

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1739/00-01

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 May 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 David CHU Yu-lin
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 CHOY So-yuk
Hon LI Fung-ying, JP
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee

Public Officers Attending : Item III

Mrs Carrie LAM, JP
Director of Social Welfare

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

Mrs Patricia CHU, BBS, JP
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)

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Mrs Eliza LEUNG
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

Item IV

Mrs Carrie LAM, JP
Director of Social Welfare

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

Mrs Eliza LEUNG
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

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

Item V

Mrs Carrie LAM, JP
Director of Social Welfare

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

Mrs Eliza LEUNG
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

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

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

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

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I. Confirmation of minutes of meeting held on 9 April 2001

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1461/00-01)

The minutes were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1462/00-01(01) and (02))

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting to be held on 11 June 2001 -

(a) Healthy Ageing;

(b) New expenditure initiatives for the disabled arising from the 2001 Budget; and

(c) Progress report on Support for Self-reliance Scheme.

3. As regards the item "Review of rehabilitation services for mental patients" which was on the list of issues to be considered (LC Paper No. CB(2)1462/00-01(01)), the Chairman said that he would liaise with the Chairman of the Panel on Health Services to decide whether this item should be discussed at the meeting of the Panel on Health Services in July 2001.

4. Ms Cyd HO proposed to discuss the Concluding Observations made by the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the first Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China in the light of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in either June or July 2001. As the Concluding Observations covered many policy areas, the Chairman said that he would liaise with the Chairman of the Panel on Home Affairs to decide on how best to follow up the matter. Members agreed.

III. Re-organisation of Social Welfare Department

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1462/00-01(03))

5. At the invitation of the Chairman, Director of Social Welfare (DSW) gave a power point presentation on the proposals to re-position Social Welfare Department (SWD) to better meet changing needs in social welfare, as detailed in the Administration's paper. DSW said that subject to members' advice and support, the Administration planned to approach the Establishment Subcommittee of the Finance

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Committee (FC) before 20 June 2001 to effect the necessary changes involving directorate posts.

6. Although it was noted that SWD had fully consulted its staff on the re-positioning exercise and that feedback from staff was generally positive and supportive of the re-organisation, Miss CHAN Yuen-han nevertheless considered that it was worthwhile to hear the views from the staff side. Dr YEUNG Sum concurred with Miss CHAN. The Chairman said that he would liaise with the staff associations concerned to see whether they would like to give their views on the subject before a special meeting would be arranged. Members agreed.

7. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan enquired about the impact of the re-positioning exercise on non-civil service contract staff in SWD. DSW responded that it should not impact much on its non-civil service contract staff. At present there were two main groups of non-civil service contract staff in SWD, namely, the 103 Employment Assistant Coordinators (EACs) employed to assist in the implementation of the Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme and the 100-odd Social Security Assistants (SSAs) employed to assist in the processing of social security cases. DSW however pointed out that the EAC was not an established grade or rank in the civil service and the posts were not on the permanent establishment of SWD, whereas the SSA posts were. The reason for hiring people on non-civil service contract terms to fill the permanent SSA posts was because SWD needed additional manpower to cope with increased workload but could not recruit civil servants to fill the SSA vacancies due to the general freeze on civil service recruitment implemented in 1999-2000.

8. DSW said that with the lifting of the recruitment freeze with effect from 1 April 2001, a plan was now underway to recruit civil servants to fill the SSA posts. As the turnover rate of non-civil service contract SSAs was quite high and having regard to the fact that these contract SSAs were a suitable source of candidates to fill the SSA posts, she would like to retain some of them as staff on civil service terms. The Civil Service Bureau had recently announced that heads of departments/grades had the discretion to reduce the probation period in respect of individual new appointees who were formerly non-civil service contract staff serving in the department concerned on similar duties and on whom the department concerned had prior performance records. DSW further said that the arrangement for SSAs on non-civil service contract terms could not be applied to the EACs, as the latter were specifically funded and engaged for the SFS Scheme. Consideration could only be given to these posts in the light of the way forward for SFS Scheme.

9. Noting from the power point presentation made by DSW that one of the reasons for re-organising SWD was to make the provision of welfare services more people-centred and client-based, Mr WONG Sing-chi enquired in what ways the proposed SWD structure was different from the present one to enable it to achieve such objective.

