

立法會
Legislative Council

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seen by the Administration)

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Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 May 2007, at 2:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Margaret NG
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung

Members absent : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG

Public Officers attending : Item I

Mr Stephen FISHER, JP
Secretary to the Commission on Poverty

Ms Edna WONG Yuen-ling
Assistant Secretary to the Commission on Poverty

Ms Ernestina WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Health) 2

Mr Eugene FUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security) 1

Mr D C CHEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security) 2

Ms Joyce CHEUNG
Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security) 3

Mr NG Wai-kuen
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 2
Social Welfare Department

Clerk in attendance : Miss Betty MA
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Mr Chris LAI
Senior Council Secretary (2) 7

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

Action

I. Draft report on "Elderly in poverty"
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1764/06-07(01) to (04)]

The Subcommittee deliberated (index of proceedings attached at **Annex**).

Discussion with the Administration

2. The Chairman said that the Subcommittee would first discuss with the Administration the recommendations in its draft report on elderly in poverty in relation to medical services, care and support services, residential care services, financial assistance and financial security for the elderly at the meeting. Other recommendations in the draft report would be discussed at the next meeting.

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Medical services for the elderly

3. Members strongly called upon the Administration to make improvements on medical services for the elderly. Members' views on particular areas are as follows –

- (a) the new automated telephone booking system (TBS) for public out-patient services introduced by the Hospital Authority (HA) was not user-friendly. It was difficult for the needy elders to make an appointment at the general out-patients clinic, especially on the same day;
- (b) the public dental services provided by the Department of Health should be strengthened with a view to increasing the number of General Public Sessions and consultation quota. For elderly on dental grant under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme, they should be allowed to receive dental treatment and emergency dental services covering pain relief and teeth extraction at the same designated dental clinic; and
- (c) the application procedures for medical fee waiver mechanism should be streamlined to make it more accessible to elderly patients.

4. Responding to members' views, Principal Assistant Secretary (Health)² made the following points –

- (a) to further improve access by elderly patients to the general out-patient clinics, HA was planning to implement on a trial basis in selected clinics a booking hotline dedicated for the elderly with reserved telephone booking quota;
- (b) it was the Government's policy for curative dental services for the public to be provided by the private sector and non-governmental organisations. Nevertheless, emergency dental services were provided free of charge at 11 Government dental clinics, while specialised oral health care service for in-patients and special needs group were provided at dental clinics of the seven public hospitals. Principal Assistant Secretary (Elderly Services and Social Security) 2 (PAS(ES)2) added that dental grants were provided under the CSSA Scheme for elderly recipients to cover the actual expenses for dental treatment; and
- (c) a number of improvements had been introduced in the past few

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years to make the medical fee waiver mechanism more accessible to the needy patients, including the elderly patients. These included extending the maximum validity period of waivers for scheduled appointments from six to 12 months for non-CSSA patients, including the elders.

Care and support services and residential care services for the elderly

5. Members were particularly concerned about the long waiting time for subsidised residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), and requested the allocation of more resources for providing additional subsidised RCHE places to shorten the waiting time.

6. Principal Assistant Secretary (Elderly Services and Social Security)1 (PAS(ES)1) responded that the Government had invested heavily in enhancing the care and support services for the elderly in the past 10 years. The number of subsidized RCHE places had increased by 60% from 16 000 in 1997 to 26 000 in 2007. In 2007-2008, the Government's estimated expenditure on elderly services, excluding public housing and public health services, would be increased by 5.5% when compared to that of 2006-2007. Additional resources would also be allocated for enhancing the efforts to reach out to singleton and hidden elders, enhancing the support for elderly hospital dischargees and increasing the number of subsidised RCHE places in new purpose-built premises.

7. Members considered that the additional subsidised RCHE places which were in the pipeline could not meet the full demand of the elderly and should be further increased. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the CSSA payment to the elderly recipients would be reduced if they received subsidies from their family members for residing in private RCHEs. To encourage more elders to reside at quality private RCHEs and to shorten the waiting time for subsidised RCHE places, the Administration should review the above arrangement on reduction of CSSA payment.

8. PAS(ES)1 advised that the Administration would, in consultation with the Elderly Commission, continue to promote shared responsibility of individuals, their families and the society in meeting the needs of elders, and encourage a balanced mix of public and private elderly care services to widen the choice for quality self-financing and private RCHEs providing different services.

Financial assistance and financial security for the elderly

9. Members noted with concern that in the absence of a universal retirement protection, needy elders who were not eligible for CSSA were facing great financial difficulties. Members made the following suggestions for the Administration's consideration –

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- (a) the asset limit for elderly CSSA applicants should be raised so that needy elders who preferred to maintain some "funeral savings" for a sense of financial security would become eligible for CSSA;
- (b) elders should be allowed to apply for CSSA on an individual basis, irrespective of whether they were living with their family members; and
- (c) the Portable CSSA (PCSSA) Scheme should be extended to all places outside Hong Kong to enable elders to spend their twilight years in the place they chose.

