

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1461/00-01
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 9 April 2001 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP (Chairman)
Hon CHAN Yuen-han (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon LI Fung-ying, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee

Members Absent : Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung

Public Officers Attending : Item III
Mrs Carrie LAM, JP
Director of Social Welfare

Miss Diane WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare (Welfare) 2

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Mrs HO CHAN Wai-king, Justina
Chief Social Work Officer (Family and Child Welfare) 1
Social Welfare Department

Item IV

Mrs Carrie LAM, JP
Director of Social Welfare

Mr HO Wing-him, JP
Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 2

Ms Annette LEE
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare
(Elderly Services) 1

Mrs Eliza LEUNG
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly)

Item V

Mr HO Wing-him, JP
Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 2

Mr Robin GILL, JP
Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 3

Mrs Brenda FUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare (Welfare) 1

Miss Diane WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare (Welfare) 2

Mr John DEAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs 7

Ms Ann LAU
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child Welfare)

Mrs Rachel CARTLAND, JP
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security)

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Clerk in Attendance : Ms Doris CHAN
Chief Assistant Secretary (2) 4

Staff in Attendance : Miss Mary SO
Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 8

I. Confirmation of minutes of meeting held on 12 March 2001
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1227/00-01)

The minutes were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1228/00-01(01) and (02))

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting to be held on 14 May 2001 -

- (a) Re-organisation of Social Welfare Department;
- (b) Development of integrated care services for elders; and
- (c) Progress report on home care and meal services.

III. Recent upsurge of street sleepers
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1228/00-01(03))

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Director of Social Welfare (DSW) gave a power point presentation on the recent upsurge in the number of street sleepers and a three-year action plan to help these street sleepers, as detailed in the Administration's paper. A replacement sheet to the Annex to the Administration's paper, which set out a list of non-government organizations (NGOs) providing back up support to the three pilot projects under the three-year action plan, was tabled at the meeting (see **Appendix**).

4. Dr YEUNG Sum welcomed the Administration's decision to provide able-bodied street sleepers who were Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients with discretionary grant for rental deposit, as requested by members at the

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meeting held on 8 November 1999. Dr YEUNG expressed concern over the growing number of able-bodied street sleepers who were younger in age and had received some formal education, and enquired whether the Administration would consider conducting a mid-term review of the effectiveness of the three-year action plan to help street sleepers. Noting that the overall utilisation rate of shelters/hostels for homeless people was only about 70%, Dr YEUNG enquired whether this was due to the facts that these shelters/hostels had limited opening hours and were not conveniently located.

5. DSW responded that the Administration would be more than happy to conduct a mid-term review of the effectiveness of the three-year action plan to help street sleepers. Indeed, the Department intended to closely monitor the action plan on a more frequent basis. Findings of the review would be submitted to members for consideration in due course. As to why shelters/hostels for homeless people had spare capacity, DSW said that she would need to gather more information before an answer to the question could be given. DSW pointed out that many of these shelters/hostels were in fact centrally located in districts such as Yau Tsim Mong, Sham Shui Po and Wan Chai, and that those with limited opening hours, say, from 6:00 pm to 10:00 am on the following day, were run by NGOs on a self-financing basis. SWD had previously held discussions with the NGOs concerned about the possibility of extending the opening hours of their shelters/hostels, but the NGOs had difficulty in doing so because of financial constraint. Nevertheless, the Administration would continue to explore with the NGOs concerned on ways to enable them to extend the opening hours of their shelters/hostels. One possible way was to deploy some of the \$794,000 contingency fund, which was set aside from the \$8.73 million Lotteries Fund (LF) grant for implementing the three-year action plan, to provide financial assistance to those NGOs operating shelters/hostels on a self-financing basis.

6. Regarding the trend that more street sleepers were younger in age, DSW said that although the recent economic downturn had contributed to the rising unemployment rate of young people, it should be noted that some young people had low motivation to find employment despite the availability of jobs. A case in point was that NGOs providing services to people with disabilities had encountered difficulty in recruiting or retaining young people to work as programme assistants. Dr YEUNG remarked that the main reason why some young people were reluctant to work as programme assistants in the NGOs concerned was because they were not sure about the type of works they needed to perform as programme assistant. DSW responded that, as mentioned at the last meeting held on 12 March 2001, SWD would hold several briefing sessions for potential applicants about the nature of the work of programme assistant, after NGOs had had some experiences in recruiting programme assistants with the funding provided to them for the creation of the remaining programme assistant posts by end of April 2001.

7. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan noted that 927 of the 1 399 street sleepers registered with SWD as at February 2001 were CSSA recipients, and queried whether the reason why

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people on CSSA lived on the streets was because they were unaware of the availability of the special grants for rent and rental deposits, which was unlikely, or whether it was due to the fact that the existing rent allowance of \$1,505 per month was simply inadequate for them to seek accommodation in the private sector. Mr LEE further said that setting the maximum monthly income limit for single persons to be eligible for public rental housing (PRH) at \$6,200 was another contributing factor to an increase in the number of street sleepers, as low-income people, say, those earning \$6,300 a month would not be eligible for PRH and yet they could ill afford the rent in the private sector. In this connection, Mr LEE urged the Administration to review how the CSSA policy and the housing policy could be improved to better help street sleepers.

8. DSW responded that as the Computerized Social Security System only came into operation in October last year, SWD had insufficient management information to account for the phenomenon as described by the member. However, most street sleepers on CSSA only received the standard rate based on the average monthly payment captured in respect of those street sleeper CSSA recipients, i.e. \$2,555. It appeared that a proportion of street sleepers had either not applied for rent allowance or had not received the maximum allowance of \$1,505 a month. She believed that had they received the \$1,505 maximum rent allowance, they should be able to rent a bedspace in a hostel for single persons run by an NGO.

9. As regards how the housing policy could be changed to better help street sleepers, DSW said that she was not in a position to comment on the matter. She however pointed out that the income limit for applying for PRH should not have much impact on the street sleepers, as many of them were either unemployed or casual workers hardly earning the level of over \$6,000 a month. She further said that some street sleepers were not actually homeless. To her knowledge, some people who had homes in public housing estates in the New Territories still lived on the streets in the urban areas because they did not wish to spend money on transportation to find employment in the urban areas where there were more job opportunities for casual labour. Although SWD was not in a position to change the housing policy to better help street sleepers, various actions would be taken to help street sleepers find accommodation. For example, an additional emergency shelter in Wan Chai would be set up by St James' Settlement through a LF grant to augment transit accommodation services on the Hong Kong Island. To provide immediate financial assistance to street sleepers, the three NGOs commissioned to implement the three-year action plan, namely, St James' Settlement, the Salvation Army and Christian Concern for the Homeless Association, would each be provided with an emergency fund of \$80,000 to \$90,000 each year during the duration of the three-year plan to help street sleepers to meet expenses on meals, transportation, rental, etc. under a set of prescribed conditions.

10. The Chairman said that \$1,505 was not enough to rent a cubicle. For example, the monthly rent of a cubicle in Wan Chai was in the region of \$3,000 to \$4,000.

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Mr LEE Cheuk-yan also said that even the rent of a cubicle in less centrally located areas such as Tsuen Wan stood at about \$2,000 a month.

11. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan was of the view that the most immediate task of the three NGOs commissioned to implement the three-year action plan was to help the 927 street sleepers who were CSSA recipients to find accommodation. Mr LEE then enquired whether consideration would be given to increasing the amount of rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme.

12. DSW responded that the Administration would not introduce changes to the CSSA Scheme lightly to meet the specific needs of street sleepers, as the CSSA Scheme was not only targetted at street sleepers. A more practical approach would be to find out why some people chose to live on the streets, despite the fact that there was no shortage of accommodation catering for their need. DSW envisaged that with the implementation of a more integrated social work approach, the existing problem of shelters/hostels for homeless people not fully utilised and people needing such services not knowing how to gain access to them could be better addressed. DSW further said that merely increasing the rent allowance would not necessarily help street sleepers with special needs, such as drug abusers or ex-prisoners. In respect of the latter, discussion was being held with the Society for the Rehabilitation of Offenders on increasing the Society's accommodation services for ex-prisoners.

13. Mr Fred LI expressed concern that setting aside \$1.2 million from the \$8.73 million LF grant to commission the City University of Hong Kong (CityUHK) to carry out an evaluative research to assess the effectiveness of the three-year action plan to help street sleepers as well as existing services in tackling the problem of street sleepers would reduce the money available to the three NGOs concerned to implement the plan. In his view, funding for conducting the aforesaid evaluative research should be made separately. Mr LI further expressed concern that there was no mention in the Administration's paper about how the effectiveness of the three-year action plan would be assessed, and enquired whether one of the yardsticks would be a reduction in the number of street sleepers.

