Committee on the Promotion of Racial Harmony

Notes of the meeting on 13 March 2018

**Present**

**Home Affairs Department (HAD)**

Miss Vega Wong (Chairperson) Acting Deputy Director

Mr Howard Yam Assistant Director

Mr K Y Cheng Chief Executive Officer

Mr Alfred Shum (Secretary) Senior Executive Officer

**Official Members**

Mr Cheung Doi Ching Principal Assistant Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs (5),

Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau

Ms So Mei Yee, Sandy Principal Information Officer (Local Promotion), Information Services Department

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

Mr Chong Heung Yu, John Labour Officer (Employment Services)2,

Labour Department

**Non-official Members**

Mr Dewan Saiful Alam

Ms Ping Somporn Bevan

Ms Cheung Yee May, Mimi

Dr Theresa Cunanan

Mr Kul Prasad Gurung

Mr Vijay Harilela

Mr Hung Chiu Wah, Derek

Mr Akil Khan

For Agenda Item (3)

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

Mr Chan Tai Wai, David Senior Economist (5B), EABFU, FS Office

Mr Yeung Ion Lam Economist (5B), EABFU, FS Office

Mr Ng Chi Chung, Jonathan Senior Statistician (Social)1, Census and Statistics Department

For Agenda Item (4)

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

**Absent with apologies**

Mr Sikkander Batcha, MH

Mr Brian Chau

Dr Sharmila Gurung, MH

Mrs Poonam Vijayprakash Mehta

Ms Rigam Rai

Mr Hafiz Mohammad

1. Introduction
   1. The Chairperson welcomed Members to the meeting and congratulated Dr Theresa Cunanan for receiving the Secretary for Home Affairs’ Commendation. She also thanked Members for their time and effort in attending in the Policy Address consultation session and Budget consultation session on behalf of the ethnic minority community and giving their views.
2. Confirmation of the notes of discussion on 15 September 2017
   1. The notes of the last meeting held on 15 September 2017 were confirmed.
3. Matters arising from the meeting on 15 September 2017
   1. There was no matter arising from the meeting on 15 September 2017.
4. Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2016 by the Economic Analysis and Business Facilitation Unit of the Financial Secretary's Office
   1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr Chan Tai Wai, David of the Economic Analysis and Business Facilitation Unit (EABFU) of the Financial Secretary's Office (FS Office) briefed Members on findings and recommendations of the Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Ethnic Minorities 2016.
   2. Issues raised by Members and the discussions were summarised below:
      1. In response to Members’ enquiries, Mr Chan explained that the poverty line adopted by the Commission on Poverty for Hong Kong was determined with reference to household income and there were six thresholds for households of different sizes. The poverty situation would then be analysed under scenarios before policy intervention and after policy intervention (including recurrent cash, non-recurrent cash and in-kind benefits). Under the post-intervention (recurrent cash) scenario, the poverty rate in 2016 for the whole population was 14.7% whereas that for the South Asian population was 23.0%. A Member questioned whether there was any correlation between the education level and employment rate of ethnic minorities (EMs). Mr Chan replied that while employment rate of EMs could be affected by a myriad of socio-economic factors, it was observed that household members with lower education attainment were usually less economically active.
      2. A Member noted from the statistics that a high proportion of Nepalese lived in private tenements and that EMs became less dependent on social benefits. She was concerned that these phenomena could either be interpreted as EMs had become more self-reliant or they were not aware of the poverty alleviation measures available to them. Mr Chan said the proportion of households residing in public rental housing was higher for Pakistanis and Thais but the reasons that many Nepalese did not reside in public housing were not enquired in household surveys. He explained further that while the statistics may not directly reflect the level of EMs’ awareness in social welfare benefits, the rather broad-based decreases in shares of social welfare recipients among EMs in tandem with the generally visible growth in EM employment and improved employment earnings amidst the sustained economic expansion in recent years could partly reflect the increased self-reliance of EMs.
      3. A Member was worried that the school drop-out rate for Nepalese was high. Mr Chan said that the proportion of Nepalese youth aged between 19 and 24 who were receiving full-time education was lower than those of other ethnic groups in 2016. At the same time, a higher labour force participation rate was observed among Nepalese youth of this age group. It reflected that many Nepalese youth had left school to enter the labour market.
