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Panel on Welfare Services

Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Family Violence

Minutes of the 3rd meeting
held on Thursday, 3 March 2005 at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP (Chairman)
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung

Members absent : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP

Member attending : Hon Margaret NG

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

Miss Hinny LAM
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), Social Welfare Department

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 Victor LO
Assistant Commissioner of Police (Crime)
Hong Kong Police Force

Ms Cecilia NG
Superintendent of Police (Crime Support)
Hong Kong Police Force

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

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

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

I. Discussion on the views expressed by deputations at the meeting on 18 January 2005
(LC Paper No. CB(2)980/04-05(01))

At the invitation of the Chairman, Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child Welfare) briefed members on the salient features of the

Administration's responses to the views expressed by deputations at the meeting on 18 January 2005 with regard to strategies and measures to tackle family violence.

2. The Chairman noted from the Administration's response that in the planning of a new town, adequate lands were set aside for the provision of welfare, cultural and leisure facilities. The actual provision and implementation of such facilities/services were in turn determined by individual departments taking into account local circumstances and available resources. On the other hand, District Offices of the Home Affairs Department (HAD), together with District Councils (DCs), already had a mechanism to discuss district town planning, community development and district needs, to reflect the views to the relevant departments, and to monitor the provision of facilities and services. The Chairman asked, if that was the case, why there were criticisms made by the Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai (the Review Panel) in their report on the poor town planning of Tin Shui Wai (TSW) which had contributed in part towards the occurrence of the family tragedy in TSW on 11 April 2004.

3. Director of Social Welfare (DSW) responded that District Officers (DOs) of HAD would continue to step up their effort to coordinate departmental operations and services to meet district needs. In the planning of a newly developed town in future, more emphasis would be placed on the provision of public facilities and services to tie in with the population growth in the district and the population characteristics.

4. District Social Welfare Officer (Yuen Long) (DSWO(YL)) supplemented that following the release of the report of the Review Panel in November 2004, a dedicated working group, namely, the “天水圍規劃及社區建設工作小組”, was formed by the Yuen Long District Council (YLDC) to review the provision of public facilities and services in TSW and to coordinate and monitor departments' activities and programmes in the implementation of such provisions, among others. The working group, convened by the Vice-Chairman of YLDC, had hitherto met on two occasions.

5. The Chairman queried about the effectiveness of setting up a working group under a DC to coordinate and monitor the work of relevant departments in the provision of district based facilities and services to meet district needs, if departments continued to pay scant regard to the views and requests of DC and shoved their responsibility to others. The Chairman then asked whether the aforesaid working group would be formed in other newly developed areas by the relevant DCs; and if so, whether the membership of such would comprise outside parties such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Action

Admin

6. DSW responded that he was not in a position to answer whether a working group similar to the “天水圍規劃及社區建設工作小組” formed by YLDC would be set up by other DCs. DSW however pointed out that work similar to that performed by the “天水圍規劃及社區建設工作小組” had all along been carried out by DOs through the District Management Committees chaired by DOs. There was no question of the relevant departments shoving their responsibility on the provision of facilities and services as they were required to report their work to DCs whose primary role was to ensure that the provision and delivery of public facilities and services could meet the needs and aspirations of the community. Despite the aforesaid, DSW agreed to convey the questions raised by the Chairman in paragraph 5 to HAD for consideration.

7. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked whether different measures were taken by the Administration to tackle family violence in districts where the problem was serious. For instance, whether more integrated family service centres (IFSCs) had been set up in district where the problems of spouse battering and child abuse were serious and whether arrangements had been made to assign those Police officers who had received more training on handling spousal and child abuse cases to work at the Police stations located in that district.

8. DSW responded that the manpower resources accorded to each district/IFSC already took into account the population to be served and the complexity of the problems in the district. DSW further said that SWD was currently conducting a pilot project at Kwun Tong District, namely, “Kwun Tong District Welfare Concourse”, involving representatives from various departments, NGOs, community groups and service users. The pilot project aimed to promote early identification and early intervention through cross-sector and multi-disciplinary coordination and cooperation. The outcome and experience of the project should help to shed light on how to enhance district welfare planning and coordination. The project was scheduled for completion by the end of 2005.

