

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1251/01-02
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 4 February 2002 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP (Chairman)
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Bernard CHAN
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 Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS

Public Officers Attending : All Items

Mrs Carrie LAM, JP
Director of Social Welfare

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

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Item II

Mr KOK Che-leung
Chief Social Work Officer (Information Systems and Technology)
Social Welfare Department

Item III

Mr LEE Wing-wai
Assistant Director of Social Welfare
(Subventions and Performance Monitoring)

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

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

I. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1033/01-02(01) to (03))

Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting to be held on 11 March 2002 at 10:45 am -

- (a) Implications on the provision of social welfare services from the recent population statistics;
- (b) Proposed scheme to encourage provision of residential care homes for the elderly premises in new private developments; and
- (c) Family violence.

II. Implementation of Phase II of the Information Systems Strategy of the Social Welfare Department
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1033/01-02(04))

2. At the invitation of the Chairman, Director of Social Welfare (DSW) gave a power point presentation on -

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- (a) Phase II of the Information Systems Strategy (ISS) of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) which involved the development of a department-wide technical infrastructure (TI) and a client information system (CIS); and
- (b) The consequential arrangements to be put in place in dealing with surplus staff arising from the TI/CIS implementation and the proposed development of a similar information system for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the social welfare sector.

as detailed in the Administration's paper. DSW further said that subject to members' views, funding would be sought from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council for Phase II implementation in March 2002.

3. Dr YEUNG Sum expressed support for the implementation of TI/CIS in SWD and for extending the implementation of the CIS to the whole NGO sector providing welfare services. Dr YEUNG, however, hoped that no SWD staff would become redundant as a result of the TI/CIS implementation and that the confidentiality of client personal data would be protected.

4. DSW responded that no civil service staff in SWD would become redundant as a result of the TI/CIS implementation, and assurance on this had been made to the staff side. To ensure that the computerisation project would not give rise to any civil service staff redundancies, appropriate arrangements would be devised especially given the overall restraint in the number of civil service posts throughout the Government. For example, as a special arrangement, the anticipated 131 surplus staff in the General Grades would be returned to their respective Heads of Grades as and when re-deployment elsewhere to fill existing vacancies within the civil service was possible, without awaiting the commissioning of the computerisation project. DSW assured Dr YEUNG that SWD attached great importance to protecting data privacy, and work was being conducted to ensure that the proposed systems were in line with the requirements of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance.

5. Ms Cyd HO asked the following questions -

- (a) Whether other policy bureaux/government departments, such as the Police, could have access to the database held by the CIS; and
- (b) Whether the anticipated 44 surplus staff in the Departmental Grades would be deployed to fill non-social work posts.

6. DSW replied in the negative to Ms HO's first question, as the CIS was designed to provide a workflow-based database which collected and shared client data across SWD for operational, management and planning purposes. This would enable SWD to improve the use of its resources and provide better and more effective levels of client service. Furthermore, SWD would not lightly disclose client personal data to

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other policy bureaux/government departments without strong justification. DSW further said that SWD would report to members on the management of data privacy and security of the CIS once study on them had been completed. DSW said that the same degree of privacy and vigilance was observed in the Computerised Social Security System and that no personal particulars of service users would be input into the System without their prior consent. According to the Code on Access to Information, service users wishing to know what kinds of their personal data were kept by SWD could write to SWD to request for such.

7. As regards Ms HO's second question, DSW said that the anticipated 44 surplus staff in the Departmental Grades would be deployed to fill other social work and related posts within SWD. The arrangement was one of normal posting, not changing job nature. For example, an Assistant Social Welfare Officer (ASWO) currently working in a medical social services unit might be transferred to work on the Family Support Networking Team run by the Family Support and Resource Centre upon deletion of the ASWO post in the former setting. DSW further said that she did not envisage any difficulty in deploying all these 44 staff to other social work posts which were expected to become available through natural wastage within the next few years, having regard to the fact there were some 2 000 social worker posts in SWD.

8. Ms HO further enquired whether consideration could be given to enabling SWD clients to view their personal data held by the CIS through self-help kiosks. DSW responded that the CIS did not have the feature described by Ms HO. She felt that the point made by Ms HO had public service-wide implications and should better be dealt with under the e-government strategy. She agreed to convey Ms HO's suggestion to the Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau for consideration.