10. PAS(ES)2 made the following responses –

- (a) given that the standard payment rates for the CSSA elders were higher than the able-bodied adults and the value of an owner-occupied residential property was totally disregarded for elderly cases, the Administration had no intention to raise the asset limit of elderly CSSA cases. Moreover, burial grant was provided for elderly recipients under the CSSA Scheme;
- (b) under the CSSA Scheme, any persons, including elders, if living with family members, should apply for CSSA on a household basis. The one-household requirement encouraged family members to support each other and prevented the avoidance of the duty of care for the elders by resorting to CSSA. However, exceptional cases which merited special consideration might be granted exemptions where justified; and
- (c) the PCSSA Scheme had accounted for 95% of the total number of CSSA elders and had already addressed the needs of the vast majority of elderly CSSA recipients. Extending the Scheme to all places outside Hong Kong would also give rise to practical difficulties in administering and monitoring the Scheme.

Admin

11. At the request of Dr Fernando CHEUNG, PAS(ES)2 agreed to provide, if available, the number of CSSA elder cases in which the applicants were allowed to apply for CSSA on an individual basis in the past five years.

12. Members were disappointed at the Administration's reluctance to implement the recommendations made in the Subcommittee's report. Members expressed grave concern that after the expiry of the tenure of the Commission on Poverty (CoP) on 30 June 2007, no designated body would be responsible for the overall coordination of anti-poverty efforts and following up the

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recommendations in the Subcommittee's report.

13. Secretary to CoP responded that subject to the approval by Legislative Council (LegCo) on the proposed re-organisation of policy bureaux of the Government Secretariat, policy responsibilities for poverty would come under the new Labour and Welfare Bureau, while policy on social enterprises would be put under the Home Affairs Bureau.

14. Dr Fernando CHEUNG moved the following motion which was seconded by Mr LEE Cheuk-yan –

"本小組委員會促請政府保留扶貧委員會，讓它繼續統籌政府的扶貧工作，並向立法會及公眾交代工作進展。"

(Translation)

"That this Subcommittee urges the Government to keep the Commission on Poverty in operation so that it will continue to coordinate the Government's anti-poverty measures and report its work progress to the Legislative Council and the public."

15. The Chairman put the motion to vote. All members present at the meeting voted for and no members voted against the motion. The Chairman declared that the motion was carried.

16. The Chairman reminded members that the Subcommittee would continue its discussion with CoP and the Administration on other recommendations in its draft report on elderly in poverty at the next meeting to be held on 28 May 2007.

II. Any other business

17. The Chairman informed members that after taking into account the advice of the receiving organisations on the timing of the duty visit to the United Kingdom and Spain, the visit would be scheduled for 16 to 22 September 2007. The Chairman said that the LegCo Secretariat would issue a circular to invite members to indicate their interest in joining the visit.

18. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:33 pm.

**Proceedings of the meeting of the
Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty
on Monday, 14 May 2007, at 2:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
<i>Agenda Item I – Draft report on "Elderly in poverty"</i>			
000000 - 000147	Chairman	Meeting arrangements	
<i>Medical services, care and support services and residential care services for the elderly</i>			
000148 - 002033	Chairman Admin	The Administration's responses to the recommendations in the Subcommittee's draft report relating to medical services, care and support services and residential care services for the elderly	
002034 - 002734	Chairman Mr LEE Cheuk-yan Admin	Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's disappointment at the Administration's reluctance to take forward the recommendations made by the Ad Hoc Group on the Elderly in Poverty under the Commission on Poverty (CoP) and the Subcommittee in respect of elderly services The Administration's response that CoP would provide a report in mid 2007 summarising its work and recommendations for the next Administration's consideration	
002735 - 003607	Mr TAM Yiu-chung Chairman Admin	Mr TAM Yiu-ching's suggestion that additional resources should be allocated for enhancing medical services for the elderly, in particular – (a) to improve the automated telephone booking system (TBS) for general out-patient clinics (GOPCs); (b) to shorten the waiting time for specialist out-patient services operated by the Hospital Authority (HA); and (c) to enhance the community care for discharged elderly patients from hospitals The Administration's response that – (a) HA was planning to implement on a trial basis in selected clinics a booking hotline dedicated for the elderly with reserved telephone booking quota; (b) emergency cases would be accorded priority in arranging the first appointment of specialist out-patient services; and (c) additional resources had been allocated in 2007-2008 for enhancing the efforts to reach out to singleton and hidden elders as well as the support for elderly hospital discharges	

