

立法會

Legislative Council

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Report of the Panel on Welfare Services for submission to the Legislative Council

Purpose

This report gives an account of the work of the Panel on Welfare Services during the 2004-2005 Legislative Council (LegCo) session. It will be tabled at the Council meeting on 6 July 2005 in accordance with Rule 77(14) of the Rules of Procedure.

The Panel

2. The Panel was formed by a resolution of this Council on 8 July 1998 and as amended on 20 December 2000 and 9 October 2002 for the purpose of monitoring and examining Government policies and issues of public concern relating to welfare services matters.
3. The terms of reference of the Panel are in **Appendix I**.
4. The Panel comprises 15 members, with Hon CHAN Yuen-han and Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung elected as Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Panel respectively. The membership list of the Panel is in **Appendix II**.

Major work

Strategy and measures to prevent and tackle family tragedies

5. The Panel discussed the Report of the Review Panel on Family Services at a special meeting on 22 November 2004. Members supported the recommendations and urged the Administration to implement the recommendations as soon as possible. The Administration responded that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) had already launched several enhancement and improvement measures in service delivery. As the Report was just received, SWD would need more time to examine whether and how the

recommendations could be put into practice.

6. Some members considered that to help prevent family violence, it was necessary to alleviate the heavy workload of social workers by setting a ceiling on the number of family cases each social worker should handle. The Administration pointed out that past experience had shown that merely increasing social workers to handle family cases was not the most effective way to prevent and tackle family violence. As dealing with the problem required the collaboration of many parties including medical social workers, Police officers, clinical psychologists and other professionals, the Administration had all along adopted a multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral approach in preventing and tackling family violence. Apart from increasing manpower to provide timely intervention and remedial services, the Administration would step up its publicity efforts to enhance public awareness of the need to strengthen family solidarity, encourage early help-seeking and prevent family violence.

7. A Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Family Violence was set up under the Panel to discuss with the Administration how to improve the existing strategy to tackle family violence. The Subcommittee held five meetings from December 2004 to June 2005.

Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Allowance Scheme

8. The Administration briefed the Panel in November 2004 on the Comprehensive Social Security Allowance (CSSA) Scheme and specific reviews being undertaken to improve the system. The Administration pointed out that in view of the fast growth in cases involving able-bodied adults over the past years, its emphasis at that moment was on continuing its efforts to help able-bodied recipients move into work. The Administration was carrying out an evaluation of the intensive employment assistance projects implemented since October 2003 to help employable CSSA recipients and the “near-CSSA” unemployed move into work. It was also conducting a review of existing CSSA arrangements and related services for single families on CSSA. It would also review the provision of disregarded earnings under the CSSA Scheme.

9. A Subcommittee on Review of the CSSA Scheme was set up under the Panel to review the existing arrangements for the CSSA and the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Schemes. The Subcommittee held six meetings from December 2004 to June 2005 to discuss various subjects, including social security benefits and other services for needy children in Hong Kong, the Household Expenditure Survey on CSSA households, seven-year residence requirement for CSSA, review of arrangements for single parent recipients under the CSSA Scheme, and findings of the evaluative study of the intensive employment assistance projects.

Support and assistance for tetraplegic patients living in the community

10. The Panel met with the Administration and deputations in February 2005 to review the progress made in the enhanced services for tetraplegic patients living in the community.

11. Members noted that in addition to the Care & Attention (C&A) Allowance under the CSSA Scheme, SWD would also consider discretionary grant to cover other one-off expenses related to the hire of a carer, including insurance, agent fee, air ticket, government tariff and long service award. Notwithstanding the training provided to carers by the medical specialists of the Hospital Authority (HA) and occupational therapists of the Home-based Training and Support Teams, a sum of money had also been granted by the Administration to the paralysed patients' self-help groups in December 2004 to enable them to provide their own carer training.

12. A member pointed out that although SWD had adopted a flexible approach in granting the C&A Allowance to tetraplegic patients on CSSA to hire foreign domestic helpers, the patients had to share their CSSA monthly payment with their helpers as the C&A Allowance was not adequate to cover food for the helpers. The Administration agreed to consider the feasibility of providing an additional grant to subsidise meal expenses of the foreign domestic helpers in question.

13. Two members requested the Administration to seriously consider adopting a social insurance scheme for people with disabilities to ensure that people with disabilities would have adequate means to meet their basic and essential needs regardless of their income. To address the present inconsistency in assessing the needs of people with disabilities, the Administration was further requested to consider developing a standardised needs assessment tool for this group of people which could be used for admission to residential homes and for granting disability allowance and other funds. The Administration undertook to convey the requests to the working group to be set up to develop a Rehabilitation Programme Plan.

