

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2702/01-02
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 8 July 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)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP
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, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee

Member Absent : Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP

Public Officers Attending : All items

Mrs Carrie LAM, JP
Director of Social Welfare

Item III

Dr E K YEOH, JP
Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

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Mrs Carrie YAU, JP
Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mr Patrick NIP
Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services)

Mr Robin GILL, JP
Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Welfare)

Item IV

Mrs Eliza LEUNG, JP
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

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

Item V

Mr David WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Security (B)

Miss Bonnie WONG, CSDSM, JP
Assistant Commissioner of Correctional Services (Rehabilitation)

Mr FUNG Man-chung
Acting Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Youth & Corrections)

**Deputations by
Invitation** : Item V

Society for Community Organisation

Mr HO Hei-wah
Director

Mr NG Wai-tung
Community Organizer

10 representatives of ex-prisoners

The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong

Mr CHAN Fu-sai, Simon
Rehabilitation Services Officer

Mr NG Wang-tsang, Andy
Support Services Officer

Mr LO Kam-fu, James
Assistant to Chief Executive

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

Staff in Attendance : Ms Janet SHUM
Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 9

I. Confirmation of minutes of meeting held on 10 June 2002
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2496/01-02)

The minutes were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2497/01-02(01) and (02))

2. The Chairman informed members that a special meeting would be held on 15 July 2002 to discuss the issue of financial assistance for elders. In this connection, the Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services) (DSHWF) said that the Administration had responded to the issue at the Legislative Council meetings on 8 May 2002 and 5 June 2002 and in public recently, and it could provide no additional information regarding the progress of the review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme (CSSA) and the Old Age Allowance Scheme (OAA) at this stage. DSHWF pointed out that as the issue was complex and only a preliminary study was being made, it would take time for the Administration to conduct an in-depth review and come up with a detailed proposal. Nevertheless, DSHWF said that representatives of the Administration would attend the special meeting to listen to the views of the deputations on the issue.

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3. Members agreed not to hold meetings during the summer recess unless urgent matters requiring immediate attention came up.

III. Briefing session for the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food to exchange views with Panel members on the priority issues on social welfare

4. The Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (SHWF) said that he would like to seek members' views on the priority issues on social welfare. As to members' concern on the issue of financial assistance for elders, SHWF said that the Administration would conduct an overall review on the provision of CSSA and OAA for elders. As the issue was complex, time and careful consideration were required to formulate a long-term policy.

5. Ms LI Fung-ying enquired whether the Administration had any new proposals for providing assistance for people with low income other than the CSSA Scheme in view of the high unemployment rate. SHWF said that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) had been implementing measures to assist the unemployed. For example, under the Support for Self-reliance Scheme, the unemployed CSSA recipients were given active employment assistance. Retraining and counselling services were also provided for the unemployed school-leavers. SHWF further said that it would require co-ordination among bureaux to jointly tackle the unemployment problem. On the part of SWD, the enhancement of elderly care services had contributed to an increase of job opportunities for the public.

6. Ms LI Fung-ying further enquired whether the Administration would provide unemployment assistance as a new initiative to alleviate the immediate financial problem of the unemployed who were not CSSA recipients and to relieve hardship of the low-income families. In response, SHWF said that the disregarded earnings under the CSSA Scheme was aimed at providing incentive to take up work. SHWF pointed out that the Administration would examine whether the goals set for the provision of CSSA for the four target groups of recipients including the unemployed, the single parent families, the aged and the disabled had been achieved. Although the Administration had considered it not necessary to introduce unemployment security, it would continue to implement measures such as the launching of retraining programmes and create job opportunities for the unemployed. The role of SWD in future would be to continue providing welfare services in line with the overall policy objectives of the Government.

7. In view of the Administration's objective to reduce the real growth in government expenditure to an average of 1.5% each year from 2002-2003 to 2006-2007, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan enquired whether SHWF would ask for additional resources from the Financial Secretary (FS) or instead trim down the services to make up for the shortfall in the medium term. SHWF responded that the Administration would examine whether the provision of welfare services had achieved its targets and set

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priority according to the needs of the society. SHWF further said that FS had already stated that the Government would be committed to providing a safety net to cater for people's basic livelihood needs and CSSA would be maintained at the current level for the time being. However, in view of the resources involved in OAA and CSSA Schemes for elders, it was prudent for the Government to examine whether there were other options in utilising the resources more effectively and efficiently to target even greater assistance to those elders most in need.

8. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan pointed out that in prioritising the provision of services to those most in need, it was important that the Administration should also provide assistance for the less vulnerable whose needs should also be taken care of. Mr LEE stressed the importance of maintaining the level of assistance to the needy as there would be social costs such as a possible increase of suicide and crime rate if the provisions were withdrawn.

9. In reply to Mr LEE's question whether he would fight for additional resources for welfare services in view of the economic downturn, SHWF said that he would try his best to obtain additional resources. However, as a first step, he would work with the Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (PSHWF) and the Director of Social Welfare (DSW) to see whether the recurrent expenditure of SWD could further be rationalised through integration, revamping and re-engineering of services.

10. In response to the Chairman's suggestion of singling out the expenditure on CSSA, and making it an overall financial responsibility of the Government so that SWD could re-examine its expenditure exclusive of the gross expenditure on CSSA, SHWF said that he would give thought to the suggestion.

11. Mr LAW Chi-kong considered that the future provision of welfare services should be in line with the central policy to provide employment assistance to those in need. In this connection, he drew the Administration's attention to a motion passed at the Legislative Council meeting on 15 May 2002 urging the Government to formulate appropriate measures to increase employment opportunities of people with disabilities who were able to work. Mr LAW also considered it important that the Administration should formulate a long-term policy for elders as soon as possible and implement early measures to prevent the rise of elderly problems in the future. He said that SHWF should also inform the public of SWD's strategy to contribute to the development of social capital in Hong Kong. As to the fiscal arrangement of SWD in the future, Mr LAW said that under the accountability system, the Administration should also take into account public opinions on the matter and keep the public informed about the process involved in the formulation of the budget. Mr LAW further said that the level of provision for CSSA should not be reduced particularly in time of economic downturn and should be regarded as the overall responsibility of the Government.

12. In view of the fact that FS and DSW had separately commented on the future provision of CSSA in public, Mr Fred LI enquired why issues relating to the policy

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portfolios of SHWF were not announced by him who was the accountable official. Mr LI also requested SHWF to provide members with a timetable as regards the review on financial assistance for elders and his five-year-term political agendas before the next legislative session so that the Panel would be in a better position to discuss and follow up on the relevant issues.

13. Mr WONG Sing-chi enquired how far the new Bureau would respond to and follow up the recommendations made by the Commission on Youth to assist the unemployed school-leavers. Mr WONG said that the Administration should assess the feasibility of the recommendations and co-ordinate among the Bureaux to formulate policy for implementation of the recommendations. Mr WONG pointed out that while the school-leavers were advised to seek jobs in the Mainland, policy should be formulated to provide assistance to them such as offering them advice in this regard.

14. Miss CHOY So-yuk enquired about the Administration's population strategy and said that it would have direct implications on the future provision of welfare services. She said that in view of the 180 days' absence allowed for elders under the OAA scheme, elders who had exceeded their absence period could not claim their allowances. Miss CHOY enquired whether SWD would review the 180 days' absence allowed under the OAA scheme in the future.

15. Dr YEUNG Sum considered that from the perspective of welfare services, the provision of CSSA should be increased rather than reduced in time of economic downturn and high employment rate. Dr YEUNG said that the Administration had not imposed any capping of expenditure on CSSA in the past and should not do so in the future. Dr YEUNG considered that SHWF, PSHWF and DSW had good reasons to fight for a case that the provision for CSSA should not be capped.

16. In response to Mr LAW Chi-kwong's concerns raised in paragraph 11 above, SHWF said that the Administration would continue to accord high priority to elderly services which had been one of the most important work targets of the Administration. As to the development of social capital, it was a prime concern of the Chief Executive and the relevant Bureaux would continue to co-ordinate among themselves to achieve the goals set in this aspect. SHWF said that he would put forward members' views on welfare expenditure at the time of the formulation of the budget, such as the issue whether the provision for expenditure on CSSA should be capped or not. Nevertheless, SHWF pointed out that other policy areas requiring huge public expenditure such as education, which was accorded high priority in the Government agenda, would also compete for resources.

