

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2743/01-02
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Monday, 15 July 2002 at 2:30 pm
in the Chamber 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 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

Members Absent : Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee

Public Officers Attending : Mrs Brenda FUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services) 2

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

Action

Deputations by Invitation : Association for the Rights of the Elderly

Ms LAM Yu-kiu
Chairperson

Ms CHAU Suk-king
Executive Committee Member

Social Policy Committee of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions

Mr WONG Kwok-king
Vice-Chairman

Mr HO Yin-fai
Committee Member

Grey Power

Mr LEE Chik-kai

Mr LAM Siu-fai

Ms LEE Kam-yuk

Ms LEE Tsui-king

Joint Action Group to Fight for the Well-being of Elders

Mr WONG Jze-sam
Member

Mr LEE Chun
Member

The Hong Kong Association of Senior Citizens

Mr MAK Hon-kai, M.H.
Vice Chairman

Alliance Concerning CSSA

Ms CHENG Suk-ching, Dora
Representative

Action

Ms CHEUNG Yuet-fung
Representative

Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Dr WONG Hung
Vice-Chairman, Specialized Committee on Social Security and
Employment Policy

Ms Carmen NG
Chief Officer, Service Development (Elderly)

The Neighbourhood and Workers' Service Centre

Ms CHAN Tung-mui

Mr WAN Siu-kin

Mr NG Wing-chak

Senior Citizen Centre (Kowloon City),
Hong Kong Family Welfare Society

Ms YAU Wai-man
Centre-in-charge

Mr LAW Kin-ping
Retired

Mr LEUNG Wai-chung
Retired

Mr LAU Chuk-pang
Retired

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

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

I. Meeting with deputations

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2566/01-02(01) to (10))

The Chairman welcomed the representatives of the Administration and nine organisations present at the meeting. The Chairman then invited the representatives to give their views.

Association for the Rights of the Elderly (ARE)

2. Ms LAM Yu-kiu of ARE presented the views of ARE as detailed in its submission. In particular, Ms LAM urged the Administration to reconsider pursuing the old age pension scheme (OPS) previously discussed in 1994 to provide protection for elders approaching retirement whose income was too low for them to be benefited from the Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme (MPF). Referring to the examples of overseas countries in providing financial protection for the elderly discussed in the Second World Assembly on Ageing of the United Nations, Ms LAM said that the Administration should make references to the successful examples of other countries in providing future financial protection for elders. In addition, Ms LAM referred to the view expressed by Hon TAM Yiu-chung, Chairman of the Elderly Commission, on a public occasion that elders should continue to receive their Old Age Allowances (OAA) and suggested that the elders' representatives should request a meeting with Mr TAM and the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (SHWF) to express their views.

Social Policy Committee of the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (HKFTU)

3. Mr WONG Kwok-king of HKFTU briefed members on the salient points of HKFTU's submission. Mr WONG requested the Administration to clarify whether it was considering combining OAA with the CSSA Scheme. Mr WONG said that HKFTU objected to the combination of the two Schemes as the elders had always considered OAA as a tribute of social respect paid to them by the society. As many elders who might be eligible for CSSA preferred to live on OAA as their main source of income, Mr WONG urged the Administration to improve the OAA Scheme by cancelling the means-test for elders and increasing the amount to \$1,000. Mr WONG also called for the Administration to cancel the 180 days' absence limit for elders choosing to reside in the Mainland under the Portable CSSA Scheme.

Grey Power(GP)

4. Representatives of GP said that they objected to any proposal that elders over 70 would be means-tested in a new Scheme when OAA was combining with CSSA. The representatives said that it would not only involve additional administrative costs but would deter the elders from seeking assistance. The representatives said that since the Government had not introduced any retirement protection schemes in the past, many elders had to rely on OAA as an old age protection. The representatives also

Action

expressed similar views to HKFTU that the Administration should not only continue the provision of OAA but increase its amount to \$1,000 as the high cost of living, such as public utility charges, had not been lowered even in the time of economic downturn. The Representatives also expressed regret that SHWF did not attend the meeting to listen to their views.

Alliance Concerning CSSA (the Alliance)

5. Ms Dora CHENG of the Alliance took members through the Alliance's submission. Ms CHENG expressed similar views to those of HKFTU that elders preferred to receive OAA instead of CSSA in view of the social stigma that those relying on CSSA were lazy people. Ms CHENG urged the Administration to attend to the individual financial need of the elders separately from their families. She said that in combining OAA with the CSSA Scheme, the procedural requirement of means-testing would result in some elders losing their minimal income for daily maintenance and an increase in public expenditure when some elders would claim a higher amount under the CSSA Scheme. In addition, Ms CHENG shared the view that the Administration should allow elders to apply for CSSA independently from their family members. Ms CHENG also said that the Administration should reconsider the OPS proposed in 1994 which would include contributions from the employees, the employers and the Government.

