

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)3010/02-03
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 7 July 2003 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Dr Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP (Chairman)
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon LI Fung-ying, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee

Members absent : Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS, JP

Public Officers attending : All items
Mrs Carrie LAM, JP
Director of Social Welfare

Mr FUNG Pak-yan
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child Welfare)

Item IV

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

Item V

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

Dr Joe C B LEUNG
Head, Department of Social Work and Social Administration
University of Hong Kong

Deputations by invitation : Hong Kong Social Workers Association

Prof Angelina YUEN
President

Ms Lilian LAW
Board of Director

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Betty WOO
Representative

Ms Angie LAI
Representative

Mrs Cecilia KWAN
Representative

Ms Jane TSUEI
Representative

Concern Alliance on the Development of Social Welfare

Mr LAM Kwok-wai
Representative

Ms Lora WONG
Representative

Mrs CHIU
Representative

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

Staff in attendance : Miss Betty MA
Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 1

I. Confirmation of minutes
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2749/02-03)

The minutes of meeting held on 9 June 2003 were confirmed.

II. Information papers issued since the last meeting
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2392/02-03(01), CB(2)2722/02-03(01) to (02) and CB(2)2752/02-03(01))

2. Members noted that the above papers had been issued since the last meeting. Referring to the information paper provided by the Administration on "Central waiting list for subsidized long term care services for the elderly", the Chairman said that he had received views and concerns from the social welfare sector regarding the measures outlined in the paper. The paper might have to be discussed at a future meeting. Members raised no objection.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2750/02-03(01) and (02))

3. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that no Panel meetings would be held during the summer recess unless there were urgent matters requiring immediate attention.

4. The Chairman said that as agreed under agenda item II above, the "Central waiting list for subsidized long term care services for the elderly" could be discussed at the next meeting.

5. Director of Social Welfare (DSW) said that she had no objection to discuss the above paper at the next Panel meeting, as it was originally prepared for discussion at this Panel meeting. At the request of the Panel, the paper was subsequently issued to members as an information paper to allow more time for the other agenda items for the meeting. DSW further said that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) planned to put the central waiting list in place in August/September 2003 after conducting briefings to parties concerned. She hoped that members would not object to the implementation timetable, if the item was to be discussed by the Panel in the next session. The Chairman undertook to take this up with other Panel members after the meeting and inform the Administration of the Panel's decision.

Chairman

6. The Chairman said that Mr WONG Sing-chi had proposed to discuss the assessment mechanism in respect of residential placement for people with disabilities and the Comprehensive Vocational Rehabilitation Services. The item would be put on the list of issues for discussion.

Clerk

IV. An update on support for vulnerable elders

(LC Paper No. CB(2)2750/02-03(03))

7. At the invitation of the Chairman, DSW took members through the Administration's paper on the strategies and programmes/services to provide support for vulnerable elders.

8. Mr WONG Sing-chi said that the Administration's paper provided figures on elder abuse and elder suicide in 2001 and 2002 only. Mr WONG asked whether the Administration would conduct similar researches in 2003. He was concerned that given the financial assistance to the elderly under the Comprehensive Social Security Allowance (CSSA) Scheme would be adjusted downwards in October 2003 and a new charge on accident and emergency service in public hospitals had been introduced, the problem of elderly suicide and abuse

would be worsened. The vulnerable elders would face more financial difficulties and it would add to their worry of being a burden on their family members. Mr WONG urged the Administration to enhance the co-operation with the non-government organisations (NGOs) to prevent the problem of elder abuse and suicide from worsening.

9. DSW said that following the introduction of the new charge on accident and emergency service in public hospitals, the fee waiver system had been enhanced. Frontline medical social workers in public hospitals had endeavoured to promote awareness of the enhanced fee waiver mechanism. Publicity pamphlets were also distributed to the users of accident and emergency service. Regarding the downward adjustment of CSSA rates for the elders, DSW pointed out that about 16% of the elderly population were CSSA recipients. Although there was no direct relationship between the reduction of CSSA allowance and the problem of elderly suicide and abuse, SWD had attached great importance to providing support for vulnerable elders. DSW said that following the re-engineering of community support services for elders since April 2003, District Elderly Community Centres had strengthened their services on prevention, support and remedy of elder abuse and elder suicide. In addition, to sustain the momentum of promoting the sense of worthiness among elders, the Opportunities for the Elderly Project would be implemented on a regular basis from April 2003 onwards. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (ADSW) added that the latest statistics on the number of elderly suicide deaths and abuse cases were yet to be compiled.