17. In response to the questions raised by Mr Fred LI in paragraph 12 above, SHWF said that he would brief members on the policy objectives of the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) after the Policy Address of the Chief Executive in January 2003. SHWF further said that it was the concern of the Government as a whole that it should continue to provide a safety net for the public in time of economic

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downturn. He assured members that there was no concrete plan to reduce the level of CSSA at present.

18. In response to Mr WONG Sing-chi's concerns expressed in paragraph 13 above, SHWF said that he had regularly met with the Chairman of the Commission on Youth and had taken note of the Commission's recommendations. Although issues concerning the creation of work opportunities and re-training fell outside the scope of HWFB, he would put forth the proposals to other Bureaux or Departments for follow-up.

19. As to the issue of population strategy raised by Miss CHOY So-yuk in paragraph 14 above, SHWF said that the Chief Executive was committed to completing the review in a year's time. The HWFB would offer advice to the Government from the perspective of welfare provision. As to the absence period allowed for OAA, SHWF said that the issue would be included in the overall overview of the CSSA and OAA Schemes.

Adm 20. SHWF reiterated that there was no timetable as to when the review of CSSA and OAA would be completed, but he assured members that the Administration would report to the Panel and consult the public on any proposed changes.

21. In response to the Chairman's request that the Administration should provide members with a report stating its policy portfolios on welfare services, SHWF said that he needed time to work out the future strategy with PSHWF and DSW and could only provide members with a report after the Policy Address of the Chief Executive.

Adm 22. As to Ms Cyd HO's enquiry as to the discussion items for Panel meetings held before the Policy Address in January 2003, SHWF said that the Administration would provide members with papers on the preliminary proposals of various welfare issues. For example, the Administration would seek members' views on the preliminary review of the future system in the provision of social safety net before the relevant proposals were formulated as the policy objectives of the Government. SHWF said that the Administration would also consult its advisory bodies, the public and the professional bodies on the relevant welfare issues where needed.

23. Ms Cyd HO suggested that the Panel should take a more proactive stance to invite deputations to the Panel meetings early in the next legislative session so that the Administration could also consider their views in its decision-making.

24. In summing up, the Chairman said that the issues of concern raised by members at the meeting and that of family violence raised earlier should be included in the list of outstanding issues for discussions in the next legislative session.

IV. Re-engineering community support services for elders
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2497/01-02(03))

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25. At the invitation of the Chairman, DSW gave a power point presentation on the re-engineering of community support services for elders which was detailed in the Administration's paper and in the hard copy of the presentation materials provided to members in LC Paper No. CB(2)2576/01-02.

26. DSW briefed members on the plan to rationalise and re-engineer the wider spectrum of community support services for elders including all existing social centres, multi-service centres, home help, home care and meal services, and the guiding principles adopted in re-engineering the services. DSW also highlighted the development of the 15 integrated elderly projects over the territory which included the projects of day care centres, district elderly community centres (DECCs), neighbourhood elderly centres (NECs), and the provision of sub-base for existing social centres and multi-service centres.

27. Referring to paragraph 26 of the Administration's paper, Mr WONG Sing-chi enquired whether transitional arrangement would be made to assist elders to adjust to DECCs which replaced the social centres which they had joined. In addition, Mr WONG enquired whether the elders would be assisted in managing the premises of under-utilised social centres and running various programmes for their peers. Mr WONG further enquired whether the users would be consulted on the new arrangement under the re-engineering plan.

28. In response, DSW said that the District Officers of SWD would consult the district bodies such as the District Councils and the users after the detailed proposals submitted by the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) were firmed up. As the Elderly Commission (EC) had also expressed concern regarding the effect of the re-engineering plan on the users, SWD would ensure that the elders would be widely informed of the facilities and services of DECCs and advice would be given to them on using the facilities. As to Mr WONG's second question, DSW said that the proposal of using some premises released from the proposed re-engineering to develop elders self-managed groups was also suggested by EC. She added that the premises could be operated as a subsidiary unit of a NGO and SWD would follow up on the implementation of the proposal.

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29. Dr YEUNG Sum said that as the integrated elderly projects aimed to encourage NGOs to rationalise their services, the private sector should not be invited to submit proposals for such projects which should only be confined to NGOs concerned. DSW assured members that such re-engineering projects, with the 15 new integrated elderly projects commissioned since 2001, would only involve NGOs. However, SWD would continue to invite the private sector to submit tender for the running of new residential care homes for elders.

