

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1425/04-05
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Wednesday, 20 April 2005 at 8:30 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
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, 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

Member absent : Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Public Officers attending : Items IV and V
Mrs Brenda FUNG
Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly
Services and Social Security) (Acting)

Mrs Agnes ALLCOCK, JP
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)

Mrs Rachel CARTLAND, JP
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security)

Mr CHENG Chok-man
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 1
Social Welfare Department

Mr LAI Shiu-bor
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 2
Social Welfare Department

Mr IP Tin-sung
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 3
Social Welfare Department

Items V and VI

Mrs Mary MA
Commissioner for Rehabilitation
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Miss Ophelia CHAN
Assistant Director of Social Welfare
(Rehabilitation and Medical Social Services)

**Deputation
by invitation**

: Item V

1st Step Association

Mr LEUNG Choy-yan
Chairman

Mr SIN Sai-lun
Member

**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)1193/04-05)

The minutes of meeting held on 14 March 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)1237/04-05(01) and (02))

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting scheduled for 9 May 2005 at 10:45 am -

- (a) Closure of Single Parents Centres; and
- (b) Policy on assisting women in poverty.

4. The Chairman suggested and members agreed to invite deputations to give views on the two items in paragraph 3 above and to invite members of the Panel on Home Affairs to join the discussion of the second item.

IV. Review of qualifying condition for elderly in receipt of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance to live outside Hong Kong and absence limit for Social Security Allowance

(Legislative Council Brief - Ref : HWF CR 2/4821/58)

5. Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services and Social Security) (Acting) (DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg)) briefed members on the background on and justifications for extending the Portable Comprehensive Social

Security Assistance (PCSSA) to Fujian Province to CSSA recipients aged 60 or above, relaxing the “three-year-on-CSSA” rule for PCSSA and relaxing the annual permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong for the Old Age Allowance (OAA) and Disability Allowance (DA) under the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme from the present 180 days to 240 days, details of which were set out in paragraphs 3-16 and 24-27 of the above Legislative Council (LegCo) Brief. Subject to the approval of the Finance Committee (FC) of LegCo of the necessary financial implications in respect of the SSA absence limit, the Administration aimed to implement the PCSSA measure by August 2005 and the SSA measure by October 2005.

6. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) added that the Administration was well aware of the call from some quarters in the community to relax the annual permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong for OAA to 360 days or even to allow absence for a whole year for OAA. The reasons why the Administration had decided the present proposal was appropriate were firstly, as OAA was intended for Hong Kong residents aged 65 or above in the light of old age, it was necessary for an absence limit from Hong Kong to be kept. Also as OAA was largely non-means-tested and financed entirely by general revenue, it was necessary for the Administration to use public funds prudently by paying OAA only to those elderly residents with a genuine and long-term connection with Hong Kong. If the absence limit for OAA were extended to 360 days or more, it might attract some elderly not receiving the benefit or living overseas to apply for it. There were 150 000 elderly who currently were not receiving any assistance under the CSSA and SSA Schemes. If all applied, the additional annual expenditure might be about \$1.17 billion. Secondly, unlike the PCSSA Scheme for elderly recipients which was confined to Guangdong and the newly added Fujian Province, the whereabouts of OAA recipients could be widely dispersed, both in the Mainland and in overseas countries, subject to their fulfilling the 90-day residence requirement in a year. It would be virtually impossible to put in place an administrative arrangement in the Mainland, or for that matter, in overseas countries, to review the continuous eligibility of recipients which currently already stood at 457 000.

7. Taking into account the above considerations, DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) said that the Administration considered that relaxing the present absence limit for OAA from 180 days to 240 days per year, subject to the continual requirement that recipients had to have resided in Hong Kong for at least 90 days in the year, constituted a right balance. On the one hand, the new 240-day absence limit could address the wishes of some elderly to spend more time with family/friends outside Hong Kong. On the other hand, it would allow the Administration to manage the use of public funds prudently for a non-means-tested and non-contributory scheme.

8. Mr TAM Yiu-chung disagreed that there must be an administrative arrangement put in place in the Mainland and in other overseas places to review the continuous eligibility of OAA recipients, as retired civil servants who resided outside Hong Kong only needed to make an annual acknowledgement by mail that they were still alive in order to continue receiving their pension. Even if such an administrative arrangement was required, there should be no great difficulty in engaging local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or notary public to review the continuous eligibility of OAA recipients.