10. Mr Michael MAK said that to his knowledge, the number of elderly suicide deaths was on the high side as compared with other overseas countries. Mr MAK asked whether the Administration would strengthen the preventive measures. As the suicidal risks among elders who had just proceeded on retirement were comparatively high, he considered that the Administration should strengthen its services for this group of elders to help them face this new phase of their life. To better understand elder suicide and facilitate taking preventive measures, Mr MAK further asked for information on the reasons for elderly suicide and the ways used by elders for committing suicide.

11. DSW said that she agreed that preventive measures would curb the problem at root. As to short term measures, a series of radio programmes on promoting healthy ageing and prevention of elderly suicide had been broadcast since May 2002. Following the re-engineering of community support services for elders, about 40 centres would aim at empowering the young-olds in organising self-help activities at the district level, with the support of SWD. DSW further said that she could see much room for further enhancing services in this respect.

12. ADSW supplemented that the three-year Pilot Projects on Prevention and Handling of Elder Abuse also sought to provide community education, volunteer training and direct services including hotline, outreaching services, counselling services and support groups. Regarding the statistics and reasons for elderly suicide, ADSW said that according to the Centralized Statistical Information System (CSIS) for Suicide Death and Attempted Suicide Cases put in place by the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) from 1 January 2003, 157 reports of suicide deaths and 185 reports of attempted suicide cases were recorded. Of the 157 reports of suicide deaths, 87 elders were patients with chronic illnesses while many others had emotional or psychiatric/mental problems. These elders committed suicide mainly by plunging from heights or hanging themselves.

13. Mr Michael MAK said that apart from adopting prevention strategies to reduce the vulnerability of elders to abuse and suicide, SWD should make more proactive efforts to provide preventive and supportive service for the vulnerable elders. As most of the elders who committed suicide had chronic illnesses, he was concerned that some elders would worry about their health condition, simply because they had not attended medical follow-up as a result of the recent outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). To reduce their vulnerability to suicide, the Administration should enhance outreaching and counselling services for these elders. Mr MAK further said that HWFB and the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) should enhance co-operation in the promotion and implementation of community support services for elders.

14. DSW responded that since the launch of Operation Care in May 2003, SWD had taken the lead in providing supportive service for those who were affected by SARS, including the vulnerable elders. In addition, carer support service was included by 140 Integrated Home Care Services Teams as part and parcel of their service components which helped to prevent elder abuse and elder suicide by relieving the pressure on the carers of elders.

15. Mr Frederick FUNG noted that a two-year project, namely the Project on Elder Abuse Research and Protocol (EARP), had been implemented by the Hong Kong Christian Service (HKCS) since February 2002, with a view to conducting a research and setting up an intra-structure to combat elder abuse. Mr FUNG pointed out that the major findings and recommendations of the research were in fact similar to the views expressed by members at previous Panel meetings. As elder abuse was a very serious problem and the abusers were the elders' close family members, he asked whether the Administration would consider taking immediate measures to implement the recommendations of the research, instead of formulating its strategy after the completion of EARP in 2004.

16. DSW assured members that SWD had made continuous efforts to provide

support for vulnerable elders. DSW explained that one of the objectives of the pilot projects underway was to develop protocols and build up skills and knowledge in handling elder abuse for sharing knowledge and skills among frontline staff in the elderly service units. Moreover, the NGOs responsible for the pilot projects would explore the possibility of developing operational model for providing integrated services relating to elder abuse in District Elderly Community Centres.

17. Mr Frederick FUNG further asked whether the Administration would consider introducing legislation to tackle the problem of elder abuse. Regarding measures to resolve the problem of elder abuse, ADSW said that EARP implemented by HKCS recommended that a family approach in understanding and tackling elder abuse cases be adopted. HKCS had also pointed out the importance of community education and empowerment of the elders as means to promote public awareness of elder abuse, encourage the reporting of suspected elder abuse cases, motivate the elders and their family members to seek help as early as possible, and educate the elders to protect themselves. ADSW further said that it had not made any recommendation in relation to introducing legislation to tackle elder abuse. ADSW pointed out that it was not an easy task to combat elder abuse because most of the elders suffering from abuse felt shameful about the problem and feared that their relationship with their family members would be further aggravated if such abuse was made known to outsiders. In some cases, the abusers were in fact dependents of the elders but the elders were reluctant to change their relationship. In the circumstances, the Administration considered it more important to educate the elders to protect themselves, instead of introducing legislation on elderly abuse.

18. Mr Frederick FUNG sought clarification as to whether EARP would study the need for introducing legislation on elder abuse; if not, whether it was the Government's decision that no legislation would be introduced in this regard.