14. DSW responded that setting aside \$1.2 million to commission an evaluation on the provision of services for street sleepers was justified, having regard to the fact that the action plan would run for three years from 1 April 2001 to March 2004 and that no research on the service approach to help street sleepers had been conducted before. The evaluative research would include, among others, the setting up of a Client Information and Service Intervention Database System and formulation of performance standards and measurement tools to ensure resources were maximised to support street sleepers to resume a normal and self-reliant life. DSW further said that using reduction in the number of street sleepers to assess the effectiveness of the three-year plan was not entirely suitable, as a number of factors, such as economic downturn, could give rise to an increase of street sleepers, and that the number of

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street sleepers fluctuated greatly from time to time. Under the circumstances, the Administration concluded that the objective of the plan should not be on reducing the number of street sleepers, but on reaching as many street sleepers as far as possible so that early intervention could be provided to them to prevent them from becoming habitual street sleepers. DSW pointed out that the proposals submitted by the three NGOs concerned did contain output measurements. For example, one of them proposed to contact 200 new street sleepers, help 50 of them to find employment and another 50 to secure accommodations in a year. SWD however considered such outputs could be raised further, and had therefore asked CityUHK to include formulation of performance standards and measurement tools in its evaluative research on the services to street sleepers.

15. Regarding the concern about insufficient fund for the three NGOs concerned to carry out the three-year action plan, DSW said that there was no question of such a situation as over \$6 million from the LF grant would be apportioned to the three NGOs to undertake the new service of mid-night outreaching visits to contact the street sleepers in need of services and offering them immediate support and following them through with a continuum of services. DSW pointed out that money from LF was additional to Government's subvention to NGOs providing services to street sleepers, which currently stood at over \$10 million a year.

16. Responding to Miss CHAN Yuen-han's enquiry as to whether consideration would be given to setting up an inter-departmental working group to help able-bodied street sleepers to become self-reliant, DSW said that she did not see the need for such at this stage in view of the following actions taken/to be taken. Notably, the three NGOs would work with the Labour Department, retraining centres and employers to provide employment training and job placements as appropriate. The three NGOs would also interface with existing services to help street sleepers to become self-reliant. To complement the new approach and the work of the three NGOs, the three Street Sleepers Outreaching Teams of SWD would be re-engineered to strengthen collaboration among NGOs, SWD, other government departments, District Councils, etc. in order to ensure smooth coordination in delivery of services for street sleepers. In addition, under the Active Employment Assistance of the Support for Self-reliance Scheme, able-bodied street sleepers on CSSA would be assisted to get access to up-to-date labour market information and other support services to overcome barriers to work. They would be helped to develop personalised action plans to find work. DSW further said that SWD would, where practicable, liaise with other government departments to provide more support and assistance to street sleepers in order to help them to become self-reliant and stop living on the streets.

17. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed support for the three-year action plan to help street sleepers. Mr CHEUNG further said that the main reasons why accommodation at shelters/hostels for homeless people was not fully taken up were due to the facts they imposed too many rules on the users and were located away from

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places where street sleepers lived. To remedy the situation, Mr CHEUNG enquired whether consideration would be given to setting up transit shelters similarly to those run by the Home Affairs Department for people needing a place to stay during cold weather and typhoon. Such a transit shelter for street sleepers should be close to the places where street sleepers lived so as to enable them to walk in at anytime to stay and/or to store their belongings. He was of the view that, through this arrangement, street sleepers would feel more at ease in using transit shelters for accommodation, and this, in turn, should make it easier for the outreaching teams to contact and offer assistance to them.

18. DSW responded that at present some of the shelters/hostels for homeless people were already providing the sort of accommodation suggested by Mr CHEUNG. DSW pointed out that the main difficulty in setting up an emergency shelter/transit hostel for street sleepers did not lie in the cost, but in finding a place which was accessible to street sleepers and also acceptable to people living in the vicinity. In order to avoid criticisms about the need to construct additional shelters/hostels for street sleepers when the existing ones were not yet fully utilized, DSW said that SWD would be happy to consider increasing additional emergency shelters/transit hostels for street sleepers if there was a genuine demand.

19. Mr WONG Sing-chi expressed support for adopting a case management approach in helping street sleepers. Mr WONG however considered that in order for such assistance to be effective, it was imperative that the policies of other government departments should complement that of SWD to help street sleepers. In this connection, Mr WONG enquired whether SWD would liaise with other government departments in this regard and urge them to provide more immediate support and assistance to the street sleepers referred to them. Mr WONG further enquired whether SWD would bring it to members' attention if the policy of a certain government department would affect or had affected the efforts made by SWD and the NGOs in helping street sleepers.