14. While noting that tetraplegic patients not on CSSA could apply to various relevant charitable funds for financial assistance to support their living in the community, members were concerned about the plight of these patients as the nature of the grants from the charitable funds was generally one-off or temporary. Members unanimously passed a motion urging the Administration to immediately establish a safety net for such patients to address their special needs.

Services for the elderly

Provision of infirmary care for elders in a non-hospital setting

15. The Administration briefed the Panel on SWD's initiative to start a trial scheme to provide subsidised infirmary care services for medically stable infirm elders in a non-hospital setting. The Administration pointed out that it was not cost-effective to keep infirm elders who were medically stable in hospitals. The provision of infirmary care services in a non-hospital setting for medically stable infirm elders could provide them with more homely and socialised environment without compromising the quality of care, which was in line with the international trend.

16. Members asked the Administration to explain why the selection of operators would be made through an open tender exercise, and not confined to those NGOs which already had ample experience in providing infirmary care for elders in residential care homes for the elderly.

17. The Administration explained that since the private sector was an important player in the provision of residential care services for the elderly, there was no reason to exclude private operators from the tender exercise. Another consideration for opening up the operation of the trial scheme to the private sector was to enable more applicants on the Central Infirmary Waiting List who were staying in the community to receive infirmary care.

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

18. The Administration consulted the Panel on the arrangements for the conversion of self-care hostel and home for the aged places into care and attention places providing continuum of care. Members noted that in line with the international trend on the development of elderly services, the Government encouraged and facilitated those capable of self-care to lead an active and healthy life by providing them with community support services through the various district-based elderly centres. For elders who had long term care needs and required public assistance in meeting their care needs, the Administration aimed to provide them with the appropriate services according to their conditions. To ensure a more precise matching of services to care needs and the allocation of services to elders most in need, the Government had adopted a standardised care need assessment mechanism in 2000 to assess the care needs of elders.

19. Five deputations from the welfare sector presented their views on the arrangements for the conversion of self-care hostel and home for the aged place into care and attention places. Taking into consideration the deputations' views, members asked the Administration to provide further information on

how the conversion exercise would impact on the existing staff of the 75 homes operating self-care and home for the aged places. In view of the concerns of the frontline staff about their job security and salaries after conversion, some members urged the Administration to include the staff unions concerned in the task group set up to work out the conversion arrangements.

Social security assistance for needy elderly

20. The Panel met with six deputations to listen to their views on social security assistance for needy elderly. Members were particularly concerned about the financial difficulties faced by those elders who did not apply for CSSA for various reasons and had to live on their meagre savings and OAA. Members urged the Administration to find more ways to assist these needy elderly and to re-consider the setting up of a contributory pay-as-you-go old age pension scheme to ensure that older persons could live a dignified life in their retirement years. Members pointed out that the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) scheme could not benefit the current older persons, and did not cover people not in the workforce, such as housewives. For those of low income, the benefits of MPF were limited.

21. The Administration explained that the Hong Kong model of providing financial security to the elderly drew reference from the three-pillar approach on retirement protection advocated by the World Bank, i.e. mandatory savings on a contributory basis for the working population, a social safety net for needy elders, and voluntary private savings. In terms of the public pillar of social safety net, the Government had established a comprehensive social assistance system for the elderly based on non-contributory direct financial support, and heavily subsidised medical, housing and care services.

22. The Administration also pointed out that according to the latest census figures, Hong Kong's elderly population aged 65 or above was projected to rise from one in eight in 2004 to one in seven in 2013, one in six in 2023 and one in four in 2033. To assess the financial sustainability of the three pillars of retirement protection in the light of the ageing population, an Expert Panel on Financial Security in Old Age had been formed in July 2004 by the Central Policy Unit to develop a research agenda on financial security in old age. The Expert Panel was expected to come up with initial findings in early 2006.

Policy on assisting women in poverty

23. At the Panel meeting on 9 May 2005, 11 deputations presented their views on assisting women in poverty. Their suggestions included establishing a poverty line and minimum wage, enhancing the status of the Women's Commission, promoting the social participation of women, setting up a comprehensive database on gender mainstreaming to better help policy-makers to take into account women's needs and perspectives in their policy

formulation, promoting self-reliance and formulating comprehensive training and re-training policies for middle-aged and grass-root women to enhance their employability and earning power.

24. Members were particularly concerned about the low wages of women. The Administration responded that to improve their livelihood, the long term solution was to enhance the employability and earning power of women of low educational attainment and low skill through the various subsidised education opportunities provided by the Government. Child care services were available to facilitate women and single parents of low income families take up employment. Extended hour services were provided in some centres to meet the special needs of working parents who needed longer hours of child care.

25. Members considered that the approach adopted by the Administration to combat poverty in women was too piecemeal and remedial in nature. Members requested the Administration to take into account the views expressed by the deputations and come up with a comprehensive policy to address the problem.

Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF)

26. In January 2005 the Administration briefed the Panel on the up-to-date position of the CIIF and the CIIF's strategic focus for the coming year. Members noted that as of 20 December 2004, 72 projects had been selected with funding around \$60 million allocated and 45 projects had commenced. Applicants now had a much clearer idea about the meaning of social capital and project teams were now more focused on strategies and implementation, community engagement, developing meaningful tripartite partnerships and sustaining the project outcome.

27. Members noted that a CIIF Partnership Scheme had been established in July 2002 to assist the less well-established applicants in turning their projects into viable proposals, and various breakthroughs had been achieved in encouraging cross-sector cooperation and partnership in developing social capital. Members shared the view that the CIIF Committee and Secretariat should provide more assistance to the prospective applicants and the successful organisations, in particular the less well-established agencies. The Administration should encourage the business sector to participate in developing social capital and strengthen the cooperation among Government departments to facilitate the implementation of the CIIF projects. The Administration undertook to discuss with the CIIF Committee on ways to further enhance support and assistance to the less well-established applicants and project organisers.

Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged

28. The Administration consulted the Panel on the SWD's plan to establish a \$200 million one-off Matching Grant for the establishment of a Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged.

29. Members raised concern that the proposed ceiling of 15% of the grants from the Fund for staffing or administrative expenses was too low, as carrying out welfare initiatives invariably involved staff and staff costs formed the bulk of NGOs' operating expenses. The Administration explained that the ceiling was to ensure that the Fund would bring maximum benefit to the disadvantaged groups. Under very exceptional circumstances, worthwhile projects which could only be delivered with a higher percentage of justifiable administrative expenses might be considered for approval by the Vetting Committee. Members found the explanation unacceptable and further pointed out that the proposed ceiling would have the effect of discouraging NGOs from applying for the Fund.

30. To address members' concern, the Administration revised its proposal by removing the 15% ceiling in question before submitting it to the Finance Committee of LegCo for funding approval. The Administration explained that while it would not mandate a ceiling for staffing or administrative expenses, in considering applications, priority would be given to proposals which used funding in a way that would bring maximum benefits to the disadvantaged groups.

Financial support to NGOs after the Tide-Over Grant period

31. The Administration had put in place the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) subvention system with effect from 1 January 2001 as part and parcel of the subventions reform. Under LSG, SWD no longer rigidly imposed input controls on staffing structure, levels of pay and individual items of expenditure. NGOs were given flexibility in the deployment of funds to meet the changing service and community needs. To address the concerns of the welfare sector that LSG might not provide sufficient funds to meet their commitment to the staff as at 1 April 2000, SWD introduced a Tide-Over Grant (TOG) Scheme, covering a five-year period from 2001-02 to 2005-06, to enable NGOs to honour their contractual commitments in terms of paying salary increments to their staff during the transitional period. NGOs were expected to carry out organisation restructuring and service reengineering within the TOG period so that they could operate their services within the LSG provision.

32. As the TOG would cease in 2006-07, the Panel held a special meeting on 2 June 2005 to meet with 15 deputations from the welfare sector. All the deputations opposed the cessation of the TOG and did not accept a Special One-off Grant proposed by the Administration after the termination of the TOG.

Members passed a motion urging the Administration to review the LSG subvention system and to continue the TOG until an improved subvention system had been worked out.

Other issues/items discussed

33. Other issues/items discussed by the Panel included policy initiatives in respect of welfare services in 2005, funding for welfare services in 2005-06, third progress report on the Trust Fund for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), employees' compensation for Hospital Authority workers infected with SARS on duty, progress of formation of Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centres, and implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre model and closure of Single Parent Centres.

34. The Panel was consulted on the review of qualifying condition for elderly in receipt of CSSA to live outside Hong Kong and absence limit for SSA and the provision of a monthly supplement to CSSA recipients who were 100% disabled or who required constant attendance and were not living in institutions.

35. The Panel held a total of 12 meetings from October 2004 to June 2005.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
27 June 2005

Panel on Welfare Services

Terms of Reference

1. To monitor and examine Government policies and issues of public concern relating to welfare and rehabilitation services matters.
2. To provide a forum for the exchange and dissemination of views on the above policy matters.
3. To receive briefings and to formulate views on any major legislative or financial proposals in respect of the above policy areas prior to their formal introduction to the Council or Finance Committee.
4. To monitor and examine, to the extent it considers necessary, the above policy matters referred to it by a member of the Panel or by the House Committee.
5. To make reports to the Council or to the House Committee as required by the Rules of Procedure.

Appendix II

Panel on Welfare Services

Membership list for 2004 - 2005 session

Chairman	Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Deputy Chairman	Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Members	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 LEUNG Kwok-hung
	Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG

(Total : 15 Members)

Clerk Ms Doris CHAN

Legal adviser Mr LEE Yu-sung

Date 12 October 2004