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
003608 - 004310	Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung Admin	<p>Mr LEUNG Yiu-ching's views that –</p> <p>(a) additional resources should be allocated for enhancing the residential care services and medical services for the elderly; and</p> <p>The Administration responded that additional funding had been allocated to the Hospital Authority</p> <p>(b) measures should be introduced to make the medical fee waiver mechanism more accessible to elderly patients</p> <p>The Administration responded that improvement measures to the medical fee waiver system had been introduced over the years and further extension of the waiver period for non-scheduled appointments in the general out-patient clinics for the elderly patients was being considered by the Hospital Authority</p>	
004311 - 005152	Dr Fernando CHEUNG Admin	<p>Discussion on Dr Fernando CHEUNG's concern about the Administration's reluctance to utilise effectively the fiscal surplus and make efforts to enhance the support services for elderly in poverty, particularly the residential care services and long-term care services</p> <p>The Administration responded that the Government had invested heavily in enhancing elderly care in the past 10 years. Additional resources were also earmarked for 2007-2008</p>	
005153 - 005656	Ms LI Fung-ying Admin	<p>Ms LI Fung-ying's suggestion of providing direct subsidies for the elders to receive dental care and treatment</p> <p>The Administration responded that the suggestion would give rise to a significant policy change in public dental care services, which should be discussed in the wider context</p>	
005657 - 010123	Chairman	<p>The Chairman's concern about the difficulties faced by the needy elders in using the automated TBS for GOPCs</p> <p>The Chairman's suggestion of including low-income as an additional eligibility criteria for subsidised residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs)</p>	

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
010124 - 010735	Mr LEE Cheuk-yan Admin	<p>Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's suggestion that the automated TBS should accept same-day appointments for out-patient services to ensure that elders could receive timely medical treatment</p> <p>The Administration advised that arrangement would be made to accept 24-hour appointments for out-patient services by using the automated TBS, subject to the availability of quotas</p> <p>Mr LEE's view that the Administration should review the arrangement of deducting the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) payment from elderly recipients if they received subsidies from their family members to reside in private RCHEs</p> <p>The Administration's response that it was discussing with the Elderly Commission about the long-term financing of long-term care services for the elderly and was exploring ways to encourage those who were more financially better off to make use of private residential care services so that the subvented places could be provided to elders most in need</p>	
010736 - 011415	Dr Fernando CHEUNG Admin	<p>Dr Fernando CHEUNG's dissatisfaction about the arrangement that CSSA recipients, including elderly recipients had to receive dental care services and emergency dental treatment at different dental clinics</p> <p>Dr CHEUNG's concern about the difficulties faced by singleton elderly persons in using the automated TBS for GOPCs</p> <p>The Administration's response that with the new telephone booking arrangements dedicated to the elderly patients, bookings would be easier</p>	
<i>Financial assistance and financial security for the elderly</i>			
011416 - 011823	Chairman Admin	The Administration's responses to the recommendations made by the Subcommittee on financial assistance and financial security for the elderly	
011824 - 012458	Mr LEE Cheuk-yan Admin	Discussion on Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's suggestion that the asset limit for elderly CSSA applicants should be raised so that needy elders who preferred to maintain some "funeral savings" for a sense of financial security would also be eligible for CSSA	
012459 - 013119	Miss CHAN Yuen-han Admin	<p>Miss CHAN Yuen-han's concern that in the absence of a universal retirement protection scheme, elders who relied on Old Age Allowance (OAA) for a living faced undue financial hardship</p> <p>The Administration's response that needy elders could apply for CSSA which was a safety net of last resort and a wide range of other support services were currently provided for needy elders</p>	

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
013120 - 013849	Ms LI Fung-ying Admin	<p>Ms LI Fung-ying's request for further elaboration on the difficulties in monitoring the Portable CSSA Scheme if it was extended to all places outside Hong Kong</p> <p>Ms LI's suggestion of further extending the permissible annual absence limit for OAA to facilitate elders to retire in the Mainland</p> <p>The Administration's response that the OAA payment was not intended for retiring in the Mainland</p>	
013850 - 014421	Dr Fernando CHEUNG Admin	<p>Discussion on Dr Fernando CHEUNG's suggestion of removing the one-household requirement for needy elders in applying for CSSA</p> <p>Information on the number of cases in which elderly CSSA applicants had been granted exemption from the one-household requirement</p>	Admin to follow up
014422 - 014849	Chairman Admin	<p>The Chairman's suggestion that elderly CSSA applicants who did not own any properties should have a higher income limit under the CSSA Scheme</p> <p>The Administration's response that the suggestion would have implications on the income limit for other categories of CSSA recipients which would require further deliberations</p> <p>The Chairman's concern about the slow progress of the consultancy study commissioned by the Central Policy Unit on "Sustainability of the Three Pillars of Retirement Protection in Hong Kong"</p> <p>The Administration's advice that the consultancy study was expected to be completed in 2007</p>	
014850 - 020023	Chairman Dr Fernando CHEUNG Mr LEE Cheuk-yan Admin	<p>Concern about the long-term arrangement for anti-poverty measures after the expiry of CoP's tenure on 30 June 2007</p> <p>Motion moved by Dr Fernando CHEUNG and seconded by Mr LEE Cheuk-yan was passed by the Subcommittee</p>	Admin to follow up
<i>Agenda Item II – Any other business</i>			
020024 - 020100	Chairman	Date and time of the next meeting and issues to be discussed	
020101 - 020224	Chairman	Timing of the proposed overseas duty visit to study the development of social enterprises in the United Kingdom and Spain	