

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1193/04-05
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 March 2005 at 11:30 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung (Deputy Chairman)
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG

Members absent : Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Public Officers attending : Items III and IV
Ms Salina YAN
Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security)

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

Mr Freeman HUEN
Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security) 1

Mr Paul TANG, JP
Director of Social Welfare

Mrs Kathy NG
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly)

Mr FU Tsun-hung
Chief Social Work Officer (Subventions)
Social Welfare Department

**Deputations
by invitation** : Item IV

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr TIK Chi-yuen
Chairman, Specialized Committee on Elderly Service

Ms Carman NG
Chief Officer, Elderly Service Development

Community Care and Nursing Home Workers General
Union

Ms TSE Woon-sung
Executive Member

Social Welfare Organizations Employees Union

Mr LIU Wai-ying
Chairperson

Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions

Ms LAM Ying-hing
Organizer

Frontier Welfare Workers Union

Mr LAM Chi-leung

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

Staff in attendance : Miss Mary SO
Senior Council Secretary (2) 8

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

I. Confirmation of minutes
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1021/04-05)

The minutes of meeting held on 18 February 2005 were confirmed.

II. Information paper issued since the last meeting

2. There was no information paper issued since the last meeting.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1022/04-05(01) and (02))

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for 20 April 2005 at 8:30 am -

- (a) Relaxation of the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong under the Social Security Allowance Scheme;
- (b) Provision of a monthly supplement to Comprehensive Social Security

Allowance (CSSA) recipients who are 100% disabled or who require constant attendance and are not living in institutions; and

- (c) Progress of the formation of Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centres.

4. Members further agreed to discuss the following items at the meeting in May 2005 -

- (a) Measures to help single parents on CSSA to achieve self-reliance;
- (b) Measures to assist women in poverty; and
- (c) Closure of the Single Parents Centres.

The Chairman suggested to invite women's groups to give their views on the three items listed in paragraph 4(a) to (c) above. Members expressed support.

IV. Conversion of self-care hostel and home for the aged places into care and attention places providing continuum of care

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1022/04-05(03) and CB(2)1064/04-05(01) and (02))

5. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly) (ADSW(Elderly)) briefed members on the conversion of self-care (S/C) hostel and home for the aged (H/A) places into care and attention (C&A) places providing continuum of care through a powerpoint presentation, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1022/04-05(03)).

6. Representatives from the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS), Community Care and Nursing Home Workers General Union, Social Welfare Organizations Employees Union and Frontier Welfare Workers Union presented their views on the conversion of S/C hostel and H/A places into C&A places providing continuum of care, details of which were set out in their submissions (LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1064/04-05(01) and (02), CB(2)1090/04-05(01) (tabled at the meeting) and CB(2)1106/04-05(01) issued on 21 March 2005). Ms LAM Ying-hing of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions also raised the following concerns -

- (a) the Administration should consult the views of the existing staff of the 75 homes operating S/C and H/A places, instead of merely briefing them, about the implementation details for the conversion programme, prior to embarking on the exercise; and

- (b) the existing problem of staff shortage at SC hostels and H/As should not be allowed to continue at C&A homes whose residents required higher level of care. Otherwise, not only would there be a further increase in injuries at work, the quality of service to the residents would also suffer.

Discussion

7. Mr Bernard CHAN noted from paragraph 3.2.2 of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)'s submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)1064/04-05(01)) that in the inclusion of the subvention of nursing home (NH) place in the calculation of the subvention per C&A place providing continuum of care under the conversion exercise, the amount of subvention per NH place proposed by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) was around 10% lower than the current amount of subvention per NH place. HKCSS reiterated that it only accepted this new level as a reference for this conversion exercise, and hoped that SWD would not use the reduced subvention level as a benchmark for funding NH places in future. Mr CHAN enquired about the Administration's stance in this regard.

8. ADSW(Elderly) responded that the Administration had no intention to revise the current amount of subvention per NH place. This was made clear to HKCSS and the welfare sector. ADSW(Elderly) further said that both the amounts of subvention per C&A place and NH place were used in the calculation of the subvention of C&A place providing continuum of care under the conversion exercise. The reason why a subvention level around 10% lower than the current subvention of NH places was used for this conversion exercise were twofold. First, as the staff establishment of the subvented NHs was based on a medical model which slightly exceeded actual needs, SWD had consulted and obtained the consent of the Department of Health, which was the licensing body of NHs, in adopting an adjusted staff mix for NH places in the calculation of the amount of subvention of C&A place providing continuum of care under the conversion exercise. Second, although homes participating in the conversion exercise would not have to admit elders of NH level directly, they would be required to provide continuum of care to elders, some of whom might deteriorate to a level requiring nursing home service. ADSW(Elderly) pointed out that both HKCSS and the welfare sector were also agreeable to applying the reduced amount of subvention per NH place in the calculation of the amount of subvention per C&A place providing continuum of care for this conversion exercise.

