

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)562/04-05
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seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PS/2/04

Panel on Welfare Services

Subcommittee on strategy and measures to tackle family violence

Minutes of the 1st meeting
held on Wednesday, 8 December 2004 at 8:30 am
in Conference Room B of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP (Chairman)
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung

Members absent : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Public Officers attending : Item III
Ms Linda LAI, JP
Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Family and Women)

Miss Dora FU
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Women)

Mr Paul TANG, JP
Director of Social Welfare

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

Mrs SO WONG Wei-yee
Chief Social Work Officer (Domestic Violence)
Social Welfare Department

Mrs Loretta CHAU
District Social Welfare Officer (Yuen Long)
Social Welfare Department

Mr James CHAN, JP
District Officer (Yuen Long)
Home Affairs Department

Mr Raymond WU
Assistant District Officer (Yuen Long)
Home Affairs Department

Mr Victor LO
Assistant Commissioner of Police (Crime)

Ms Cecilia NG
Superintendent of Police (Crime Support)

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

Staff in attendance : Mr LEE Yu-sung
Senior Assistant Legal Adviser 1

I. Election of Chairman

Miss CHAN Yuen-han was elected Chairman of the Subcommittee.

II. Proposed terms of reference

(LC Paper No. CB(2)335/04-05(01))

2. Members did not raise any query on the proposed terms of reference set out in the above paper prepared by the Secretariat. The agreed terms of reference would be submitted to the Panel on Welfare Services for endorsement.

III. Meeting with the Administration

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)145/04-05(05) to (06) and CB(2)335/04-05(02) to (05))

3. Assistant Director of Social Welfare briefed members, through a power point presentation, on the Administration's initial views on the recommendations of the Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai (the Review Panel) and the Administration's intention on how to take them forward, details of which were set out in LC Paper No. CB(2)335/04-05(02).

4. Members noted a supplementary information paper provided by the Administration on the number of new arrival women involved in family violence cases in the recent four years tabled at the meeting.

Workplan of the Subcommittee

5. Members agreed to hold future meetings on a bi-weekly basis initially. The Chairman suggested inviting deputations to the next meeting to give their views on the recommendations of the Review Panel and the Administration's views to these recommendations. In view of the wide-ranging topics relating to family violence, the Chairman further suggested setting specific topic(s) for discussion at each meeting. Members agreed. The clerk undertook to fix the dates of next meetings for the coming three months, and consult members and the Administration on the topics to be discussed.

Clerk

Discussion

6. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked whether there was any policy on preventing and combating family violence. If so, Dr CHEUNG requested that the relevant policy paper be provided to members. Dr CHEUNG was of the view that the effectiveness of the measures implemented/to be implemented to prevent and tackle family violence would continue to be undermined if they were not underpinned by a clear and comprehensive policy on preventing and combating

family violence.

7. Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (DSHWF) responded that although there was no policy paper on preventing and combating family violence, this did not mean that there was no such policy in place. DSHWF pointed out that the “zero tolerance” policy against family violence had all along been upheld by the Administration, the realisation of which was made through the adoption of a three-pronged approach, with multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration, to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and specialised services at primary, secondary and tertiary levels to prevent family problems and to deal with them when they arose. DSHWF further said that although the work of preventing and combating family violence involved the joint efforts of different Government departments and the Police, the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau was the leading bureau.

8. Dr Fernando CHEUNG remarked that the “zero tolerance” policy against family violence was nothing but a slogan if there was no paper documenting the objectives of the policy; rationale behind the objectives; strategy and measures to achieve the objectives; yardsticks to gauge the effectiveness of the strategy and measures to achieve the objectives; delineation of the roles assumed by parties concerned and establishment of a central body comprising also outside professionals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to review and monitor the policy direction and matters such as initiatives under the policy, etc. Dr CHEUNG pointed out that the occurrence of the Tin Shui Wai family tragedy of 11 April 2004 had clearly demonstrated that had a central body comprising also outside professionals and NGOs to oversee, coordinate, monitor and review the strategy and measures to prevent and combat family violence been set up by the Administration, such a tragedy could have been avoided. Although different parties, such as the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Police, an integrated family services centre (IFSC) operated by an NGO and a refuge centre for women, were involved in rendering assistance sought by one of the victims of the Tin Shui Wai family tragedy, Madam JIN, they still failed to prevent the tragic incident from happening.