30. Referring to paragraph 19 of the Administration's paper, Ms LI Fung-ying expressed concern that the eight social centres run by the six single-service NGOs which were Community Chest (the Chest) members might be affected by the Chest's

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withdrawal of funding. She enquired whether their staff or users would be affected if the social centres encountered financial difficulties in the future. DSW said that she had discussed the matter with the Chest which had agreed to review the funding situation of these Chest members running small service units if they should have financial difficulties in the future despite SWD's proposed re-engineering which involved certain injection of new resources. DSW said that she would keep in view the situation and approach the Chest if such circumstances arose.

V. Rehabilitation policy for adult ex-prisoners

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1539/01-02(01), CB(2)2497/01-02(04) and (05))

31. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Principal Assistant Secretary (Security)(B) took members through the Administration's paper which detailed the rehabilitation policy for adult ex-prisoners and the Administration's response to the views of SOCO in its submission to the Panel.

32. Mr HO Hei-wah of the Society for Community Organization (SOCO) said that the 50% recidivism rate of local prisoners re-admitted to prisons within a period of three years indicated that the Administration's rehabilitation policy for adult ex-prisoners had not been successful. Mr HO made the following comments -

- (a) Assistance should be provided to ex-prisoners to seek jobs as according to a survey carried out by SOCO in January 2002, about 60% of the adult ex-prisoners were unemployed after they were released from prisons.
- (b) More attention should be paid to the rehabilitation needs of the adult (21 or above) and short-term (less than two years) prisoners as they comprised 88.7% of the total number of prisoners according to the statistics provided by the Correctional Services Department (CSD).
- (c) CSD should provide vocational training to the adult prisoners other than requiring them to do manual work so that they would become more equipped to seek jobs after their release from prisons.
- (d) Prisoners should all be provided with counselling and informed on the relevant welfare services and vocational training opportunities prior to their discharge.
- (e) An integrated approach should be adopted in the provision of aftercare services to the discharged prisoners so that they needed not turn to different organisations for assistance.
- (f) Accommodation should be arranged for the prisoners prior to their discharge when needed to prevent them from street sleeping while

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waiting for accommodation after their discharge and SWD should be more flexible in the provision of financial assistance to the discharged prisoners to meet their immediate needs.

- (g) The Administration should take the lead to employ ex-prisoners instead of setting an example of discrimination against them.

33. Mr HO called for the Administration to review its policy for the rehabilitation for adult ex-prisoners and pointed out that rather than building a new super prison or continuing to spend about \$14,000 per month on each of the prisoners, CSD should make better use of the resources to improve its rehabilitation services so as to reduce the rate of recidivism.

34. One of the ex-prisoners said that he encountered accommodation problem after his discharge. He was forced to street sleep for one and a half months before he was accommodated. He said that the lack of accommodation and the feeling of being abandoned by society would discourage the ex-prisoners' desire to live a new life.

35. Another representative of ex-prisoners said that he was forced to street sleep for almost a month after his discharge from prison. After a long-term imprisonment of 15 years, he found it difficult to integrate into society, particularly due to the lack of a secure dwelling place. He suggested that the Administration should arrange accommodation for prisoners who had been jailed for more than five years prior to their discharge.

36. The third representative pointed out that the \$30 allowance per day granted by the Society of Rehabilitation And Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP) was insufficient for the daily maintenance of a newly discharged prisoner. She said that the Administration should allow flexibility in granting CSSA or other forms of financial assistance for them. She said that without enough money to sustain their living, the discharged prisoners would easily revert to committing offences which would result in further imprisonment.

37. The fourth representative described his difficulties in seeking jobs as an ex-prisoner. He pointed out that prisoners discharged for less than two years were not entitled to apply for a permit to work as a security guard or a guard of estate property. He further pointed out that the Government had discriminated against ex-prisoners as the application form for Government posts required the applicants to declare any criminal offence record. He considered the declaration unnecessary and called for the Government to implement its policy to take a lead to employ ex-prisoners as laid down in Civil Service Regulation 148 and 151 and to advocate a non-discriminatory environment facilitating ex-prisoners to re-join the workforce.