Joint Action Group to Fight for the Well-being of Elders (FWBE)

6. Representatives of FWBE highlighted the salient points of FWBE's submission. The representatives expressed similar views to other deputations that OAA had a special deferential meaning for elders. In addition, they also expressed disappointment that the Government led by the Chief Executive (CE) not only failed to achieve its objective to provide a sense of security, belonging and worthiness for elders, but had instead tightened its financial support for elders by requiring them to apply for CSSA together with their family members, forcing them to live alone if they were to make an independent CSSA application.

The Hong Kong Association of Senior Citizens (HKASC)

7. Mr MAK Hon-kai took members through the HKASC's submission. In particular, Mr MAK said that while HKASC supported the Administration's intention to enhance assistance for those elders in need, it considered that the current OAA Scheme should continue as its social meaning could not be measured in monetary terms. Mr MAK said that OAA had provided a sense of security and worthiness for the elders, any adverse changes to the Scheme would lead to elderly problems such as suicide or worsened family relationship.

Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)

8. Referring to the views of the deputations in paragraphs 2 to 7 above, Mr

Action

WONG Hung of HKCSS said that it should be clear to the Administration that the elders unanimously opposed the combination of OAA with the CSSA Scheme. In the light of this, Mr WONG urged the Administration to -

- (a) continue the provision of OAA to elders over the age of 70 regardless of their means;
- (b) revise the CSSA Scheme so that elders living with family members could make an individual application for financial assistance to sustain their own daily expenses and contribute to reducing the financial burden of their family at the same time; and
- (c) consider a contributory old age retirement protection scheme in addition to the compulsory MPF Scheme by adopting the concept of pay-as-you-go so that the contributions jointly collected from this generation of workers, employers and Government would be paid out immediately to this generation of retirees.

Senior Citizen Centre (Kowloon City) Hong Kong Family Welfare Society (HKFWS)

9. Representatives of HKFWS expressed views similar to other representatives that the Administration should not cancel OAA by combining it with CSSA. In view of the strong objection of the elders, the representatives said that elders might organise a demonstration to show their opposition. In addition, the representatives suggested that the Administration should consider introducing legislation to require family members to support the elders. Referring to the social security system in the Mainland, the representatives said that the Administration should provide more welfare benefits to elders.

Neighbourhood and Workers' Service Centre (NWSC)

10. The representatives of NWSC expressed their regret that SHWF did not attend the meeting to listen to their views and the Government had failed to provide a sense of security for elders. Apart from expressing strong opposition to any plan to cancel OAA, the representatives also criticised the Administration's policy of restricting elders from making individual CSSA applications. The representatives pointed out that the Administration should not regard welfare benefits for elders as a financial burden despite the economic turndown.

11. In response to the Chairman's enquiry, PAS(HWF) explained that the Administration was invited on 3 July to send representatives, not SHWF, to attend the special meeting. In any event, SHWF was unable to attend the meeting due to a previous engagement. She would relay to him the views and concerns expressed at the meeting.

12. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that in the light of the budget deficits and

Action

unemployment problem, the issue of financial protection for elders had not been accorded high priority by the Government. Mr LEE said that although the Financial Secretary (FS) aimed to achieve a balanced budget in his five-year plan, he should not reduce expenditures on welfare items which would aggravate the livelihood of the low income groups. Mr LEE considered that both FS and SHWF should arrange to meet with the elders to listen to their views and sought the Administration's response to the aforesaid request. In reply, PAS(HWF) said that she would relay the request to SHWF who would be willing to meet with the elders and listen to their views.

13. Mr Fred LI asked the Administration to clarify whether there was a deferential meaning in granting OAA to elders. Referring to the Administration's reply to an oral question raised at the Legislative Council meeting recently, PAS(HWF) explained that originally OAA was meant to help elders to meet their special needs arising from old age and to assist families to look after their older members. PAS(HWF) said that although the original objectives of OAA had not specifically included a deferential purpose, the Administration had taken note of the public's perception of the meaning of OAA.

14. In this connection, Ms LI Fung-ying asked whether the Panel would consider following up the matter with the Administration at future meetings. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that the issue should be further discussed at Panel meetings.

15. Miss Cyd HO concurred with Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's views in paragraph 12 above that FS and SHWF should meet with the public to clarify their policy relating to financial assistance for elders, in particular, FS should inform the public of the service areas planned for reduction in the future years.