9. Director of Social Welfare (DSW) responded that well-established mechanisms had been put in place to ensure effective coordination of the joint efforts of different Government departments, professionals and NGOs in preventing and tackling family violence. They included three dedicated multi-disciplinary committees, namely, the Committee on Child Abuse (CCA), the Working Group on Combating Violence (WGCV) and the Working Group on Elder Abuse. These committees would meet as and when necessary and set up subcommittees to study specific topics where appropriate. For instance, a subcommittee was formed under the WGCV to review the procedure guidelines

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for handling battered spouse cases.

10. DSW further said that at the district level, 13 District Coordinating Committees on Family and Child Welfare, under the chairmanship of the District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) of SWD, were currently in place to coordinate family and child welfare services including service provision relating to family violence to meet the specific needs in each district. As recommended by the Review Panel that the existing District Coordinating Committees should be reviewed in terms of its roles, functions and structures in the light of the increasing complexity of social problems in the district and the rising community expectations of the roles and functions of the DSWO, SWD was reviewing the District Coordinating Committee mechanism. To this end, a pilot project was being conducted at Kwun Tong district, namely “Kwun Tong District Welfare Concourse”, involving representatives from various departments, NGOs, local organisations and service users. The pilot project aimed to promote early identification and early intervention to at-risk families or those with the domestic violence problem through cross-sector and multi-disciplinary coordination and cooperation. It was scheduled for completion by the end of 2005. To further strengthen district liaison and coordination and to provide better support to NGOs in handling domestic violence, District Liaison Groups would be convened by the District Social Welfare Offices of SWD, with the participation of the Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs) of SWD, IFSCs, the Police and other relevant organisations as appropriate in early 2005.

11. DSW also said that apart from strengthening district welfare coordination and support to NGOs in handling domestic violence cases, efforts would continue to be stepped up on preventive and supportive measures to meet the challenging needs of families. The former included enhancing public awareness of the need to strengthen family solidarity, encourage early help-seeking and prevent violence and collaborating with the Home Affairs Department (HAD) on building up support networks in the community to deal with family violence. DSW, however, pointed out that nurturing a culture of care and concern and gender equality required long-term efforts. As regards supportive measures, these included ensuring that various assistance and services made available to the victims, such as housing and financial assistance and child care services, were adequate to meet their needs.

12. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that he appreciated the efforts put in by the Administration to prevent and tackle family violence and welcomed the measures to be taken in response to the recommendations of the Review Panel. Dr CHEUNG, however, pointed out that all these were not justification for not having a policy paper on preventing and combating family violence. If the Administration considered preventing and combating family violence an important

policy issue, it was unreasonable for the Administration not to have a paper setting out, say, the role and responsibilities of the CCA and WGCV and how they interacted with the local organisations and district committees, in the form of a policy paper. Dr CHEUNG further said that one of the main reasons for having a policy paper on preventing and combating family violence was to enable easy identification of whether a certain measure was effective or otherwise and why a particular problem had occurred. In this regard, Dr CHEUNG urged the Administration to come up with a policy paper on preventing and combating family violence in the near future, and in so doing, to involve NGOs, local organisations and professionals.

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13. DSHWF reiterated that although there was no policy paper on preventing and combating family violence, this did not mean that there was no such policy in place. In fact, the Administration's stance on zero tolerance of family violence and the relationship among different Government departments on preventing and combating family violence was covered in the papers on the subject matter previously submitted to the Panel. Nevertheless, DSHWF undertook to make clearer the Administration's policy on family violence in a paper to the Subcommittee for the next meeting.

14. The Chairman shared Dr Fernando CHEUNG's view that the Administration should develop a policy paper on preventing and combating family violence, as this would enable the Administration to have a better grasp of the overall situation so that a more practicable and long-term solution to the problem could be worked out. The Chairman pointed out that the lack of a policy paper had rendered the handling of family violence by the Administration without a clear direction and close coordination. For instance, each service unit often viewed handling of family cases as routine work and thus lacked the foresight to look out for any potential problems. The Tin Shui Wai family tragedy of 11 April 2004 was a case in point.

15. DSW hoped that members would not use one case to conclude that the whole strategy and measures to prevent and tackle family violence was a failure. Many family tragedies had been successfully avoided through timely intervention, though they were not reported by the media. It should be pointed out that given the complexity of the problem, it was not realistic to expect family violence could be completely avoided. DSW, however, agreed that there was room for improvement in the handling of family violence cases, as pointed out by the Review Panel. To this end, actions would be taken to address the deficiencies identified. For instance, training on handling family violence for social workers, the Police and other professionals would be strengthened. DSW also envisaged that with the development of assessment tools by the University of Hong Kong to identify high risk cases, the situation could be further improved.