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10. DSW responded that making the provision of welfare services more people-centred and client-based could be achieved in at least two ways under the new SWD structure. Firstly, the disbandment of the five Regional Offices (ROs) would facilitate the streamlining of administrative and operational practices and improve the decision-making process in response to district matters. The 13 District Social Welfare Workers (DSWOs), to be upgraded to D1 rank, would be responsible for and accountable to her through the two Deputy Directors and would have direct access to the Headquarters Service Branches and be involved actively in the planning and co-ordination of welfare services at district level. Secondly, Social Work Officers and Assistant Social Work Officers currently in the Youth Office (YO) and Rehabilitation and Elderly Office (REO) within the district office would be pooled to become members of a Planning and Co-ordination Team (PCT) in the district. In addition to carrying out YO and REO duties in a more flexible and integrated manner, the PCT would carry out district-wide liaison, district-based planning, networking and collaboration duties. An outreaching team would be formed as an executive arm of the PCT, of which it would be manned by pooling the Social Work Assistants of YO and REO. DSW however pointed out that bureaucracy was a culture which could not be easily eradicated with the implementation of a new structure. Nevertheless, the re-positioning of SWD was a major first step in the right direction.

11. Mr WONG Sing-chi expressed concern that if the planning of welfare services was made on a district basis, there would be inconsistency in the implementation of welfare policies. DSW responded that there was no question of such a situation. Although the role of DSWOs would be strengthened as a district planner and service co-ordinator under the new structure, they would still be required to plan their provision of welfare services in accordance with the welfare policies set out at the headquarters level. DSW referred members to the Administration's paper (LC Paper No.CB(2)1462/00-01(04)), to be discussed later at the meeting, which illustrated how the provision of integrated care facilities and services for elders would be carried out at district level in accordance with the policy objectives set out at the headquarters level.

12. Dr YEUNG Sum welcomed SWD's objective to make the provision of welfare services more people-centred and client-based, and hoped that it could deliver what it set out to do.

13. Mr Henry WU hoped that SWD would collaborate more with District Council (DC) members on the implementation of welfare policies. He cited a recent case whereby SWD failed to consult the Eastern DC members about the construction of an integrated center in the Eastern district. Mr WU further asked the Administration to re-consider a suggestion made by the Eastern DC members to set up a designated welfare office in the Eastern district, having regard to the fact that the Eastern district

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was quite different from the Wan Chai district in population characteristics, even though at the moment Eastern and Wan Chai came under one SWD district.

14. DSW responded that it was not feasible at the moment to re-align the SWD districts with the DCs but the span of control would be taken into account in determining the actual resources of individual DSWOs. In the case of the SWD district supporting Eastern and Wan Chai DCs, SWD intended to increase the number of Assistant District Social Welfare Officers from the existing two to three under the new structure. As regards the case cited by Mr WU, DSW agreed that consultation with DC should have been carried out even if the project concerned was not funded by the Government but was run by an non-governmental organisation (NGO) on a self-financing basis. In this connection, SWD staff had given an assurance to the Eastern DC members that SWD would improve communication with them.

15. Ms Cyd HO enquired whether, upon the disbandment of ROs, the DSWOs would have greater autonomy in deciding how welfare services should be provided in their districts, including having the discretionary power to deal with Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) applications/cases, or that the powers currently given to ROs to oversee the District Offices would go back to the headquarters level.

16. DSW replied in the positive to Ms HO's question. To better support the DSWOs in dealing with CSSA applications/cases, the number of Senior Social Security Officers would be increased from five to seven to oversee the Social Security Field Units in 13 SWD districts. Apart from this, DSWOs would have a free hand on the use of resources allocation to them to organise local activities, including manpower deployment. DSW further said that the only power currently given to the Regional Officers and which would be taken back by the Headquarters upon the disbandment of ROs was the power to make decision on career development and posting. In this connection, a Human Resources Management (HRM) Branch would be formed at the headquarters level to put in place a comprehensive and dedicated system and structure to address the human resources issues such as manpower planning, recruitment, training and development, performance management, posting and succession planning. DSW pointed out that the setting up of the proposed HRM Branch was made in response to feedback from staff who were concerned that their career development and posting might be confined to the districts they were serving if DSWOs were given the power to make decisions on the career development and posting of staff under their management.

17. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that members were generally supportive of the proposed re-organisation. Subject to the views of the staff associations concerned, arrangement would be made to invite them to give their views on the re-positioning exercise before it was considered by the Establishment Subcommittee in June.

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(Post-meeting note : A special meeting would be held on 8 June 2001 to meet with representatives of three staff associations of SWD.)