19. DSW responded that the object and scope of the research activities conducted by HKCS were detailed in paragraph 17 of the Administration's paper. DSW stressed that the research report was yet to be finalized by HKCS. The Administration would not prohibit HKCS from making recommendations on introducing legislation to tackle elder abuse, if it considered it necessary. To her knowledge, the research report, which was currently being refined by HKCS, did not cover the issue of introduction of legislation. DSW pointed out that the Administration did not have any plan to introduce the legislation in question. She personally had reservation about the need for the introduction of legislation to tackle elder abuse, having regard to the controversy over the definition of elder abuse and the fact that most elders wished to maintain their relationship with family members. DSW further pointed out that elder abuse, such as physical

abuse and sexual assault, constituted the commission of criminal offences and could already be dealt with by existing legislation.

20. Mr WONG Sing-chi noted from paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Administration's paper that according to the statistics provided by the Coroner's Court, a total of 241 elders were reported to have died from suicide in 2002, but 157 reports of suicide deaths were recorded in the CSIS in 2002. Mr WONG asked for the reasons for the discrepancy.

21. ADSW explained that the statistics provided by the Coroner's Court was the total number of cases handled in the year, but it did not necessarily mean that such suicidal cases occurred in the same year. The discrepancy might be attributed to the different basis of the two systems in capturing the statistics. ADSW further said that when CSIS was first set up in 2002, the scope was limited. For example, elderly centres were not included in the system. Hence not every case of elder suicide was reported to CSIS. In order to extend the scope of the statistical information and facilitate data analyses, the Administration had developed a more sophisticated system and put in place a new CSIS with effect from 1 January 2003.

22. Mr WONG sing-chi said that to assess the effectiveness of the preventive measures taken to tackle the problem of elder suicide, the accuracy of reports of suicide deaths and attempted suicide cases was very important. He said that the Administration should endeavour to improve the accuracy of the data and provide members with up-to-date information on elderly suicide.

23. Referring to DSW's earlier response that the Administration had presently no intention of introducing legislation to tackle elder abuse, the Chairman said that the enactment of such legislation would allow the Administration to intervene and provide necessary assistance to elders in the situation where the elders did not wish to report that they were suffering from abuse simply because they relied on the abusers for their living. The Chairman further said that the Administration might consider extending the scope of domestic violence to cover elder abuse and making reference to the legislation on protection of children and juveniles to better protect elders from abuse.

24. ADSW reiterated that in some cases, the abusers were in fact dependents of the abused elders but the elders were reluctant to change their relationship. The Administration should therefore be cautious in handling these cases so as not to deter the elders from help-seeking for fear that their relationship problem with their family members would be further aggravated if their situation was made known to outsiders. DSW said that the major problem was due to the fact that the elders were not aware of what assistance was available to them. In this connection, the Administration would remind its frontline social welfare staff to

exercise vigilance over suspected elder abuse cases and enhance outreaching services for the elders. DSW stressed that although there was presently no specific legislation on elder abuse, adequate assistance and a comprehensive range of services had been provided to the vulnerable elders.

V. Interim report on the implementation of the review of family services
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2750/02-03(04) to (07))

25. At the invitation of the Chairman, DSW and Dr Joe LEUNG gave a power-point presentation on "Interim report on the implementation of the review of family services". The presentation set out the findings and recommendations of the Interim Report on the Implementation of the Review of Family Services (the Interim Report) and SWD's response to the initial findings and recommendations made by the Consultants. DSW said that SWD fully agreed that the Integrated Family Service Centre (IFSC) was a more desirable mode of service delivery. Given the evidence of positive outcomes of the IFSC model, there was suggestion that preparation for re-engineering, such as identification of appropriate premises, could start now instead of waiting until the completion of the evaluative study in March 2004. DSW stressed that family services would remain the core business of SWD, the SWD/NGO IFSC proportion would follow more or less the same ratio as currently in existence.

(Post-meeting note : The Administration's power-point presentation material on "Interim report on the implementation of the review of family services" was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2776/02-03(01) on 8 July 2003.)