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16. Ms LI Fung-ying sought more details on inter-departmental and multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral collaboration to prevent and tackle family violence, and measures to improve such collaboration. Ms LI pointed out that under the existing arrangements, it was not possible to identify which party was responsible and accountable for the overall handling of family violence cases. Ms LI also hoped that the incident of youth service units in the Yuen Long District refusing to give support and assistance to the work of IFSCs when there was an upsurge in the demand for family services, as mentioned in the report of the Review Panel, would not recur.

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17. DSW undertook to provide the information requested by Ms LI Fung-ying in paragraph 16 above after the meeting. In the meantime, DSW referred members to paragraphs 8, 9 and 18 of the Administration's paper which set out the framework of the Administration's plans to strengthen cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary coordination and cooperation in districts in handling family violence cases. DSW further said that SWD and NGOs had already been collaborating closely to meet district needs. However, the actual deployment of NGO resources needed more deliberation and careful examination. SWD would look into the feasibility of carrying out the Review Panel's recommendation that the DSWOs should be empowered to mobilise the resources of the NGOs in their districts by making reference to the experience to be gained from the pilot project mentioned in paragraph 10 above.

18. Assistant Commissioner of Police advised that to strengthen collaboration in preventing and combating family violence, starting from January 2005, a Police officer of the Chief Inspector or Inspector rank responsible for overseeing Police operation on a district basis would be appointed in a new liaison process to supplement the District Coordinating Committees of SWD to provide a wider input from the Police perspective in handling family violence cases. Such an arrangement would differ from the existing arrangement whereby only the Police officer in charge of a particular family violence case would attend case conference with other relevant parties.

19. DSWO (Yuen Long) said that similar to other SWD districts, five District Coordinating Committees/Local Committee on family and child welfare services, elderly services, rehabilitation services, promotion of volunteer services and young people services respectively were established in Yuen Long District. These committees were the key mechanism whereby the District Social Welfare Office could tap the expertise and opinions from relevant stakeholders in the district, including District Council members, local leaders, representatives from Government departments such as the HAD, the Education and Manpower Bureau, the Police, service providers, local organisations, and service users in district

welfare planning. The major functions of the District Coordinating Committees included reviewing the provision of welfare services in the district; identifying service needs; making recommendations to improve the existing provision and enhancing liaison and coordination of resources among different disciplines and organisations concerned in the district. Other than the existing district coordinating mechanism, the District Social Welfare Office (Yuen Long) regularly organised district welfare services planning forums in providing and sharing information on the district profile and welfare needs and formulating strategies and actions to meeting such needs as strengthening family harmony, etc.

20. DSWO (Yuen Long) further said that in view of the population profile of the Yuen Long District, actions had been taken to involve the joint efforts of IFSCs and service units providing children and youth services in developing networking projects for the prevention of family problems and provision of greater social support for residents in Yuen Long.

21. The Chairman pointed out that according to her experience, the existing coordinating mechanism of District Coordinating Committee could not enable DSWOs to mobilise the resources of the NGOs in their respective districts during crisis situation. The Chairman urged the Administration to give greater authority to DSWOs to play a more active role in this regard.

22. Mrs Sophie LEUNG said that instead of relying on a policy paper to provide direction on preventing and combating family violence, which was static and lacked the flexibility to meet changing needs, a better approach would be to raise public awareness of the need to strengthen families and combat violence with a view of instilling an anti-violence culture in the community. Mrs LEUNG further said that DSWOs should be given greater authority in district welfare planning and coordination to better meet the welfare needs of their respective districts. A greater role should also be played by District Offices in coordinating inter-departmental and cross-sectoral collaboration on community building. Mrs LEUNG, however, pointed out that the structures and procedures for handling family cases should be made simple as far as possible to allow more time and room for frontline workers to assist at-risk families.

23. District Officer (Yuen Long) said that Yuen Long District Office had been encouraging and assisting Yuen Long District Council, local organisations and NGOs to organise activities to promote community building. In 2003-04 and 2004-05, about \$10 million per year had been allocated by Yuen Long District Council for nearly 700 community building projects. This year in particular, Yuen Long District Office, Yuen Long District Council and SWD jointly organised two large-scale projects, the “Building Harmonic Families Campaign” and the “Building Harmonic Community Campaign”. Effort in this endeavour

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would continue.

- Admin 24. In closing, the Chairman urged the Administration to carefully consider the views expressed by members at the meeting and provide a response. The Chairman hoped that representatives from the Housing Department would attend the future meetings of the Subcommittee.

IV. Date of next meeting

25. Members agreed to hold the next meeting on 18 January 2005 to listen to the views of deputations on the recommendations of the Review Panel and the Administration's views to these recommendations.

26. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:25 am.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 January 2005