9. Mr TAM further said that the Administration should refrain from using the scare tactic that relaxing the absence limit for OAA to 360 days would have significant financial implications to the SSA Scheme. He considered that the Administration's estimation that an additional 150 000 elderly would apply for OAA if the absence limit for OAA were changed to 360 days thereby incurring an additional annual expenditure of \$1.17 billion was a gross exaggeration. According to the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the number of elderly who currently had their OAA payment deducted because they were away from Hong Kong for more than 180 days in a year was only several thousands. Moreover, it was possible that expenditure on other public services, such as medical and housing, might be reduced as a result of more OAA recipients opting to reside in the Mainland if the absence limit for OAA were changed to 360 days. In the light of this, Mr TAM urged the Administration not to rule out relaxing the absence limit for OAA to 360 days and to review the possibility of implementing such one year after the implementation of the 240-day absence limit for OAA.

10. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) pointed out that the figure of several thousands referred to existing recipients breaching the present 180-day absence limit for OAA, whereas the figures quoted by the Administration in paragraph 6 above referred to potential new applicants. They had different basis. As for comparison between the civil servant pension scheme with the OAA, DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) pointed out that direct comparison might not be appropriate as the former was a contractual arrangement underpinned by legislation whereas the latter was an administrative scheme.

11. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration) (DDSW(A)) supplemented that there was no question of the Administration using the additional annual expenditure of \$1.17 billion for OAA to deter the public from giving support to changing the absence limit to 360 days. The Administration had the responsibility to tell the public the financial implications of the relaxation of the absence limit for OAA to the SSA Scheme, and let the public decide whether it was the best use of public funds to change the absence limit for OAA to 360 days.

12. DDSW(A) further said that the additional annual expenditure of

\$1.17 billion for OAA was no exaggeration, albeit an estimation, in view of the growing ageing population. Although there was no ruling out that more elders would opt to reside in the Mainland if the absence limit for OAA were changed to 360 days, it did not necessarily mean that expenditure on other social services would be reduced. Experience revealed that most elderly residents on OAA or CSSA residing in the Mainland preferred to return to Hong Kong to seek medical treatment and/or hospitalisation. Moreover, these elders could always apply or re-apply for public housing assistance if they decided to return from the Mainland and live here again.

13. Dr YEUNG Sum said that the Democratic Party welcomed the move to relax the absence limit for OAA to 240 days, but hoped that the Administration could do more to further relax the absence limit to 360 days so as to better meet the wishes of those elders wishing to reside in the Mainland. Dr YEUNG echoed Mr TAM Yiu-chung's request for the Administration to consider the proposal of changing the absence limit for OAA to 360 days one year after the implementation of the 240-day absence limit for OAA. Dr YEUNG expressed doubt whether changing the absence limit for OAA to 360 days would attract more elders to apply for OAA. To his understanding, the reason why some elders did not apply for OAA was because they felt the money should best be used on people most in need. Dr YEUNG further said that although OAA was a good policy, the best way forward to provide retirement protection for older persons was to implement a contributory social insurance scheme.

14. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) responded that the Administration understood the wish to have better retirement protection for older persons. To this end, a study was being undertaken by the Central Policy Unit (CPU) to find out how the existing arrangements for retirement protection, including mandatory savings for the working population, social security assistance for needy elders, and personal savings, under the three-pillar approach developed by the World Bank could be more sustainable in light of the ageing population. As regards conducting a review on the relaxation of absence limit for OAA one year after implementation, DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) said that the Administration would closely monitor the implementation of the absence limit and consider adjustment as appropriate.

15. Ms LI Fung-ying shared the views expressed by Mr TAM Yiu-chung and Dr YEUNG Sum. In particular, Ms LI hoped that the Administration would expeditiously come up with a proposal on implementing a contributory social insurance scheme to provide better retirement protection for older persons. Ms LI pointed out that the existing Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Scheme was far from adequate in providing retirement protection for older persons. For instance, the MPF Scheme did not cover people who had never held any income-earning jobs in their lives such as housewives. Moreover, the MPF Scheme was not entirely satisfactory due to the fact that an employer could offset

the long service payment or severance payment as required under the Employment Ordinance with the accrued benefits derived from the contribution the employer made to his/her employees in the MPF Scheme.