      4. A Member asked why the poverty situation of Pakistanis had shown more significant improvement than other ethnic groups. Mr Chan pointed out that decreased poverty rate of Pakistanis between 2011 and 2016 could be seen even before policy intervention. This could be attributable to the higher labour force participation rate for Pakistanis over the period, in particular Pakistani women.
      5. A Member commented that employment and training support could help reduce poverty for EMs. Noting that the unemployment rate was still high among EM youths, he suggested that the Government should offer more job openings for EMs such as interpreters.
   3. The Chairperson thanked Mr Chan and representatives from EABFU of the FS Office and the Census and Statistics Department for their presentation.
5. Improvement Measures under the Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme by the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency
   1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms Cheung Shuk Kau, Teresa of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency (WFSFAA) briefed Members on the improvement measures under the Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme.
   2. Issues raised by Members and the discussions were summarised below:
      1. A Member was concerned about how non-regular income earners could provide proof on their working hours from their employers. Ms Cheung replied that under the existing arrangement, an applicant with a fixed employer could provide his/her employment contract or salary statements as proof if the working hours were shown in the documents. If the number of working hours was not specified in such documents, the applicant should ask the employer to certify the number of working hours. A template was provided by the WFSFAA to help the applicant to seek the employer’s certification.
      2. In response to an enquiry about the operation of the 24-hour enquiry hotline, Ms Cheung said that arrangements had been made with the Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents (CHEER) to answer the hotline in ethnic minority languages during their operating hours. At other times, an enquirer might leave a message and WFSFAA would contact the enquirer with the help of staff of CHEER as soon as possible.
      3. The Chairperson thanked Ms Cheung for her presentation.
6. Any Other Business
   1. Mr Howard Yam updated Members on the progress of the Lifesaving Training Programme for Ethnic Minority Youths (the Programme). About 100 EM youth had signed up for the Programme. One intensive swimming class had been completed, four were in progress and three more would be arranged in the coming months. Two participants who had passed the water test together with other qualified participants would proceed to the Lifesaving Bronze Medallion course. Taking into account Members’ suggestion, participants were offered an encouragement of $100 per session and an additional $1,000 and $2,000 respectively for passing the water test and acquiring the Bronze Medallion.
   2. The Secretary reported that a submission had been received from a Member. The submission suggested that due to diversity in culture, food habit and lifestyle between Chinese and EMs, there should be separate elderly homes for EMs. The Secretariat would explore further to see if the matter could be a future discussion topic.
   3. Further to the earlier discussions, a Member asked for suggestions on how information on support services could be disseminated to the EM community more effectively apart from the conventional media. The Chairperson said that WFSFAA had mentioned about a host of publicity including promotional visits to newly completed public housing estates, Islamic centres, mosques, etc. She added that the Home Affairs Department could also assist by promoting through our district network. In addition, she invited Members to provide other suggestions which would be forwarded to the relevant departments for consideration.
   4. On the suggestion of establishing a high-level commission to coordinate the effort of various Government bureaux and departments in the provision of support services to EMs, a Member suggested that EMs should be invited to take part in the proposed steering committee to be chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration. The Chairperson replied that the details were still being finalised and Members would be informed in due course.
   5. A Member noted that the public health system was overburdened and the situation could be alleviated by admitting medical practitioners qualified from overseas. The Chairperson said that this matter fell outside the scope of work of the Home Affairs Department and should be referred to the Food and Health Bureau for consideration.
   6. The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

**Home Affairs Department**

**March 2018**