38. Mr Simon CHAN presented the views of SRACP's as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2497/01-02(05)). In particular, Mr CHAN said that -

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- (a) The basic needs of ex-prisoners, if properly addressed, would help their rehabilitation. SRACP had encountered many difficulties in providing services to ex-prisoners such as accommodation and financial support due to constraint of resources.
- (b) Due to limited financial resources, SRACP could only provide discharged prisoners with two weeks' allowances. SRACP would work with SWD to improve the provision of financial assistance for discharged prisoners. To avoid the ex-prisoners falling into the social security net, SRACP had provided them with training sessions or referred them to join the training programme provided by SWD in the Support for Self-Reliance Scheme.
- (c) SRACP would work with SWD to look for suitable site for the building of a new hostel. In the meanwhile, ex-prisoners might have to seek accommodation in other single-person hostels.

39. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan asked the representatives whether they had been informed by staff of SWD that they could apply for discretionary payment if they were genuinely in need of additional financial assistance to meet their expenses. Mr LEE also enquired about the result of job-seeking services provided by SRACP.

40. One of the representatives said that instead of being informed of their eligibility to apply for discretionary payment, he was being referred to SRACP for financial assistance. Another representative said that it took him over one and a half months to be placed with a job.

41. Mr Andy NG of SRACP said that they had encountered a lot of constraints in helping ex-prisoners to find jobs. In fact, much of their effort had been put to assisting ex-prisoners to rehabilitate from drug addiction. The unfavourable economic environment, the lack of resources of SRACP, and the fact that 90% of the ex-prisoners only received lower form education and 70% were drug abusers made it very difficult to find jobs for the ex-prisoners.

42. DSW said that SWD had accorded priority to the rehabilitation problem of ex-prisoners in the last half year. She agreed that the provision of accommodation, financial assistance and employment were the main concerns of ex-prisoners which needed to be tackled. DSW said that she considered it not feasible or realistic to change the CSSA Scheme or introduce special provisions under this massive scheme to address the particular circumstances of the discharged prisoners noting the mounting pressure on CSSA arising from unemployment. The granting of discretionary payment under CSSA to the discharged prisoners would depend on the assessment of each individual case and the discretionary judgement of each District Officer. Referring to the experience in the operation of emergency funding disbursed by NGOs providing direct services to streetsleepers, under a one-stop approach in the 3-year action plan, DSW said that SWD was prepared to build on

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SRACP's present short-term cash assistance scheme and consider alternative emergency funding arrangements to ensure more timely provision of support to discharged prisoners. As for seeking employment, DSW said that it was only in recent years that assistance for employment had become a welfare issue. She said that SWD was currently managing various employment assistance programmes for the disabled persons and street-sleepers and for able-bodied CSSA recipients through the Special Job Attachment Programme and Intensive Employment Assistance Fund projects run by NGOs. Such services could be extended to ex-prisoners referred by SRACP. As for accommodation problem, DSW said that she had taken note of the need for additional provision of residential places for ex-prisoners. However, various attempts to use available government premises for such purpose failed because of possible local objection. SWD and SRACP would continue to search for suitable premises for setting up new-hostels. In the meanwhile, DSW would discuss with the relevant NGOs to ensure full use of the places in the existing singleton hostels.

43. Mr LAW Chi-kwong said that arrangement should be made to formalise the pre-release preparation service for prisoners so that it would become part of the regular procedures to be taken before discharge. In addition, Mr LAW disagreed with the objective set by SRACP that discharged prisoners should be encouraged to work rather than applying for CSSA. He considered it reasonable that if discharged prisoners had urgent financial need, they should be assisted to apply for CSSA.

44. Mr WONG Sing-chi was of the view that SRACP might have to re-prioritise its provision of services and make sure that its funds were used efficiently and effectively. Mr WONG suggested that SRACP should integrate with other NGOs of the welfare sector and make references to integrated approaches adopted in other realms of welfare services.

45. Mr Frederick FUNG considered that SRACP needed to re-prioritise its objectives as it might have wrongly used its resources to rehabilitate the addicted ex-prisoners instead of assisting them to find jobs.

46. In summing up, the Chairman said that in view of the current recidivism rate and the administrative cost of re-admitting repeated offenders, the Administration should review its services and support to ex-prisoners and adopt a more proactive approach to prevent them from recidivism.

VI. Any other business

47. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:20 pm.

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19 August 2002