9. Assistant Commissioner of Police (Crime) (ACP(Crime)) said that there was no need nor practice for the special arrangement mentioned by Dr Fernando CHEUNG in paragraph 7 above, as handling family violence already formed part of the basic training of Police officers and Police officers were often deployed to work in different districts. Following the occurrence of the family tragedy in TSW on 11 April 2004, the Police had repeatedly reminded all frontline officers of the need to handle family violence cases with care. Since July 2004, the Police had commenced another round of training to heighten officers’ sensitivity, particularly those in the frontline, in handling family violence incidents through real case study and group discussion involving social workers. The importance of risk assessment and referral of parties to SWD or NGOs was also emphasised. With the new training package, Divisional Training Officers could conduct

refresher training at their own time. Discussion seminars had also been held as part and parcel of the training drive to foster understanding of the problem of family violence among divisional supervisory officers. Frontline and supervisory officers would continue to attend courses conducted by overseas professionals, SWD or NGOs.

10. Ms LI Fung-ying said that the new measures taken by the Administration to strengthen coordination and monitoring of departments' activities and programmes in the implementation and delivery of public facilities and services appeared to focus only on newly developed areas. Ms LI urged the Administration not to lose sight on developed areas such as Sham Shui Po where the problem of child abuse was also serious.

11. DSW responded that there was no question of the situation mentioned by Ms LI in paragraph 10 above. DSW pointed out that the role of DOs was to ensure the overall provision of public facilities and services in an effective and timely manner at the district level. DSWOs were concerned with the planning of welfare services on a district basis, collaboration with the locals to facilitate implementation of social welfare policies and coordination with NGOs in respect of delivery of services. Apart from using the District Coordinating Committees to review the provision of welfare services in the district, to identify service needs, to make recommendations to improve the existing provision and to enhance liaison and coordination of resources among different disciplines and organisations concerned in the district, District Liaison Groups were being formed under the District Social Welfare Offices with participation of Family and Child Protective Services Units of SWD, IFSCs of SWD/NGOs and the Police etc. to strengthen multi-disciplinary frontline collaboration in handling family violence.

12. DSWO(YL) supplemented that in view of the prevalence of the problems of spouse battering and child abuse in YL District, prevention of domestic violence was made the focus of work of the District Coordinating Committee on Family and Child Welfare Services in YL District in the past years. To further strengthen the efforts, meetings with 11 focus groups comprising batterers, victims of family violence, service providers, local concerned groups and people from the business sector, etc were held from November 2004 to January 2005 to collect their views on how best to prevent and tackle family violence. A district welfare planning forum was also held on 18 February 2005 to brief the public on the findings from the focus group meetings. Based on the findings from the focus group meetings and taking account of the population and community characteristics in YL District as well as the findings of the studies/surveys conducted by NGOs and government departments on the needs of families in YL District, her office had mapped out a new direction in its future work plan with emphasis on preventing domestic violence and enhancing support to the district.

For instance, efforts would be made to strengthen collaboration and communication among different disciplines and organisations concerned in the district through a cluster-based approach, and to promote publicity as well as education /training to heighten awareness of the problem in the district.

13. Mr Albert CHAN said that the Administration still had not learnt from its past mistakes with regard to the provision of public facilities and services in a newly developed area, as evidenced by the lack of leisure and community hall facilities in TSW(North). Mr CHAN pointed out that despite his repeated call for schools in TSW to open up their halls for use by the community after school hours, his request still fell on deaf ears. Mr CHAN hoped that apart from SWD and the Police, representatives from other relevant departments such as HAD, LCSD and Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) would also attend meetings of the Subcommittee in future.

14. DSW responded that the Administration was presently in discussion with schools in TSW about opening up the latter's halls for use by the community after school hours. EMB was supportive of such an arrangement if agreed to by the schools concerned. DSWO(YL) supplemented that schools in TSW in general had no strong objection to allowing SWD and NGOs to use their halls to organise community activities. Nevertheless, these schools had reservation about opening up their halls on a regular basis due to concerns over security. Mr Albert CHAN remarked that if that was the case, EMB should provide money to those schools which incurred additional costs in opening up their halls for use by NGOs to organise community activities.

15. Mr Albert CHAN sought clarification from SWD about the existing guidelines for handling child abuse cases. He cited a case whereby due to the objection raised by the school principal, the school social worker had not reported an apparent child abuse case to the Police.

16. Chief Social Work Officer (Domestic Violence) (CSWO(DV)) responded that it was stipulated in the guidelines for handling child abuse cases that any professional or organization, including social workers and schools, had the responsibility to report child abuse cases involving crime element to the Police. She requested Mr Albert CHAN to provide more details of the case he cited in paragraph 15 above for follow-up by SWD.

17. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the response given by the Administration thus far only focused on strengthening coordination and collaboration and failed to provide information on the actions which had been taken by relevant departments to address the deficiencies in providing public facilities and services in the district. In his view, one of the major factors attributing to the inadequate provision of

Action

public facilities and services was the cost-cutting exercise implemented by the Government in recent years to restore fiscal balance.