9. Ms LI Fung-ying enquired why SWD now only proposed a total deletion of 178 posts arising from the TI/CIS implementation, which were at variance with a total deletion of 313 posts identified in the Feasibility Study on TI/CIS. Noting that a helpdesk would be set up to deal with staff's requests for redeployment and posting out of SWD, Ms LI asked whether this indicated that a lot of grievances from the anticipated 131 surplus staff in the General Grades were expected.

10. DSW explained that SWD had taken into account the following two factors in coming up with its decision to reduce the number of deleted posts from 313 to 178. Firstly, there had been considerable changes in SWD's establishment and the delivery of welfare services since the completion of the Feasibility Study on TI/CIS in 1999. These included the Enhanced Productivity Programme, efforts to contain the size of the civil service, the re-organisation of SWD with the disbandment of regional offices and the implementation of the Service Performance Monitoring System. Secondly, findings of the six-month Case Management Pilot Project involving 50 frontline staff from 12 service units in Kwun Tong indicated that the use of electronics might not save as much professional manpower as envisaged in the Feasibility Study. A decision was therefore made to reflect as realisable savings only one-quarter of the staff in the Departmental Grades identified in the Feasibility Study. DSW further said that

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although the number of posts to be deleted had been greatly reduced, a notional staff savings of some \$102 million was expected, given the large number of service units and staff who would benefit from the enhanced efficiency under TI and CIS. This included savings arising from reduced or eliminated staff effort and time in the areas covered by the projects. While it was not practicable to realise the time and effort savings spread over a large number of offices and staff, SWD was committed to absorbing additional workload generated by the increasing number of individuals and families seeking welfare services in the few years following system implementation with these fragmented staff savings.

11. DSW clarified that the setting up of a helpdesk was merely to provide more accessible assistance to the affected staff in dealing with their redeployment requests. DSW further said that grievances from the anticipated 131 General Grades surplus staff should be minimal, having regard to the special arrangement to be put in place mentioned in paragraph 4 above and the fact that some 90 General Grades staff had already requested for posting out of SWD. DSW added that every effort would be made to see that affected staff were deployed to posts which they preferred as far as practicable.

12. The Chairman enquired whether staff were genuinely satisfied with the measures that management would put in place to deal with the surplus staff arising from the TI/CIS implementation. The Chairman further enquired how SWD had come about with the calculation that investment on TI and CIS would break even in October 2008, i.e. in 46 months following the CIS go-live.

13. DSW shared that she had met representatives of General Grades staff and members of Departmental Consultative Committee (DCC) personally in January 2002 to share with them on the arrangements. Although she would not wish to confirm on behalf of staff that they were genuinely satisfied with the measures that management would put in place to deal with the surplus staff arising from the TI/CIS implementation, DSW said that it was nevertheless indicated to her that they found these measures agreeable. For example, representatives of the General Grades in SWD had told Civil Service Bureau staff attending the DCC that the arrangement of returning the surplus General Grades staff in phases to their respective Heads of Grades as and when redeployment elsewhere to fill vacancies within the civil service was possible, without awaiting the commissioning of the computerisation project, should be adopted by other departments in similar situation. DSW further said that the staff side supported the plan to proceed with the implementation of TI/CIS, as they understood that further computerisation of the work of SWD was essential to the efficient operation of SWD and the delivery of quality welfare services to meet changing needs of the community. As to how the investment on TI and CIS would break even in October 2008, DSW referred members to a cost and benefit analysis of ISS's Phase II set out in Annex 4 to the Administration's paper.

III. Implementation of Lump Sum Grant - An Update

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1033/01-02(05))

14. DSW briefed members on the Administration's paper which detailed the progress on the implementation of the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) subvention system since its introduction on 1 January 2001.

15. Dr YEUNG Sum said that the implementation of LSG might not be as smooth as was depicted in the Administration's paper, as there were complaints from senior social workers that their salaries and benefits had been reduced after the NGOs they served joined LSG.