IV. Development of integrated care services for elders
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1462/00-01(04))

18. Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare (DSHW) briefed members on the Administration's paper which detailed the Government's long-term strategy on the development of integrated care facilities and services for elders. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services) (DDSW(S)) then introduced the three pilot projects, detailed in Annex B of the Administration's paper, which were planned for commissioning this financial year.

19. Dr YEUNG Sum expressed support for the general direction of providing care and services for elders in an integrated manner, and was of the view that better planning of facilities and manpower requirement were integral to the successful implementation of integrated care facilities for elders. In this connection, Dr YEUNG urged SWD to liaise with the relevant government department(s) on identifying suitable sites for the construction of integrated care facilities for elders, instead of the existing arrangement of placing day care centres (DEs), multi-service centres (MEs) and social centres (SEs) on the ground floor of a public housing estate or next to a shopping mall. Dr YEUNG further urged SWD to review the manpower requirement of an integrated care facility, as the staff establishment of a DE/ME/SE would no longer be an appropriate model for adoption in an integrated care facility.

20. DSW responded that although converting existing centres into integrated care centres for elders was not the most ideal arrangement, it would nevertheless be very wasteful to move them away from the existing buildings and find alternative sites to accommodate them. DSW however assured members that better planning of integrated care facilities could be achieved in new districts. SWD would not force service providers to re-align their existing care and support services for elders to provide an integrated care services for elders. SWD agreed with the consultants' observation that the best idea of integration might come from the service agencies and frontline workers. Hence, a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach was preferred when taking the initiative forward. To this end, a total of 12 pilot projects, including the three pilot projects detailed in Annex B of the Administration's paper, were planned for commissioning within this financial year. Addressing Dr YEUNG's concern about the service providers not being given adequate resources to provide integrated care services for elders, DSW said that in addition to the \$27 million earmarked for implementing the 12 pilot projects, SWD had diverted an additional \$12 million from its budget for implementing the pilot projects.

21. Dr YEUNG further enquired whether discussion had been held with the Hospital Authority (HA) regarding its provision of medical and health services to the long term care clients of the integrated care facilities, such as by sending doctors to come to the DEs to provide medical and health services to the elders. DSHW responded that a working group comprising, amongst others, representatives from

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local organisations and HA, had been set up by the Health and Welfare Bureau (HWB) to examine how the interface between medical and health and direct welfare services for the older persons could be improved. A preliminary report of the working group would shortly be submitted to the Administration for consideration.

22. Referring to paragraph 14 of the Administration's paper which stated that with successful implementation of the district planning mechanism, there was no need to adhere to planning ratios for facilities rigidly, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed concern that in doing so there would not be any objective standards to assess the need for an integrated care facility for elders. Mr LEE also noted that the Administration had endorsed the consultants' recommendation that SEs should move away from directly organising recreation and leisure activities, and enquired whether this meant that in future the responsibility for organising recreational and leisure activities would be transferred to other organisations, such as the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), and that the district elderly community centres (DECCs) would only publicise and help the elderly to enroll in the recreational and leisure activities organised by other organisations.

23. DSHW clarified that the Administration had no intention to abandon the planning ratios for facilities, but it would not adhere to them rigidly in the planning of integrated care and services for elders. The reason being that it was equally important to take into account the needs and specific characteristics of elders in the district and the local circumstances. DSHW pointed out that in view of the increasing need for elderly services, the Administration had increased resources in this regard in the past few years, the level of which had in fact exceeded what it would have been called for under the planning ratios. The number of beds in the care and attention homes was a case in point. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan maintained the view that if the planning ratios for facilities were not required to be followed rigidly, there would be a lack of objective standards to assess the need for a facility. DSW agreed to convey Mr LEE's concern to the committee set up by HWB to review the planning of welfare services in Hong Kong.

24. Responding to Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's enquiry as to whether SEs and the future DECCs would no longer organise recreational and leisure activities for elders, DDSW(S) said that the moving away from providing direct recreational and leisure activities for elders would be gradual. DDSW(S) explained that the reason for doing so was to implement a new concept in services for healthy elders recommended by the consultants whereby SEs and DECCs would, instead of providing direct recreational and leisure activities for elders, act as a facilitator by referring elders to recreational and leisure activities organised by other organisations and government departments. Such an arrangement would allow SEs and DECCs to take on greater responsibility in promoting healthy and active ageing and in satisfying the psycho-social needs of older persons, rather than concentrating on provision of recreational programmes. Moreover, the new centres would engage the elders in their operation, as engaging

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elders in this regard was believed to be one of the most effective ways to continue to empower the elders. DDSW(S) further said that SWD had reached a consensus with the now-dissolved Recreation and Sports Services (RSS) two years ago that RSS would be the main provider of recreational and leisure activities for elders. In the event that the recreational and leisure activities provided by RSS could not cope with demand from elders, SEs would suitably organise the same to meet elders' needs.