9. Ms LI Fung-ying asked whether the Administration had conducted any assessment on the impact of the conversion exercise on the staff of those homes considered not suitable for conversion due to say, structural constraints; and if so, what the impact was.

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10. ADSW(Elderly) responded that the conversion exercise should help minimise the displacement of the existing staff, as SWD had sufficient resources to carry out in-situ conversion of the existing 75 homes operating S/C and H/A places. In the 2005 Policy Address, the Chief Executive had committed to deploy \$180 million additional resources on the conversion exercise. Existing resources would also be deployed by SWD to complete the conversion exercise through service rationalisation. Moreover, the conversion would be conducted on a subvention-neutral basis. That meant homes participating in the conversion exercise would continue to receive subvention at the current level (subject to normal annual adjustments and other across-the-sector adjustments) to run the future operation after conversion. As more nursing care was required by C&A places providing continuum of care, it was inevitable that some existing staff would need to undergo training to take up different posts, say, from a welfare worker to a health worker. In the light of this, the principles taken by SWD in the implementation of Lump Sum Grant (LSG) in recognising them as snapshot staff would be applied to the conversion exercise.

11. ADSW(Elderly) further said that SWD had not yet invited the 34 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating the existing 75 homes to participate in the conversion exercise. Nevertheless, through her contacts with these home operators, so far none of them had indicated that they did not wish to participate in the conversion exercise. Rather, all of them hoped that the exercise would commence as soon as possible. Although it was envisaged that the majority of the home operators would opt to carry out in-situ conversion of their homes, it could not be ruled out that a very small number of operators, due to their own operational needs, would choose to take other alternatives such as merging with other homes. As merging with other homes would result in closure, SWD had advised the home operators that if they chose to do so, they should adequately consult and brief their staff in advance of their impending move. ADSW(Elderly) however pointed out that even if the home operators chose to take other alternatives, including reprovisioning of premises or merging with other homes, these moves should not impact adversely on the existing staff as the conversion would be conducted on a subvention-neutral basis.

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12. At the request of the Chairman, ADSW(Elderly) undertook to provide further information on how the conversion exercise would impact on the existing staff of the 75 homes operating S/C and H/A places.

13. Ms LI Fung-ying further asked whether the new 2 900 C&A places to be created after the completion of the conversion exercise could meet the long term care (LTC) needs of the elderly in the long run; if so, what was the basis for saying so. Dr YEUNG Sum raised a similar question, and further urged the Administration to more involve HKCSS and the staff unions representing the frontline staff working in the existing 75 S/C hostels and H/As in the conversion

exercise.

14. Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services and Social Security) (DSHWF(ES&SS)) replied that the prevailing mode of elderly care in the world was that community living would be beneficial for most of the elderly, and institutional care should cater specifically for frail elders with LTC needs. The conversion exercise was to put resources to more effective use, thereby providing more LTC places for needy elders. DSHWF(ES&SS) further advised that the Administration was presently conducting a survey with a view to projecting the LTC needs of the elderly, the outcome of which would be used for future planning on how best to meet the LTC needs of the elderly in the medium and long terms. Opportunity would also be taken to examine financing for residential care services for the elderly. DSHWF(ES&SS) further said that the phasing out of all S/C and H/A places should not be construed as a cost containment exercise, as evidenced by the fact that funding for elderly care and the number of subsidised residential care places for the elderly had increased by 80% and 60% respectively since 1997.

Admin

15. At the request of the Chairman, DSHWF(ES&SS) undertook to provide the information mentioned in paragraph 14 above when it became available later in the year.

16. Mr Albert CHAN urged the Administration to give serious consideration to providing financial assistance to private operators in upgrading their places, having regard to the facts that over 60 000 elders were presently residing in private homes and that the standards of private homes were generally inferior to homes subvented by SWD due to lack of funds. Mr CHAN further urged that the composition of the Elderly Commission (EC) should include members representing private home operators.

17. DSHWF(ES&SS) responded that the Administration had close contact with private home operators. Both the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food and herself had regular dialogues and exchanges with private home operators to understand their needs and aspirations.

18. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that home operators were willing to convert their S/C and H/A places into C&A places because they were worried about the drop in fee income as a result of emergence of vacant places due to the fact that SWD had ceased to accept new applications for admission to S/C hostels and H/As from 1 January 2003. Although the new policy of phasing out all S/C and H/A places so as to re-deploy the resources saved on providing more C&A places was worthy of support, Dr CHEUNG hoped that more assistance could be provided to those small-scale S/C hostels and H/As, say, running less than 100 places.