16. Ms LI further said that it was unreasonable to require elderly Hong Kong residents applying for OAA that they must have resided in Hong Kong continuously for at least one year immediately before the date of application, despite the fact that absence from Hong Kong up to a maximum of 56 days during the one-year period was treated as residence in Hong Kong. Ms LI requested the Administration to remove such a requirement if it was sincere in helping elders to meet their special needs arising from old age.

Admin

17. Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security)2 (CSSO(SS)2) explained that requiring a person to meet a period of continuous residence before the date of application was part of the new residence requirements for OAA endorsed by the Executive Council and approved by FC in June 2003, which should not be mixed up with OAA recipients' entitlement to payment for the year based on them not absent from Hong Kong for more than 180 days in a year and provided that they had resided in Hong Kong for at least 90 days in the year. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) agreed to look into how these two policies could be better explained to the OAA applicants.

18. Dr Fernando CHEUNG noted from Annex B to the LegCo Brief that in order to implement the PCSSA extension, relaxation of eligibility criteria for PCSSA and SSA and the monthly supplement for the severely disabled CSSA recipients (to be discussed under agenda item V), SWD would need to enhance its computer system at a one-off cost of \$3.2 million and annual recurrent cost of \$340,000. SWD would also need to commission an implementation agent for running the PCSSA Scheme in Fujian and enhance the services of its Guangdong agent at an annual cost of about \$640,000. Dr CHEUNG considered such administrative overheads to be on the high side, given that the additional annual expenditure arising from the new measures only totalled some \$63 million.

19. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) responded that although the beneficiaries of the PCSSA extension and relaxation of the eligibility criteria for PCSSA were estimated to be over 1 000, it should be pointed out that the beneficiaries of the relaxation of the eligibility criteria for SSA and the monthly supplement for the severely disabled CSSA recipients were much greater in number. Notably, the relaxation of the eligibility criteria for SSA would benefit the existing 457 000 OAA recipients and over 100 000 DA recipients. In addition, about 50 000 CSSA recipients were estimated to be qualified for the monthly supplement for the severely disabled CSSA recipients.

20. On spending \$3.2 million to enhance the existing Computerised Social

Security System for implementing the PCSSA extension, relaxation of the eligibility criteria for PCSSA and SSA and the monthly supplement for the severely disabled CSSA recipients, CSSO(SS)3 explained such enhancement entailed complicated modifications to several core programmes of the existing computer system. CSSO(SS)3 further said that considering that the cost of developing the existing computer system was about \$140 million, spending a one-off sum of \$3.2 million on this enhancement which would take eight months to complete was not unreasonable. As regards the annual recurrent cost of \$340,000, CSSO(SS)3 said that this was the necessary maintenance cost based on the existing contract entered with outside contractor.

21. Mr Alan LEONG shared the views expressed by members at the meeting. Mr LEONG further said that the Administration should refrain from calling OAA recipients as “受助人”, if OAA were meant to serve as a token of appreciation and respect for the elderly. In order to relieve PCSSA recipients and OAA recipients residing in the Mainland of the need to return to Hong Kong to seek medical treatment, Mr LEONG suggested deploying local medical and healthcare staff to station in reputable clinics in the Guangdong Province to provide healthcare services to these recipients.

22. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the Administration should consider removing all residence requirements for OAA recipients, as it was possible that there would be savings. This was because as some OAA recipients might give back their public housing units to the Housing Department if they decided to take up permanent residence in the Mainland and seek medical consultations in the Mainland as far as possible. In the light of this, Mr LEE asked the Administration whether it had done any calculation on the amount of savings likely to be achieved from various social services such as housing and medical care if all residence requirements for OAA recipients were lifted. Mr LEE further said that he could not agree that the public at large would oppose to such a measure, as OAA was generally viewed as a way of showing appreciation to the elderly for their past contributions to Hong Kong.

23. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) advised that the original objectives of OAA, which was established in the 1970s, were (i) to provide some financial assistance to families to help relieve the caring for their older family members; (ii) to reduce the demand for institutional care by encouraging families to care for their older members; and (iii) to enable older persons to contribute to the family budget. As to the question raised by Mr LEE Cheuk-yan in paragraph 22 above, DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) said that this had not been done as the Administration had no plan to make the OAA fully portable at this stage.

24. Mr Fred LI said that the then Chief Executive (CE) had mentioned several years ago that consideration was being given to increasing the OAA to \$1,000 a

month in order to better help those needy elderly not eligible for CSSA to meet their special needs arising from old age. Mr LI wondered whether this was still on. Mr LI further asked whether the study undertaken by CPU referred to in paragraph 14 above included the review of the OAA.

25. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) responded that the Administration had no plan to increase the OAA to \$1,000 a month at this stage due to the current fiscal condition. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) further said that the study being undertaken by CPU would focus on finding out the long term financial needs of the elderly, taking into account Hong Kong's ageing population, and making the assessment referred to in paragraph 14. Based on the findings of the CPU which were expected to become available by early 2006, the Administration would consider developing policies aiming at providing adequate financial support for older persons. The Chairman said that providing an old age pension scheme to the elderly was long overdue, and urged the Administration to expedite work in this regard.

26. Mr Albert CHENG and Mr Albert CHAN considered it discriminatory to extend the PCSSA to Guangdong and Fujian Provinces only, and urged the Administration to extend the PCSSA to all places outside Hong Kong where elderly recipients chose to take up permanent residence.

27. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) explained that the main reason why the PCSSA was provided to elderly CSSA recipients who chose to take up permanent residence in Guangdong and Fujian Provinces was because the majority of elderly CSSA recipients were originally from these provinces.

28. DDSW(A) supplemented that there was no question of the PCSSA Scheme being discriminatory, as the Scheme merely provided an option for the elderly CSSA recipients to reside permanently in Guangdong or Fujian Province if they chose to do so. To date, only about 3 000 CSSA elderly were on the Scheme, which represented a very small percentage of elderly CSSA recipients. DDSW(A) further said that apart from the fact that most elderly CSSA recipients were natives of Guangdong and Fujian Provinces, another consideration for selecting these provinces was because the proximity of these places to Hong Kong made it feasible to have an agent on the ground to undertake case reviews and provide assistance to the elderly as necessary.

29. Members supported the Administration's proposals and agreed that the approval of the necessary financial implications should be sought from FC.

Action

V. Provision of a monthly supplement to CSSA recipients who are 100% disabled, or who require constant attendance and are not living in institutions

(Legislative Council Brief - Ref : HWF CR 2/4821/58)

30. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) briefed members on the background on and justifications for providing a monthly supplement of \$100 to CSSA recipients who were 100% disabled, or who required constant attendance and were not living in institutions, details of which were set out in paragraphs 17-18 and 28-29 of the above LegCo Brief. Subject to the FC's approval of the necessary financial implications, the Administration aimed to implement the new measure by November 2005.

31. Representatives from 1st Step Association presented the views of the Hong Kong Neuro-Muscular Disease Association, 1st Step Association, Paraplegic & Quadriplegic Association, Direction Association for the Handicapped and Windward Association for the Handicapped, details of which were set out in their joint submission tabled at the meeting. Notably, whilst welcoming the new measure, they were concerned that disabled CSSA recipients would lose their entitlements to special grants, such as the care and attention allowance, if they chose to take up residence in the Mainland as a result of the relaxation of the absence limit for DA. They further urged the Administration to expeditiously come up with a solution on how to provide better help and support to the 100% disabled or those living in the community who required constant attendance.

32. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) pointed out that there might be some confusion between the PCSSA Scheme and the absence limit for DA. Under the existing social security system, a disabled person could either receive assistance under the CSSA Scheme, which was means-tested, or the DA under the SSA Scheme, which was non means-tested. The proposal to relax the absence limit applied only to the SSA Scheme. If an elderly CSSA recipient opted for PCSSA, he/she must return his/her public housing unit or delete his/her name from the tenancy if he/she was a public housing tenant. Moreover, an applicant would no longer be entitled to special grants or other payments, such as rent allowance, apart from the monthly standard rate and the annual long-term supplement.

33. Mr LEUNG Choy-yan of the 1st Step Association clarified that what they meant was to extend the PCSSA Scheme to the disabled CSSA recipients who did not necessarily have to meet the age requirement of 60 or above. ADSW(SS) agreed to give the suggestion further thoughts.

Admin

34. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that to his knowledge, SWD had been too stringent in giving out Higher Disability Allowance. For instance, people who were blind in both eyes only entitled Normal Disability Allowance. Mr TAM

Action

hoped that SWD could relax the eligibility for Higher Disability Allowance so as to better help the disabled to meet their special needs.

35. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security) (ADSW(SS)) responded that if people were aggrieved by the decisions made by SWD with regard to DA, they could always seek review from the Social Security Appeal Board whose members were all appointed by CE from outside the Government. ADSW(SS) further said that defining disability as such was very complicated, given its wide range, and therefore SWD had to rely on the opinion of independent medical experts. On the whole, SWD considered that the system had been working quite well.