25. Mr Frederick FUNG said that in the redevelopment of public housing estates in developed areas, the Housing Department (HD) would sometimes set aside some blocks of buildings therein for elders. In this connection, Mr FUNG was of the view that SWD should liaise with HD about the possibility of using, say, the lower floors of these dedicated buildings for elders, for constructing an integrated care and services centre. DSHW responded that HWB had already requested HD to identify suitable public housing estates for trying out the DECC concept.

26. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted the Administration's proposal to facilitate the development of self-financing services and programmes for older persons of independent means in future, as it was envisaged that older persons of the next generation would generally be more affluent than that of the older persons of this generation. In this connection, Mr CHEUNG enquired whether the Administration would continue to subsidise those elders of little or no financial means to participate in the elderly services and programmes. DSHW replied in the positive.

27. Mr WONG Sing-chi enquired whether consideration would be given to increasing the staff establishment of an integrated care facility, particularly the professional personnel, having regard to the varied services such a facility would provide. As the operator of an integrated care facility would be given a lump sum grant to operate the facility, Mr WONG expressed concern that the operator concerned would hire non-professional staff to perform the duties of a professional staff in order to save money. In this connection, Mr WONG enquired about the actions which would be taken by SWD to avoid such a situation from happening.

28. DDSW(S) replied in the positive to Mr WONG's first question. DDSW(S) further said that in cases where there was already an established network of centres in the vicinity and with justified additional demand, the Administration would be prepared to consider re-provisioning certain service units or recommending the incumbent service provider(s) to set up a service sub-base. In green field situations, the Administration intended to provide additional resources as necessary for new facilities including more space to enable them to take up a larger scope of service. On the monitoring of service performance of the operating agencies providing integrated care services for elders, DDSW(S) said that the Contract Management Unit (CMU) of SWD would conduct random audits and regular reviews to ensure operators' compliance with the contract requirements stipulated in the Funding and Service Agreement (FSA)). It should be pointed out that the service requirements specified in

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the FSA would be more stringent than that specified in the FSA of the past. Taking the Tung Chung Areas 30 and 31 project as an example, the FSA concerned would contain specific standards in relation to the service rendered to users, including both output and outcome measures. DDSW(S) also said that although it was the Administration's intention to introduce competitive bidding to the provision of elderly services in light of the contracting out experiences with the meal and home care services, the introduction of such would not be applied to the 12 projects mentioned earlier. These projects would be delivered through rationalisation and re-engineering of existing facilities operated by NGOs.

V. Progress report on home care and meal services

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1462/00-01(05))

29. DSW introduced the Administration paper which detailed the progress of the home care and meal services provided by contracted operators, and the actions which would be taken by the Administration to help the existing 139 home help teams to better meet the needs and expectations of the elders and the disabled.

30. The Chairman drew members' attention to a case conference on contracting out of meal service held on 30 March 2001. The relevant minutes of the meeting and the Administration's written response to the issues of concern raised at the meeting had been issued to members vide LC Paper CB(2)1491/00-01 on 9 May 2001.

31. Although the results of the customer satisfaction survey on home care and meal services were favourable and that a stringent system to monitor the service performance of contracted operators had been put in place, Dr YEUNG Sum nevertheless remained very skeptical about the benefits of adopting competitive bidding in welfare services. Dr YEUNG pointed out that many studies had shown that introducing competitive bidding in welfare services would adversely affect the relationships between operating agencies and undermine service quality given that profit was often the prime concern of the operators.

32. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the fact that results of the customer satisfaction survey on home care and meal services were favourable did not necessarily mean that provision of the services under the contracted mode was better than that based on the conventional subvention mode, having regard to the fact that the service users were the socially-disadvantaged who considered themselves fortunate to get the services and therefore would rarely complain about the services received. Mr LEE pointed out that the issue discussed at the case conference mentioned in paragraph 30 above was an evidence that the provision of meal service under the contracted mode fell short of being satisfactory.