16. DSW admitted that she had also heard that there were such complaints, but pointed out that it was very difficult to tell whether these complaints were genuine if the complainants did not come forward or take their case to the Lump Sum Grant Steering Committee (LSGSC). DSW said that only one staff complaint had been handled by the LSGSC since its inception in May 2001. To avoid the occurrence of staff complaints relating to the implementation of LSG, the Help Centre had been and would continue to conduct workshops and seminars targetting at enhancing the human resource management skills and knowledge of managers of NGOs on LSG. Management of NGOs on LSG was also encouraged to follow the best employment practices set out in the LSG Manual. DSW further said that she did not see any reason for NGOs on LSG to reduce the salaries and benefits of their existing staff, as sufficient funds had been provided for them to meet the contractual provident fund obligations and in the payment of salary increments. Furthermore, with the introduction of various new welfare services since mid-2001, there were now even more reasons for agencies to retain their experienced social workers for developing innovative proposals for seeking new service units.

17. Mr LAW Chi-kwong expressed concern that some NGOs on LSG might try to save money by not filling vacant recognised subvented posts. In this connection, Mr LAW requested the Administration to find out whether the rising trend in the number of occupational injuries of home helpers was due to the fact that their employers did not hire adequate home helpers in order to save money. Mr LAW opined that one way of finding out whether an NGO on LSG was trying to save money by not hiring people to fill vacant recognised subvented posts was to see whether its annual financial report (AFR) showed an unreasonable amount of surplus.

18. DSW responded that she was equally concerned about the rising trend in the number of occupational injuries of home helpers. To minimise the occurrence of such, actions had been taken to strengthen the occupational health and safety of home helpers. This was particularly timely and necessary, having regard to the fact that 70 home help teams would be upgraded in 2002-03 to enable more elders with higher levels of frailty to live at home. DSW, however, pointed out that there was no evidence to support that the rise in the number of occupational injuries of home helpers was due to the fact that they were overburdened with work because their

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employers failed to hire enough people to provide the service. DSW agreed with Mr LAW that examining AFR was one way to find out whether an NGO on LSG was trying to save money by not hiring people to fill vacant recognised subvented posts, and this had been done. DSW told members that having examined the 2000-01 AFRs, no unreasonable amount of surplus was found in all agencies, with the exception of one whose case was considered acceptable because of its small size and the unique circumstances. In addition, no significant discrepancy in the number of staff between the reporting year and the previous year was found in these agencies. However, she admitted that since LSG was only launched on 1 January 2001, longer time was needed to observe any noticeable differences. DSW added that SWD would continue to monitor the situation and would follow up any exceptional reports.

19. Mr Frederick FUNG enquired whether the remaining 34 NGOs currently not on LSG were required to join LSG within a specific timeframe. DSW replied in the negative to Mr FUNG's question. DSW further said that SWD would continue to address issues of concern of these 34 agencies to ensure that they could continue to participate in an active manner in the betterment of welfare services and to help them assess their readiness to join LSG. Responding to the Chairman's enquiry, DSW clarified that while it remained the policy objective of the Administration to fund all welfare services on the basis of LSG, there was no mandatory timetable requiring NGOs to move on to LSG on a compulsory basis. DSW, however, pointed out that all new subvented welfare services were put on the LSG mode.

20. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that there was a tendency for NGOs on LSG to offer unfair and unreasonable employment terms for new staff in order to save money, as the LSG subvention system only safeguarded the interests of existing staff, i.e. those being employed by the same agencies on 1 April 2000, and allowed agencies to determine the employment terms for new staff. As a result, there were many incidents whereby agencies only offered short-term employment contract to new staff, say, for six-month or one year, with no salary increment when the contract was renewed. There were also incidents whereby a registered social worker was paid a welfare worker grade salary. In the light of this, Mr LEE urged SWD to impose on NGOs on LSG standard staffing structures, levels of pay and staff qualification to avoid low staff morale, which in turn would undermine service quality.