20. DSW replied in the positive to Mr WONG's first question, as it was incumbent upon SWD to take a leading role in helping street sleepers. Nevertheless, as SWD had no authority over other government departments, she could not give a guarantee that they would follow SWD's advice. As to Mr WONG's second question, DSW said that the mid-term review of the three-year action plan would include how the policies of other government departments had affected the efforts made by SWD and the NGOs in helping street sleepers.

21. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that if members had any suggestions to help street sleepers, they could take them up with the Administration after the meeting.

IV. Regulation of private residential care homes for the elderly
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1228/00-01(04))

22. DSW briefed members on the progress made on the regulation of private residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and on further initiatives to improve service standards of these homes detailed in the Administration's paper. In particular, DSW said that all private RCHEs which had previously been allowed to operate under a certificate of exemption (CoE) had completed all the requisite improvement works to meet licensing requirements within March 2001. While all private CoE homes were licensed, five subvented and two self-financing CoE homes, due to extensive improvement works involved, would only be able to complete improvement works under progress within the coming three to nine months. As these seven subvented and self-financing homes were generally providing satisfactory service and having regard to the interests of the elders living in those homes, a decision had been made to allow them to remain on CoE after March 2001. As regards further initiatives to improve the service standards of these homes, DSW said that they would include enhancing training for staff of RCHEs, providing sufficient information to the elders and their families to facilitate choice of RCHEs, aligning the 19 Service Quality Standards (SQSs), which had been introduced to all subvented welfare services by phases since April 1999, with licensing standards in terms of management, health and care provision and where possible to further enhance service quality, and stepping up prosecution actions against non-compliance homes breaching licensing conditions.

23. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan referred to a recent incident whereby an elderly person died in a private RCHE, and enquired whether this was due to the lack of knowledge of the staff of the residential care home concerned and/or the fact that the staff concerned had been working long hours. Mr LEE said that to his knowledge, the working hours of staff in many Bought Place Scheme (BPS) and Enhanced Bought Place Scheme (EBPS) homes had far exceeded the eight working hours per staff requirement under both Schemes. In this connection, Mr LEE enquired whether action would be taken to ensuring that all BPS/EBPS homes would adhere to the eight working hours per staff requirement.

24. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly) (ADSW(E)) responded that the coroner's court had just ruled that the death of the elderly person mentioned by Mr LEE was an accident. ADSW(E) further said this was an unfortunate incident, as the elderly person concerned was in the process of being assessed for transfer to another care and attention home because of deteriorating health. ADSW(E) conceded that at present not all BPS/EBPS homes adhered to the eight working hours per staff requirement because of operational needs. ADSW(E) however assured members that SWD would step up actions to ensure that such a requirement would be complied with by BPS/EBPS homes, particularly the new ones. For example, when inviting private RCHEs to participate in running of new homes to be introduced through the form of competitive bidding shortly, applicants would be required to submit information on

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how they could meet the eight working hours per staff requirement in the light of the service standards they planned to deliver. Mr LEE further enquired whether private RCHEs, other than BPS/EBPS homes, would be required to comply with the eight working hours per staff requirement. ADSW(E) responded that such a requirement could not be imposed on private RCHEs which were not under the BPS/EBPS at this stage.

25. Referring to paragraph 19 of the Administration's paper which stated that the 19 SQSs covering four major areas, namely, Provision of Information, Service Management, Service to Clients and Respect the Clients' Right had been introduced by phases to all subvented welfare services, Mr WONG Sing-chi enquired whether consideration would be given to introducing the same or similar set of SQSs to all private RCHEs; and if so, whether periodic inspections would be carried out by SWD to these homes to ensure their service quality. He noted that although prosecution actions had been taken against the private RCHEs, it was all due to the fact that they had been operating without a valid CoE/licence and none was for malpractices that were detrimental to the welfare of the elders. In this connection, Mr WONG wondered whether this showed that monitoring of the service delivery of private RCHEs by SWD was inadequate.

