welcomed to set up information counters in six Support Service Centres for EMs and two sub-centres to answer enquiries and help applicants to complete the application forms.   
           
         *(Post-meeting notes: Since January 2016, WFSFAA has organised nine briefings at the Support Service Centres for EMs. In the coming months, WFSFAA will set up special counters at the centres to answer enquiries from EM applicants.)*
   3. The Chairman thanked for the presentation made by Mr Lee.
6. Any Other Business
   1. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.
   2. For the date of next meeting, Members would be duly informed nearer the time.

Home Affairs Department

June 2016

1. “Madressas” refers to educational institutions, particularly for Islamic religious instruction. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)