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33. DDSW(S) responded that SWD welcomed the opportunity presented by the case conference to learn about the service deficiencies of one of the contracted operators of meal service, and informed members that much of the said deficiencies had been satisfactorily addressed by the operator concerned. As the contracting out of home care and meal services was a pilot scheme, DDSW(S) conceded that there was room for improvement and monitoring work had been stepped up by SWD to ensure that the contracted operators fully complied with the requirements and standards set out in the contracts. Noting that the existing home help teams were provided with cars to help them deliver meals to the elders and the disabled, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan enquired whether such an arrangement was also required of the contracted operators of meal service. DDSW(S) responded that although it was not specified in the contract that the operators of meal service must provide their staff with a car to deliver meals to the users, operators were nevertheless required to make the most appropriate arrangement under their operating circumstances to see that the meals would reach the users in a condition specified in the contract, say, the temperature of the meals must be of a level as specified in the contract.

34. Miss CHAN Yuen-han expressed concern about the double standards in evaluating the service performance of the existing home help teams and the contracted operators of home care and meal services, and enquired about the actions which would be taken by the Administration to address such.

35. DSW responded that the apparent double standards used in evaluating the service performance of the existing home help teams and the contracted operators of home care and meal services were due to the fact that different standards were set : the existing 139 home help teams were governed by a FSA with certain Service Quality Standards which were general service standards governing the process of service, whereas very precise and specific standards in relation to the service rendered were applied to the contracted operators of home care and meal services. DSW further said that the Administration was well aware of the fact that the mode of operation and services provided by the existing home help teams were not sufficiently flexible and updated to meet the current needs of the elders and the disabled. However, as the existing conventional home help teams might not possess adequate skill to perform home-based personal and nursing services which were a more prominent component in the re-engineered home care contracts (i.e. at present, 90% of the work of the home help teams was on delivering meals and helping the elders and the disabled to clean their homes, whereas 40% of the work of the staff of the contracted operators of home care service was on providing personal and nursing care to the elders), it would not be possible to ask them to provide more home-based personal and nursing care services within a short period. Under these circumstances, SWD intended to work in consultation with stakeholders to identify the most cost-effective way to upgrade and strengthen existing home help service under the conventional mode and apply a similar monitoring system to that of the home care and meal services to enable continuous service improvements to meet the needs and expectations of service users.

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36. Mr WONG Sing-chi said that some service users of home care and meal services much preferred the existing home help teams staff over the staff of the contracted operators of home care and meal services, and wondered whether this was due to the fact that the former had better attitude and were more enthusiastic in their jobs than the latter. In this connection, Mr WONG enquired whether consideration would be given to conducting a study in this regard.

37. DSW expressed reservation about the usefulness of the study suggested by Mr WONG, as there was no scientific method to gauge how staff attitude as a whole was affected by the mode of provision of their services. DSW said that commissioning an external agency to conduct a customer satisfaction survey on the home care and meal services was the best way to gauge users' response under the circumstances. To better understand users' response to the home care and meal services, DSW said that SWD would consider engaging an external body in conducting a longitudinal study on the recipients of the home care and meal services.

38. The Chairman said that there was a need to realign the existing fragmented home care and meal services, which comprised four different components, namely, the existing home help service based on the conventional subvention mode, home care service and meal service under the contracted mode and the enhanced home and community care service. DSHW responded that it was the objective of the Administration to rationalise and realign the provision of home and community care services for the elders. The long term aim was to have one model of service delivery, but as many existing service providers and clients were involved, the realignment process would take time.

39. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that home care and meal services was very important to the frail elders, particularly to those living alone or that their family members had little time to take care of them. As home helpers and carers were often the persons the elders met most frequently, Mr CHEUNG hoped that if home helpers and carers detected any problems of the elders, they would convey the problems to their management so that appropriate follow-up actions could be taken. DDSW(S) responded that this was also the direction of SWD in the provision of home care and meal services. To this end, training had been provided to home helpers and carers to enable them to be more sensitive to the needs of the elders. DDSW(S) further said that the existing fragmented home care and meal services were not conducive to meeting the needs of frail elders living at home. To rectify the situation, the Administration had therefore introduced the enhanced home and community care service in 2001, which was an integrated form of services for the frail elders with the aim of enabling them to age at home. It was hoped that through this new service, the objective of making welfare services more people-centred and client-based could be better met.

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

Legislative Council Secretariat

7 June 2001