26. ADSW(E) replied in the positive to Mr WONG's first question. As all private RCHEs were now licensed, it was the Administration's plan to align SQSs with licensing standards in terms of management, health and care provision and where possible, to further enhance service quality. On the suggestion of carrying out inspections to all private RCHEs, ADSW(E) said that this had always been done by SWD. For example, 5 292 inspections had been carried out to all private RCHEs in 2000. Out of these inspections, 664 irregularities were detected. Amongst them, 37% of them were about building and fire safety, 20% were about management and 40% were about health and care provision. Once a RCHE was found to have failed to comply with a particular licensing standard, SWD would give the operator concerned a verbal warning on the spot, to be followed by an advisory letter. If the requirements set out in the advisory letter had not been complied with within a specified period, a warning letter would be issued. If still no action had been taken to meet the requirements stipulated in the warning letter, a second warning letter would be issued. In 2000, 102 verbal warnings, 219 advisory letters, 65 cases with one warning letter and 19 cases with two warning letters had been issued by SWD. ADSW(E) pointed out that as all RCHEs concerned had eventually managed to make rectifications after the issue of warning letters, no prosecution actions had therefore been taken to revoke their licence or CoE. Moreover, before deciding whether a prosecution action should be taken against a RCHE, due regard had to be given to the interests of the elders living in the home concerned. ADSW(E) further said that SWD would consider, in consultation with legal experts, ways and means to step up prosecution actions against non-compliant homes breaching licensing conditions in order to deter any malpractices that were detrimental to the welfare of the elders.

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27. Ms LI Fung-ying said that although each private RCHE operator was required to comply with the licensing standard on the number of staff required to deliver residential care services, the practice of a consortium of private RCHEs deploying the same staff to work in other RCHEs under their management was not uncommon. In this connection, Ms LI enquired about the actions which would be taken by SWD to address the problem. DSW responded that SWD had attempted to follow up on cases similar to that described by Ms LI. No prosecution action had however been made against any private RCHEs for not complying with the licensing standard on manpower, as the private RCHEs concerned could make swift rectification to comply with the requirement.

28. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong urged the Administration to introduce expeditiously an "accreditation" system so that elders and their families could have more information to facilitate their choice of RCHEs. As all RCHEs were by now licensed save the seven subvented and self-financing homes described earlier, Mr CHEUNG enquired whether consideration would be given to publicising the names of those RCHEs which had received warning letters for failing to comply with the licensing conditions, and whether consideration would also be given to not allowing a consortium to operate all of its RCHEs if one or several of its RCHEs had frequently failed to comply with the licensing conditions.

29. DSW responded that as the operations of RCHEs were essentially a labour-intensive industry and since they were operating on a 24-hour basis, it would entail huge resources if close monitoring on them were to be carried out. In the Administration's view, a better way was to provide more information on all licensed RCHEs, such as a brief on their services, to the elders and their families to facilitate their choice of RCHE. DSW was of the view that consumer choice and market force was a far more effective tool to keep RCHEs, particularly the private ones, on their toes to ensure service quality. If elders and their families considered the services of a particular RCHE substandard, it would not be possible for the RCHE concerned to survive in the long run. On the timing for the setting up of an "accreditation" system, DSW said that this would take some time to implement as the Administration considered it more appropriate for such a system to be undertaken by an independent non-government body to ensure impartiality. Regarding the suggestion of not allowing a consortium to operate all of its RCHEs if one or several of its RCHEs had frequently failed to comply with the licensing conditions, DSW said that she would need to seek legal advice as to whether this was legally feasible. It should however be noted that although no prosecution actions had been taken against private RCHEs for not complying with the licensing conditions, it did not mean that no inspection had been made to these homes to ensure compliance. On the contrary, each private RCHE had been visited by SWD staff on an average of 10 times last year and all these visits were made randomly. As to the suggestion of publicising the names of those RCHEs which had received warning letters for failing to comply with the licensing conditions,

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DSW said that SWD would consider doing it if this was not in violation of natural justice. She would be happy to approach the Consumer Council shortly to discuss the latter's experience in this regard.

V. Welfare issues in the Report of the HKSAR of the People's Republic of China in the light of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the Report)

30. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that although the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the Committee) had repeatedly urged the Government to adopt a poverty line in Hong Kong, the Report nevertheless revealed that no progress had been made in this area. In this connection, Mr LEE enquired whether the Administration would maintain its stance of not adopting a poverty line in Hong Kong when attending the hearing of the Committee in Geneva later this month.

31. Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 3 (DSHW3) said that there was no official definition of poverty in Hong Kong and there were various approaches for defining poverty. He pointed out that some NGOs defined poverty in relative terms, setting the poverty line at, say, half the median wage, or half of the median household income, or some other similar benchmark. But this approach would mean that even the most affluent societies would always contain a group of people regarded as "poor", which in the Administration's view, was unsound. Other NGOs had defined poverty in terms of income distribution. But such analyses took no account of intangible income derived from Government spending on housing, health and education, etc. DSHW3 further said that although there was no poverty line in Hong Kong, it had always been Government policy to help people in need and those who had difficulty in earning a living. For example, the CSSA Scheme ensured that no one was denied medical care, food, shelter and other basic needs.