26. The Chairman then invited deputations to give their views on the family service centres (FSCs) review.

Meeting with deputations

Hong Kong Social Workers Association
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2750/02-03(05))

27. Professor Angelina YUEN said that the Hong Kong Social Workers Association supported IFSC as the right direction of family service delivery. However, the Association was concerned about the implementation timetable of the re-engineering plan and would like to highlight the following views and concerns -

- (a) The various conclusions were based on the initial findings gathered

by the Consultants during the first nine months. It was doubtful whether the initial findings of the Interim Report had adequate evidence to support the recommendations and to preclude the potential future development of the "strategic alliance" and "partial integration" models. It was considered that the evaluation should adhere to the original two-year schedule;

- (b) As the Administration would take forward the new IFSC model by pooling of resources from existing community services, children and youth centres, etc to IFSCs, it should continue with the provision of specialized services for special target groups and clients with special needs;
- (c) As the implementation of the new IFSC model would have significant long-term impact on the future development of social services in Hong Kong, the Administration should start the preparation for taking forward the new IFSC model together with the affected NGOs upon the completion of the two-year study, instead of starting the re-engineering work in SWD unilaterally; and
- (d) The Association urged that the Administration should draw up its long-term blueprint for the development of social services in Hong Kong.

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2750/02-03(06))

28. Ms Betty WOO presented the views of HKCSS as set out in its submission tabled at the meeting. While HKCSS agreed with SWD that IFSC was a better service delivery model, it had the following comments and suggestions on the proposed approach -

- (a) On re-engineering family services, the Administration should communicate and work out with the NGOs concerned how the transformation would take effect, such as the implementation timetable, resource deployment, SWD/NGO IFSC proportion and delineation of service boundaries;
- (b) In planning for the IFSC transformation, the Administration should respect the autonomy of individual organizations and provide sufficient flexibility for merging of different service units. HKCSS considered that the bottom-up approach should be adopted;

- (c) Efficiency savings should be considered separately from the re-engineering exercise;
- (d) While taking forward the proposed re-engineering plan, the Administration should ensure that no existing services would be compromised; and
- (e) There should be more consultations with the relevant stakeholders in the re-engineering process. Details of the re-engineering plan should be discussed and followed up by the Working Group on Implementation of Family Services Review.

Concern Alliance on the Development of Social Welfare
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2750/02-03(07))

29. Representatives of the Concern Alliance on the Development of Social Welfare opposed the hasty implementation of IFSC, and highlighted the following views set out in their submission tabled at the meeting -

- (a) The two-year evaluative study should be allowed to run its full course before any decision was made on implementation. The Administration should put a halt to the immediate implementation of the Interim Report;
- (b) Since each IFSC would have 12 to 14 social workers, which would be below the existing staffing provision, the Alliance was concerned that services for vulnerable groups such as new arrivals, single parents, etc. and community development services would be replaced; and
- (c) Some NGO staff had expressed concern about the possible redundancy of staff as a result of pooling of resources to form an IFSC. The Administration should not achieve efficiency savings through the implementation of the re-engineering exercise. Further consultations with NGOs should be conducted and it should be up to individual agencies to decide whether they supported the re-engineering plan.

Discussion

30. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that family services were currently part and parcel of the community services. However, following the implementation of the new IFSC model, the service to be provided would be on client basis. He was

concerned that the traditional mission of community work would be eroded and the community work practices and approaches such as organizing local residents for empowerment would be cut back. Mr LEUNG asked whether the existing community-based services would fall within the scope of services to be provided by IFSCs. Mr LEUNG further asked whether the re-engineering exercise would result in staff redundancy; if so, whether the Administration had any plan to address the concerns of the affected staff.

31. Dr Joe LEUNG said that the existing direction for provision of family services was already a community-based approach. Some dedicated services and community services were currently provided by Family Services Centres (FSCs). Moreover, the role of social workers had also been modified. He could not see why IFSC was unable to take over the existing community services.

32. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan enquired how the Administration planned to start the re-engineering process within SWD, and the staffing implications. Mr LEE said that the deputations generally held the view that the Administration should make a decision on implementation of the recommendations of the Interim Report after the completion of the two-year evaluative study, and more consultation should be carried out with the relevant stakeholders in the re-engineering process. He asked whether the Administration would, in the light of the concerns expressed by the welfare sector, consider deferring the implementation of the re-engineering exercise; if so, whether the deferment would upset the re-engineering plan in SWD. Mr LEE questioned whether the hidden agenda for implementing the whole re-engineering exercise was to achieve savings to combat the current budget deficit.

33. On staff implications, DSW reiterated that family service remained the core business of SWD, and the Social Work Officer grade was regarded as one of the core grades in the Department and was not included in the Voluntary Retirement Scheme. She informed members that the implementation of the re-engineering exercise would not give rise to staff redundancy in SWD.

34. Mr Joe LEUNG added that the proposed establishment of 12 to 14 social workers for each IFSC was the minimum requirement. Under the proposed establishment, he expected that all the serving social workers in FSCs would be absorbed by the new IFSCs.