16. The Chairman considered it important that FS should not propose to make up the budget deficit at the expense of welfare benefits for the elders. She said that the Administration should continue providing OAA and re-consider a retirement protection scheme based on a pay-as-you-go system in the long-term as proposed by the deputations.

17. In response, PAS(HWF) said that in the context of an ageing population, it was the policy objective of the Administration to adopt the "three-pillar approach" recommended by the World Bank in considering financial support for older persons, which included a compulsory public plan for poverty alleviation and prevention, a privately managed compulsory pension plan (the MPF Scheme), and a voluntary saving-annuity plan. In respect of the first pillar of protection, the Administration had been considering whether there was scope to develop a sustainable financial support system which would better target resources at those older persons most in need. PAS(HWF) said that the Administration had been examining the resources for elderly recipients in the CSSA system and that for the OAA Scheme in totality. PAS(HWF) said that this was only an initial examination, and no decision had been taken. She said the Administration was open to all viable options at this stage and would certainly

Action

seek the views of the public, the elders and members on the matter. In addition, PAS(HWF) clarified that the study on financial support for elders was aimed at achieving more effective use of resources, enhancing support to needy elders, and finding options to develop a sustainable financial support system in the long-term. She assured members that it was not related to the issue of budget deficit.

18. Miss Cyd HO said that she understood that the Government was obliged to plan forward regarding the provision of financial support for older persons and had adopted the three-pillar approach in this regard. However, as it took time for the MPF Scheme to become fully effective, the Administration should not introduce changes to upset the current system at this stage.

19. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration) (DD(A)) commented that SHWF had actually attended the Panel meeting on 8 July 2002 when the same subject was raised. He had confirmed that there was no plan to combine OAA with the CSSA Scheme at this stage. DD(A) also pointed out that the issue of long term financial protection for elderly was a complicated one and the Administration needed time to examine the issue. This had to be considered against the background of a rising ageing population in the future instead of being viewed as a budget issue for the coming year.

20. Mr LAW Chi-kwong said that the opinions at the meeting clearly showed that the public objected to the proposal to combine OAA with CSSA and regarded OAA as a tribute to elders. He said that SHWF should consider such views and report to the Panel on the matter early in the next legislative session before the policy address of CE in January 2003. Mr LAW said that in proposing changes to the structure of financial support for elders, the Administration should note the different meanings of OAA and CSSA to the elders who had all along regarded the former as a social recognition and the latter as a provision to the needy.

21. The Chairman said that although SHWF had responded to members' questions on the issue of OAA at the Panel meeting on 8 July 2002, there was a need for the Administration to report to members on the progress of the issue at future Panel meetings. The Chairman considered that the Administration should widely consult the public on the matter before formulating any detailed proposals. The Chairman also pointed out that the three-pillar approach put in place by the Government was meant for long-term old age financial protection. As the benefits of MPF were not guaranteed and might not provide adequate protection for the public in the short-term, the Administration should continue to provide OAA for elders and avoid proposing measures which might arouse a feeling of insecurity among the elders.

22. Referring to the recent statistics that about 60% of the elders in Hong Kong lived on \$2,000 or below per month, Mr WONG Hung of HKCSS said that the Administration should re-define its criteria of the "need" of elders and revise its policy to provide OAA for all elders meeting the age requirement without imposing the means-test. Mr WONG said that HKCSS was working on a model for the

Action

implementation of a retirement protection scheme and would propose it to the Administration in the near future.

23. PAS(HWF) said that the Administration had taken note of the views expressed by the deputations and members as regards the perception of OAA to the elders and would take into account such views in its review of the provision of financial support for elders.

24. Ms LI Fung-ying proposed the following motion which was submitted to the Chairman in written form -

“本事務委員會支持出席會議的代表團體提出的意見，反對將高齡津貼與綜合社會保障援助金合併。”

(The English translation of the motion read as follows -

"That this Panel supports the views raised by the deputations present at the meeting and opposes the proposal of combining the Old Age Allowance with the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance".)

25. Mrs Sophie LEUNG said that the motion might pre-empt the exploration of all options available to the Administration in proposing a future framework of financial protection for elders. Mrs LEUNG was of the view that the notion of respect for elders should be considered from a humanistic point of view instead of in monetary terms.

26. Other members expressing support for the motion said that there was no objection that a comprehensive review on financial support for elders should be conducted and efforts should be made to promote respect for elders. However, the motion tabled was to oppose the preliminary proposal of the Administration to combine OAA with CSSA as the allowance was indispensable to the elders as a secured source of income for their daily maintenance.

27. The Chairman put the motion to vote. The motion was passed by all members present at the time of voting.

II. Any other business

28. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:30 pm.