18. DSW responded that although there was no community hall or centre in TSW area for the time being, NGOs at present could make use of the six Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres in YL district to organise community activities. DSW further said that as announced by the Chief Executive in this year Policy Address, the roles and functions of DOs would be further enhanced and additional resources would be given to SWD to strengthen certain welfare services. Details of the additional resources to be provided to SWD would be confirmed in the context of the 2005-06 Budget. DSW stressed that the additional money to be allocated would exceed the money saved through efficiency savings.

19. Notwithstanding the response on strengthening professional training on managing family violence given under item 3 of the Administration's paper, Miss Margaret NG requested the Police to provide more details on its basic and on-going training programmes for Police officers on the handling of family violence, such as the number of sessions and hours per session of each training programme, what forms various training programmes took, whether the trainers were from within the Police or from outside organisations such as social workers from NGOs, what were the objectives and focus of the training programmes and the numbers and ranks of Police officers who had participated in the training.

Police

20. ACP(Crime) agreed to provide the information requested by Miss Margaret NG in writing after the meeting. In the meantime, ACP(Crime) advised that the subject of family violence had been included in the basic training of Police officers since 1997. A training package had been developed for frontline officers on the handling of family violence during their training days. "Victim psychology" was one of the topics included in the package. From 2001 to 2002, over 11 000 frontline Police officers had received such training. Apart from the basic training, both frontline and supervisory officers had been arranged to attend seminars on family violence conducted by overseas professionals, SWD or NGOs. Besides, the Police had since July 2004 commenced another round of training to heighten officers' sensitivity, particularly those in the frontline, in handling family violence incidents through real case study and group discussion involving social workers. With the new training package, Divisional Training Officers could conduct refresher training at their own time.

Admin

21. Miss Margaret NG further requested the Administration to provide information on when it intended to introduce legislative amendments to the Domestic Violence Ordinance (DVO) (Cap. 189) and whether it intended to add anti-stalking provision to the DVO.

Action

22. Ms LI Fung-ying noted that DSWOs were in the process of developing a protocol for the district welfare planning mechanism and a set of social indicators on district welfare needs to facilitate welfare planning. Ms LI asked whether; and if so, what factors were considered by DSWOs to facilitate district welfare planning at present.

Admin

23. DSW undertook to provide the information requested by Ms LI in paragraph 22 above. DSW further said that the reason for developing a protocol for the district welfare planning mechanism and a set of social indicators on district welfare needs to facilitate welfare planning was to make the existing practice on district welfare planning more systematic and consistent.

24. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that incidents of the Police refusing to take action against the abuser and/or refer the victims to SWD or NGOs for assistance still occurred. He cited a case whereby the Police refused to take the aforesaid actions despite call for help from the victims on four occasions. Dr CHEUNG wondered whether this was due to the inadequacy of the training programmes or of the Police guidelines on handling family violence. In response, ACP(Crime) said that he needed more information about the case before he could comment whether the Police had mishandled. ACP(Crime) however assured members that the whole thrust of the training package on handling family violence was to raise the awareness and sensitivity of frontline Police officers on handling such cases.

25. Miss Margaret NG opined that it would be useful if the Police could share and exchange experience with stakeholders on the family violence cases which they had come across and handled, instead of reviewing such cases after tragedy had happened. ACP(Crime) responded that this would be done through the 13 District Liaison Groups mentioned in paragraph 11 above. Miss NG suggested that the Administration should provide a report on the effectiveness of the District Liaison Groups, say, one year after implementation.

Admin

26. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked when the Administration could provide outcomes of the study on child abuse and spouse battering conducted by the University of Hong Kong (HKU). To his knowledge, HKU had already submitted part one of the study to SWD last month and that part two of study would be submitted by the end of March 2005.

27. CSWO(DV) clarified that HKU had so far only submitted draft reports on part one of the study on child abuse and spouse battering. SWD had to further discuss with HKU on the draft reports as certain parts of the reports required clarification and elaboration. CSWO(DV) further pointed out that SWD was still in discussion with HKU on the proposal on the development of assessment tool to

be covered by part two of the study.

28. In closing, the Chairman suggested to hold the next meeting in early April 2005 to continue discussion on the issues raised at the meeting as well as the proposal of setting up a centralised mechanism to handle family violence. Representatives from relevant departments, including those from Home Affairs Bureau, HAD, LCSD, EMB and Planning Department should be invited to attend. The next meeting, originally scheduled for 22 March 2005, would therefore be cancelled. Members agreed. Dr Fernando CHEUNG hoped that the Administration would send officers of senior rank to attend meetings of the Subcommittee.

29. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:25 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
31 March 2005