36. CSSO(SS)2 supplemented that Normal Disability Allowance was intended for severely disabled persons who, broadly speaking, suffered from a 100% loss of earning capacity, or who were profoundly deaf. As regards Higher Disability Allowance, it was intended for severely disabled persons who required constant attendance from others in their daily life but were not receiving such care in a government or subvented institution or a medical institution under the Hospital Authority.

Admin

37. The Chairman requested the Administration to give further thoughts to relaxing the eligibility for Higher Disability Allowance under the SSA Scheme.

38. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked whether consideration could be given to advancing the implementation of providing a monthly supplement of \$100 to CSSA recipients who were 100% disabled, or who required constant attendance and were not living in institutions. Dr CHEUNG further asked whether the Administration had come up with any measure(s) to help those severely disabled persons not entitled to CSSA since the previous meeting held on 18 February 2005.

39. DSHWF(ES&SS)(Atg) explained that the reason for setting the implementation date of providing a monthly supplement of \$100 to CSSA recipients who were 100% disabled, or who required constant attendance and were not living in institutions by November 2005 was to tie in with the completion of the enhancement of the social security computer system. As regards providing support and assistance to severely disabled persons not on CSSA and living in the community, Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Rehabilitation and Medical Social Services) (ADSW(R&MSS)) said that apart from providing them with DA, community resources had been mobilised in the form of several charitable funds to subsidise these people in buying medical supplies and daily necessities where justified. A series of community support services were also provided to this group of disabled persons and their carers regardless of whether these patients were on CSSA or not as set out in an information paper for the meeting of the

Panel on 19 July 2004 (LC Paper No. CB(2)3078/03-04(03)).

40. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the measures mentioned by the Administration in paragraph 39 above to help the severely disabled living in the community were far from adequate, and urged the Administration to expeditiously implement the motion passed by the Panel on 18 February 2005 demanding the expeditious establishment of a second safety net for tetraplegic patients not entitled to CSSA.

41. ADSW(R&MSS) responded that the Administration was well aware of the needs of tetraplegic patients who lived in the community and their family members who cared for them. To this end, continuous efforts would be made to enhance measures and assistance to these patients and their families so as to mitigate the difficulties they encountered. For instance, additional resources would be provided to improving respite services to provide temporary relief to carers. ADSW(R&MSS) further advised that most of the applications for the Yan Chai Tetraplegic Fund were met with approval by the Fund Committee. As to those applications which were rejected, this was mainly due to the fact their condition did not fall within the medical definition of “tetraplegic”. SWD had been following up on these rejected applicants to see what help could be provided to them.

42. Members supported the Administration’s proposal and agreed that the approval of the necessary financial implications should be sought from FC.

VI. Progress of formation of Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centres

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1237/04-05(03))

43. ADSW(R&MSS) took members through the Administration’s paper which set out the latest development on the formation of Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centre (IVRCSs) and the future direction of the service.

44. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed support for providing people with disabilities (PWDs) with one-stop integrated and seamless vocational services so as to better accommodate the limitations arising from their disabilities. Dr CHEUNG hoped that the Administration would not use the formation of IVRCSs as a ploy to save money.

45. ADSW(R&MSS) responded that there was no cause for concern mentioned by Dr CHEUNG in paragraph 44 above. For instance, 14 of the 17 IVRCSs formed thus far were achieved through the pooling of subventions of Sheltered Workshops (SWs) and Supported Employment (SE) places. Moreover, as raised

by the Working Group comprising representatives of SWD, NGO operators, parents of PWDs formed in June 2004 to review the implementation of IVRCSs and the future development of the service, additional resources would be allocated to IVRCSs for the provision of more training rooms and interview rooms to better equip service users to secure open employment.

46. Ms LI Fung-ying asked for the reason for not fixing a timetable to convert the existing 36 SWs into IVRCSs, in view of the general recognition that IVRCSs would have many advantages over the traditional SW and SE services.

47. ADSW(R&MSS) explained that the Administration had deliberately not made the re-engineering exercise compulsory, as the success of such exercise must depend on the support of parents of PWDs and the staff concerned. ADSW(R&MSS) pointed out that some parents were very hesitant about letting their children attempt SE, particularly if their children had been working in SWs for many years. As regards the staff, they would need to undergo special training programmes in order to meet all the challenges arising from the implementation of this new service delivery mode.