32. The Chairman noted that in responding to a question raised by the Committee as to what extent the rates of assistance paid through the CSSA Scheme had provided for a decent standard of living for its recipients, the Administration had replied that CSSA payments did provide the recipients with an acceptable standard of living, having regard to the fact that at present the estimated average monthly CSSA payments for households of various sizes were higher than the average monthly expenditure of non-CSSA households in the lowest 25% expenditure group. In this connection, the Chairman enquired about the reason for deciding that households in the lowest 25% expenditure group should be used as a basis for comparing the adequacy of the CSSA Scheme.

33. Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 2 (DSHW2) explained that stating that the estimated average monthly CSSA payments for households of various sizes were higher than the average monthly expenditure of non-CSSA households in the lowest 25% expenditure group was merely for comparison purpose. DSHW2 further said that what the Administration's reply meant was that the existing rates of assistance paid through the CSSA Scheme did provide the recipients with an acceptable standard of living.

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34. The Chairman said that the Administration's replies to the Committee did not indicate whether the existing services provided by SWD and the NGOs to victims of domestic violence were adequate. In this connection, the Chairman enquired whether such services were adequate, having regard to the fact that the three refuge centres set up to provide temporary accommodation for battered women and their children were sometimes fully taken up and had to turn some people away. For example, one of the three refuge centres, the Harmony House Ltd., had recently turned away 20 battered spouse cases in need of refuge.

35. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child Welfare) (ADSW(FCW)) responded that to strengthen protection to victims of child abuse and spouse battering, SWD had expanded the three Child Protective Services Units into five regional-based Family and Child Protective Services Units since April 2000. Senior social work practitioners of these Units adopted a coordinated and proactive approach in protecting and assisting victims and their families facing crisis of domestic violence with a package of counselling, financial, medical, accommodation, psychological and legal assistance. A multi-disciplinary approach was adopted by concerned government departments and professionals in providing this package of services. ADSW(FCW) further said that the overall utilisation rate of the three refuge centres, namely, the Wai On Home for Women run by SWD and the Harmony House Ltd. and the Serene Court run by NGOs, was about 90%. She however pointed out that the utilisation rate was particularly high during the holidays periods. Although the Wai On Home for Women had a capacity of 40 places, no one had ever been turned away because it was fully occupied.

36. ADSW(FCW) said that in view of the increased utilisation of the refuge centres during the holidays periods, SWD was currently conducting a review to see whether more refuge centres should be provided. In considering such, due regard would be given to the likelihood that demand for refuge centres would decrease with the setting up of the Family Crisis Support Centre in 2001/02, having regard to the fact that the Centre would act as a focal point to tackle family crisis at an early stage by providing hotline service, short-term, emergency intervention with overnight accommodation and temporary retreat. Moreover, if more immediate assistance could be provided to the battered spouses and/or their children, the lesser time they would need to stay at the refuge centres, and this, in turn, should help to reduce the demand for the centres. Responding to the Chairman's further enquiry as to whether consideration would be given to expanding the capacity of the two refuge centres run by the NGOs, ADSW(FCW) said that this might not be feasible due to building constraints.

37. Miss CHAN Yuen-han referred to paragraph 148 of the Report which stated that the Government did not understand the reference contained in the Concluding Observations on the previous report by the Committee regarding parents having to obtain their children's consent before they could receive CSSA benefits, and was of the view that such a response from the Government was misleading because it did not

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tell the fact that elderly persons living with their children were not eligible for CSSA if their family income exceeded the limit. DSHW2 responded that in the past, an elderly person living with an adult child could apply for CSSA independently if the latter declared that he would not provide financial support to the applicant. However, under the existing practice, if an elderly person lived with his/her adult child, SWD would look at the income of the family as a whole before determining whether the family concerned was eligible for CSSA. The reason why the Government's response was such in the Report was because it was responding to the Concluding Observations made by the Committee in 1996 when the old practice was in use. DSHW2 assured members that the Administration would clarify this point to the Committee at the hearing if necessary.

VI. Information paper on implementation of Enhanced Productivity Programme in the subvented welfare sector
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1228/00-01(05))

38. Members did not raise any queries on the progress of implementing the Enhanced Productivity Programme in the subvented welfare sector.

39. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:48 p.m.

Legislative Council Secretariat
10 May 2001