35. Regarding the concerns about consultations with the relevant stakeholders on the re-engineering plan, DSW said that she could not accept that there was insufficient consultations on the proposal, having regard to the fact that SWD had held eight meetings with the welfare sector and representatives of HKCSS through the Working Group set up to monitor the IFSC progress. DSW further said that there was no intention to move into full implementation immediately. The

Administration would not impose an implementation timetable on NGOs before the completion of the evaluative study in 2004. As for SWD, DSW said that SWD was fully committed to implementing the IFSC model. SWD would start making preparations to transform its FSCs into IFSCs whenever practical needs arose. For instance, SWD would request for appropriate premises for new IFSCs in the situation where the existing FSCs would be relocated, and IFSCs would be put into operation in new towns.

36. On achieving efficiency savings, DSW stressed that the re-engineering exercise would not reduce the allocation of resources to the welfare sector, although it was expected to deliver some efficiency savings during the whole re-engineering exercise. However, under the tight fiscal situation, she hoped the welfare sector would appreciate that the new IFSC model would be taken forward by pooling resources and integrating them in a co-ordinated and cost-effective manner. DSW said that she fully understood the concerns raised by the NGOs about the reduction in social welfare resources in the overall context of tackling the fiscal deficit, and she would convey their concerns to the Administration.

37. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan remained concerned that some frontline NGO staff would be laid off as a result of the implementation of the new IFSC model. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung also expressed concern about the viability of providing community-based services by IFSCs.

38. The Chairman said that Mr Frederick FUNG had to leave early and had requested him to ask the Administration to assure that the operation of the Neighbourhood Level Community Development Projects should not be undermined after the implementation of IFSCs.

39. The Chairman pointed out that the implementation of the new IFSC model would have impact on the provision of existing community-based service. As recommended by the Interim Report, existing service units might decide to opt for merging to form an IFSC by pooling resources from other family services as well as resources beyond the family services. In the event that most of the service units in a district decided to merge to form an IFSC by pooling resources beyond the family services, e.g. community centres, it could mean that community centres would no longer be provided in the district concerned. The Interim Report, however, did not make any recommendations on the long-term and overall development of social service in Hong Kong and thereby it did not provide a discussion forum for policies other than family services, e.g. the future policy on the provision of community centres. In the circumstances, the policy on community centres would have been changed unintentionally with no prior discussion. The Chairman considered that the new IFSC model would have significant impact on the provision of specialized services. He asked whether the

Administration would accede to the suggestion of HKCSS that the recommendations of the Interim Report should be further discussed by the Working Group on Implementation of Family Services Review.

40. Regarding the concerns about the provision of community centres, DSW said that the policy of community centres was under the purview of the Home Affairs Bureau. The provision of family services was independent of the provision of community centres. She further said that as explained earlier, IFSC would be formed by pooling of resources from other family services including Family Aide service and Family Support and Resources Centres (FSRC). The Administration's stance was that it would be prepared to consider pooling of resources from areas beyond family services, e.g. community centres, if it was requested by the NGOs concerned. DSW added that the Working Group on Implementation of Family Services Review would hold further meetings on the subject matter.

41. DSW stressed that as the problems and needs of families were getting more complex as a result of rapid erosion of traditional family structures and functions, there was a pressing need for the adoption of a new service delivery model to meet the changing needs of the families. Since SWD was operating some two-thirds of existing FSCs, and in some districts such as Tin Shui Wai, Wong Tai Sin and Tseung Kwan O, SWD was the predominant FSC service provider and thus she saw no reason why SWD could not start making preparations to transform its FSCs in these districts into IFSCs through self-transformation or merging with SWD's FSRCs, with a view to improving its service. DSW reiterated that the Administration would not impose an implementation timetable on NGOs before completion of the evaluative study. She hoped that the Panel would support the proposed re-engineering plan for SWD.

42. Mrs Sophie LEUNG said that members belonging to the Liberal Party supported the recommendations of the Interim Report and considered that the IFSC model was on the right track. She pointed out that given the complexity of family problems, such problems could no longer be resolved simply with the assistance from FSCs. Mrs LEUNG further said that she would like to take the opportunity to thank Dr LEUNG for his efforts in conducting the evaluative study.

43. The Chairman said that owing to the time constraint, the Panel did not discuss the proposal in detail and therefore it could not make any conclusion as to whether the Administration should hold the re-engineering process in abeyance. Nevertheless, he hoped that the Administration would listen to the concerns raised by the deputations and conduct further consultations and discussions with the welfare sector before making a decision on the implementation of the new IFSC model.

44. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:05 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
22 August 2003