19. As homes participating in the conversion exercise would only be subvented at the current level to run the future operation after conversion, Dr CHEUNG was concerned that small-scale S/C hostels and H/As could ill afford the increase in staff costs after conversion because of the enhanced level of care required for a C&A home. For instance, C&A homes were required to hire nurses whose remuneration was higher than that for non-professional staff, say, welfare workers presently hired by S/C hostels and H/As. Another difficulty likely to face small-scale S/C hostels and H/As was in hiring nurses who at present were in short supply. Although arrangements would be made by home operators for their staff to undergo training so that they could take up, say, the post of health worker after conversion, there was the concern whether existing staff, such as welfare workers, could retain their salary after taking up the post of health worker after conversion.

20. Dr CHEUNG further said that he shared the concerns raised by those deputations representing the frontline staff working in the existing 75 S/C hostels and H/As that they had not been included in the Task Group set up by SWD last year to work out the implementation details for the conversion programme, and that they had only been briefed on such details after finalisation. In the light of this, Dr CHEUNG urged SWD to meet and listen to the views of the staff unions representing the frontline staff before implementing the conversion exercise.

21. ADSW(Elderly) responded that she was not in a position to give an answer as to whether the existing staff of the 75 homes could retain their salaries after taking up another post after conversion, as this was a matter between an employer and his/her employee. ADSW(Elderly) however pointed out that the amount of subvention which would be provided to the operators after conversion would be the same as the amount of subvention which they currently received. ADSW(Elderly) further said that while welfare workers currently working at S/C hostels and H/As might need to take up the new post of health worker after conversion, the pay scale of welfare workers and health workers was comparable.

22. ADSW(Elderly) also said that the number of welfare workers required by a C&A home would be less than that required by a S/C hostel or H/A on the same premises, yet not all welfare workers would become redundant after conversion. This was because as the conversion would be conducted on an in-situ basis, most of the S/C hostels and H/As would have additional “non-subsidised” capacity after the conversion exercise. Home operators would be allowed to operate their homes in a mixed mode, making use of the spare capacity to provide “self-financing” services for elders. This in turn meant that these home operators could retain some of those staff who could not successfully transfer to work for subsidised C&A places.

23. DSHWF(ES&SS) advised that the problem of shortage of nurses should be ameliorated later in the year or by early 2006 as it was envisaged that more nurses

would come on stream then. The outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003 had resulted in both public and private hospitals hiring additional nurses. This, together with the changes made to the qualification requirements of nurses, had given rise to a short-term shortage of nurses. DSHWF(ES&SS) further said that the Administration would continue to step up training for frontline staff working in the residential care homes for the elderly, in particular, those who cared for the elderly with medium to high level of functional disabilities. Training of medical and health care workers was also made a key programme of the Skills Upgrading Scheme launched by the Education and Manpower Bureau three years ago. Director of Social Welfare (DSW) supplemented that views would be collected from home operators and frontline staff on the contents of the training courses aimed at helping existing staff to transfer to a different post in a C&A home.

24. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that in view of the concerns raised by those deputations representing the frontline staff working in the existing 75 S/C hostels and H/As as to whether they could keep their jobs and retain their salaries after conversion, he strongly requested the Administration to include the staff unions concerned in its Task Group set up last year to work out the conversion arrangements. Mr LEE further said that instead of allowing home operators to make use of the spare capacity to provide “self-financing” services for elders after conversion, more funds should be provided to these homes to use up the spare capacity for providing C&A places in order to shorten the waiting time for C&A services. Mr LEE then asked how the subsidy of \$6,225 per month per C&A place providing continuum of care was derived.

25. DSW responded that as the circumstances of each of the 34 NGOs operating the existing 75 homes were different, it was best to leave matters pertaining to staff arrangements resulting from the conversion exercise to individual agency to work out with their respective staff. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan disagreed.

26. Responding to the question as to how the subsidy of \$6,225 per C&A place providing continuum of care per month was based, Ms Carmen NG of HKCSS explained that the amount comprised 90% of subsidy per C&A place which stood at \$5,950 and 10% of the subsidy per NH place which stood at \$8,700. Ms NG further explained that the reason why 10% of subsidy per NH place was included in the calculation of the subsidy per C&A place providing continuum of care was to take into consideration that operators of C&A places had to provide continuum of care to elders. ADSW(Elderly) also said that \$6,225 did not include other subsidies such as rent and rates subsidy, premises-related special charges and allowances for infirmary care and dementia care. In addition to adopting the principles used in the LSG funding arrangement to enable agencies to honour their contractual obligations with their staff for the conversion exercise, tide-over grant

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(TOG) would also be provided to those homes which agreed to participate in the exercise until the expiry of the TOG.

Admin 27. In closing, the Chairman urged the Administration to re-consider the suggestion made by Mr LEE Cheuk-yan in paragraph 24 above and to provide the information requested by members in paragraph 12 above.

28. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:57 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
6 April 2005