48. Ms LI further enquired whether the Administration would use funding allocation to force NGOs to re-engineer their vocational rehabilitative services to form IVRCSs. ADSW(R&MSS) replied in the negative.

49. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan urged the Administration not to drop the adoption of unit cost approach in funding the operation of an IVRCS, and award the operation of such to the lowest bidder in order to save money.

50. ADSW(R&MSS) responded that since 2001, awarding of rehabilitative services was based on the “quality” and not the “price” of proposals submitted by NGOs according to the requirements set out by SWD in its “invitation of proposals” documents. Funding for rehabilitative services was pre-determined by SWD based on resources available and the operational costs of various types of services. ADSW(R&MSS) further said that SWD had never adopted the approach through “price tendering” in funding rehabilitative services. The main reason of adopting the integrative approach was to maintain service quality, cost-effectiveness, flexibility and convenience in providing the essential services for PWDs.

51. Mr James TIEN enquired whether there was any on the job training programme for PWDs, as the business sector was generally willing to hire those PWDs who had good abilities and potential.

52. ADSW(R&MSS) advised that a special on-the-job training/attachment programme, benefiting no less than 360 PWDs per year, was currently funded by

the Administration. The objective of the project was to enhance the employment of PWDs through proactive training, market driven and placement-tied approach, overcoming disabled job seekers' barriers to work, and encouraging employers to create or offer job opportunities for PWDs. Each person would receive an individual plan comprising a period of counselling, training and job matching (three months), a job attachment in an NGO or private company (three months), a job trial in the open market with a private sector employer (three months), and post-placement service (six months). NGOs were commissioned to operate the project, each serving a designated number of clients. As part of the programme, a job attachment allowance of \$1,250 per month for a maximum of three months was provided to the disabled participant who achieved no less than 80% attendance per month during the job attachment period to cover any additional expenses that they might incur. To incentivise the private sector employer to offer job trials, an allowance was paid to the employer providing the job opportunity at a rate of half of the wage given to the worker or \$3,000, whichever was the lower, also for a maximum of three months. ADSW(R&MSS) further said that some private sector employers were so pleased with the job performance of some PWDs that they did not wait for the completion of the three-month trial period to hire these PWDs as permanent staff and declined the \$3,000 monthly allowance payable to them for providing the jobs to PWDs.

53. Responding to Mr Frederick FUNG's enquiry about the average waiting time for PWDs to receive SW or SE services, ADSW(R&MSS) said that at present about 2 000 PWDs were waiting to receive such services and the average waiting time for getting day SW services was between six and nine months. In reply to Mr FUNG's further enquiry about the average rate of PWDs exiting from SWs and SE services, ADSW(R&MSS) said that less than 1% of PWDs had left SWs over the years while about 17% of PWDs on SE had progressed to on-the-job training/attachment programme or open employment last year. Noting that the SW and SE services had no time limit, Mr FUNG wondered how the six to nine months' waiting time could be achieved. ADSW(R&MSS) responded that although 2 000 PWDs were currently on the waiting list to get into SW or SE service, past experience showed that not all of them would take such service when offered for reasons such as the location of SWs was not convenient to PWDs or the mental condition of the applicants had deteriorated. Notwithstanding this, to better meet the vocational needs of PWDs, 160 new training places would come on stream this year. In addition, new money had been set aside to provide 200 on-the-job training places for young PWDs.

54. Mrs Sophie LEUNG asked whether SWD had any measures in place to encourage NGOs operating IVRCS to strive to enhance their service to PWDs.

55. ADSW(R&MSS) responded that operators of IVRCS needed to enter into a Funding and Service Agreement (FSA) with SWD, a specimen of which was

provided in Annex 2 to the Administration's paper. Specifically, operators were measured against a series of performance indicators for continuous funding from SWD which included (i) average number of persons served per month; (ii) number of open employment cases every two years; (iii) rate of progress review per year; and (iv) engagement of the private sector in rendering support and providing job opportunities to service users. The FSA for ICRVSs had been implemented since April 2005.

56. Mrs Sophie LEUNG said that it might also be useful if operators of IVRCS could hold open forums on a regular basis to exchange views with parents of service users and share good practices with workers.

57. In closing, the Chairman suggested to pay a visit to a traditional SW and an IVRCS so as to better understand the actual operation of the latter. Members expressed support. ADSW(R&MSS) would follow up with the Secretariat.

58. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:53 am.