21. DSW responded that it would defeat the purposes of implementing LSG if Mr LEE's suggestion was adopted. Moreover, she could not see that the provision of welfare services had deteriorated as a result of the implementation of LSG. DSW further said that it was nothing new that the remuneration package of new staff might not be as good as that of the existing staff of the same rank. For example, the starting salaries of new recruits in the civil service had also been reduced since June 2000, some even by 30%. As welfare services were client-oriented, quality of staff and stability of workforce were of paramount importance. To this end, SWD was actively considering the idea of making good employment practices adopted by agencies as one of the yardsticks for allocation of funding to them. In order to safeguard the interests of workers of little or no skills, DSW said that providing these workers with

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reasonable pay and setting down a reasonable working hours for them had been included in the tendering requirements for residential care home for the elderly.

22. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan enquired whether consideration could be given to requiring NGOs on LSG to offer a three-year contract for new staff at the outset, to be renewable for a further three years subject to satisfactory performance. Where a staff had satisfactorily completed his two contracts with the agency, permanent employment should be offered. DSW responded that it would be against the spirit of LSG subvention system if SWD should impose such a requirement on agencies. Nevertheless, she agreed to put forth Mr LEE's proposal for discussion at the future experience-sharing session to be attended by NGOs on LSG.

23. Ms LI Fung-ying enquired about the reason for developing agency-based Funding & Service Agreements (FSAs). DSW explained that was to align service monitoring with the flexibility of agencies to deploy their resources allowed under LSG. DSW further said that the use of an agency-based FSA was not new. For example, service agreements of the Hospital Authority and the Equal Opportunities Commission with the Government were also agency-based. DSW added that in other aspects of interaction with NGOs, such as allocation of funding for minor maintenance, an agency-based appraisal was adopted. She said that the intention was to select several NGOs on LSG on a voluntary basis to try out the agency-based FSAs in 2002-03. DSW added that using an agency-based FSA was also conducive to promoting good corporate governance and employment practices, as this would enable SWD to have a better grasp of how well agencies had handled staff relations. Ms LI expressed concern that an agency might cease to provide services which were costly to run, if the agency-based FSAs were adopted. DSW responded that this situation would not occur, as the agency-based FSAs would still specify the requisite services to be provided by the agencies, such as through a schedule annexed to the agreement.

24. The Chairman hoped that the Administration would pay due attention to feedback from service users and staff, so as to ensure that service quality would not deteriorate as a result of implementing LSG. DSW assured members that this would be done. DSW further said that since the implementation of LSG, participation from service users in the governance of the agencies had increased. For example, service users were increasingly involved in assessing the performance of agencies and sometimes even took part in selecting service providers. DSW reiterated that there was no reason for agencies to reduce the salaries and benefits of their existing staff, as sufficient funds had been and would be provided for them to honour the contractual commitments with them. She had repeated to NGO staff on numerous occasions that they should raise with the LSGSC if they felt they were being unfairly treated by their employers.

25. Mr WONG Sing-chi said that SWD should conduct a survey on the terms of conditions of NGO staff to find out which agencies had been exploiting their staff, instead of relying on NGO staff to lodge complaints with the LSGSC. DSW responded that if Mr WONG's suggestion was acceded to, SWD would be criticised

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by agencies for interfering in their internal affairs. Moreover, there was no reason for agencies to reduce the salaries and benefits of their staff who were in their employ on or before 1 April 2000 because sufficient funds had been and would be provided for them to honour the contractual commitment with their existing staff. Notwithstanding, DSW considered it worthy to conduct a survey on the terms and conditions of staff who were in the employ of NGOs on LSG after 1 April 2000 after the LSG subvention system had been in operation for a longer period of time. In the intervening period, SWD would follow up with those agencies whose AFR showed unusually low staff expenditure compared with that of the previous year despite the fact that the delivery of services remained unchanged.

26. Dr YEUNG Sum expressed support for SWD to conduct a survey on the terms and conditions of staff who were in the employ of NGOs on LSG after 1 April 2000, and urged that it be done as soon as practicable. Mr LAW Chi-kwong said that the existing social workers manpower system collected information on the terms and conditions of social workers, including their salaries and whether they were contract staff.

27. The Chairman said that the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and the Society for Community Organization had sight of the Administration's paper, and did not raise any query.

28. In summing up, the Chairman said that members would continue to monitor the implementation of LSG and hoped that everything would continue to go well and smoothly.

29. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:18 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 March 2002