

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

LC Paper No. CB(2)2769/05-06  
(These minutes have been  
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

**Panel on Welfare Services**

**Minutes of meeting**  
**held on Monday, 12 June 2006 at 11:15 am**  
**in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

**Members present** : Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung (Chairman)  
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP  
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan  
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP  
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP  
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP  
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, JP  
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC  
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

**Members absent** : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan  
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum  
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP  
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip

**Public Officers attending** : Item IV  
Mrs Mary MA  
Commissioner for Rehabilitation  
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr MO Kim-ming  
Assistant Director/New Buildings 1  
Buildings Department

Mr Alex CHOW  
Chief Building Surveyor/Kowloon  
Buildings Department

Mr SIN Kwok-leung  
Senior Property Services Manager/Technical Support  
Architectural Services Department

Mr LUK Tsz-wai  
Senior Maintenance Surveyor/Strategy Development  
Housing Department

Mr Samson WONG  
Managing Director  
Samson Wong and Associates Property Consultancy Ltd

Item V

Mr Freely CHENG  
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food  
(Family)

Miss Annie KONG  
Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Family) 2

Mr FUNG Pak-yan  
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Development)

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

**Deputations  
by invitation**

: Item IV

The Parents' Association of Pre-school Handicapped  
Children

Ms CHEUNG Kwok-chun  
Parent Representative

Ms YU Tung-mui  
Parent Representative

1<sup>st</sup> Step Association

Mr LEUNG Choy-yan  
Chairman

Ms NG Yan-yee  
Senior Organizer

Hong Kong Neuro-Muscular Disease Association

Ms KWONG Suet-yi  
Programme Organizer

Mr SIU Tung-coi  
Member

Retina Hong Kong

Mr TAM Sai-hung  
Vice Chairman of Social Policy Group

Ms CHAN Kit-man  
Information and Promotion Officer

Hong Kong Occupational Therapy Association

Ms Sanne FONG Siu-lai

MTR Corporation

Mr Malcolm Gibson  
Chief Design Manager

Mr CHAN Lam  
Public Relations Manager - Community Communications

Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation

Mr Fred LAM  
Traffic Operations Manager

Ms Ida LEUNG  
Senior Public Affairs Manager

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr YUEN Chi-hoi  
Rehabilitation Chief Officer

Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong

Mr CHEUNG Kin-fai  
Chairman

Mr Henry HUNG  
Vice Chairman

Hong Kong Association for Parent of Persons with Physical  
Disabilities

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Ms CHIU Yee-ling  
Chairman

Ms NAM Suk-yee  
Vice Chairman

Equal Opportunities Commission

Mr Joseph LI  
Director (Operations)

Mr Philip LEUNG  
Senior Equal Opportunities Officer

The Hong Kong Institute of Architects

Ms Agnes NG  
Representative

Mr Rembert LAI  
Representative

The Salvation Army Carer Association

Ms AU YEUNG Kit-ping  
Committee Member

Ms CHENG Lai-ying  
Committee Member

The Direction Association for the Handicapped

Mr Willy LAW  
Chairman

Item V

Union of HK Rehabilitation Agencies Workshop Instructor

Mr SIN Kin-ming  
Vice President

Mr Marcus Y L CHIU, Associate Professor, Department of  
Social Work, Hong Kong Baptist University

Social Work Assistant Branch/Hong Kong Chinese Civil  
Servants' Association

Mr LAI Wing-shing  
Chairman

Staff Union of Mental Health Association of Hong Kong

Mr LAU San-ching  
Committee Member

Government Social Work Officer Association

Mr FONG Kai-leung  
Senior Social Work Officer

The Church of United Brethren Social Service Division Staff  
Committee

Mr TSANG Chiu-kit  
Staff Committee Member

Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union

Mr NG Yut-ming

Mr YUM Kwok-tung

Staff Association of Hong Kong Young Women Christian  
Association

Mr TSE Sai-kit

Community Care and Nursing Home Workers General  
Union

Ms CHEUNG Wai-lin  
Chairperson

Social Welfare Organizations Employees Union

Miss LAM Ying-hing

Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions Committee of  
Public Services (Social Services)

Mr TANG Wai-wah  
Convenor

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

**Staff in  
attendance** : Ms Amy YU  
Senior Council Secretary (2) 3

Miss Maggie CHIU  
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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**I. Confirmation of minutes**  
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2264/05-06)

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2006 were confirmed.

**II. Information paper(s) 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)2265/05-06(01) and (02))

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting to be held on 10 July 2006 at 10:45 am –

- (a) social welfare planning mechanism;
- (b) validity of the 9.3% reduction from the Benchmark Salary of non-governmental organisations on the Lump Sum Grant as a result of the Enhanced Productivity Programme and Efficiency Savings; and
- (c) further discussion on workload of and challenges faced by social workers.

4. Members also agreed that the duration of the next regular meeting would be extended to three hours, i.e. from 10:45 am to 1:45 pm, so as to allow sufficient time for discussion of the above three items.

**IV. Consultancy study for the review of the design manual: barrier free access 1997**  
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1438/05-06(01), CB(2)2265/05-06(03) to (10) and CB(2)2339/05-06(01))

Views of deputations

5. Representatives from the following organisations presented their views as set out in their respective submissions –

- (a) MTR Corporation (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(06));

- (b) Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(07));
- (c) Rehabilitation Alliance Hong Kong (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(08));
- (d) Equal Opportunities Commission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(09));
- (e) Hong Kong Occupational Therapy Association (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(05)); and
- (f) The Hong Kong Institute of Architects (LC Paper No. CB(2)2397/05-06(02)).

6. Ms CHEUNG Kwok-chun presented the views of the Parents' Association of Pre-school Handicapped Children with the aid of Powerpoint, and highlighted the problems with the barrier-free access and facilities in Yau Tong and Lam Tin MTR Stations.

7. Ms CHEUNG said that the design of these two MTR stations posed great inconveniences for PWDs. In the Yau Tong MTR Station, the wheelchair user access was only found at entrance B, which led to the factories district. This was very inconvenient for wheelchair users who had to go a long way round to reach the housing estates and shopping arcades, which were located at entrance A with no barrier free facilities. In the Lam Tin MTR Station, wheelchair user access was neither found at entrance A, which led to housing estates, nor entrance D, which led to a special school for persons with physical disabilities, but at entrance C, which led to highways.

8. Representatives of the 1st Step Association made a Powerpoint presentation on the following difficulties encountered by wheelchair users while travelling on pedestrian roads –

- (a) the height of the concrete bunds between some roads and the adjacent pedestrian paths was less than the standard requirement of four inches (e.g. at the bus stop outside St Joseph's Primary School in Kwun Tong Road). This made the portable ramps lowered from the low-floor buses too steep, rendering it easy for wheelchairs to overturn;
- (b) the light posts and other posts erected on pedestrian paths made it difficult for wheelchair users to travel along the pedestrian paths (e.g.



the pedestrian road opposite to the Government Offices in Hip Wo Street, Kwun Tong); and

- (c) some roads did not have pedestrian paths (e.g. the road leading from Argyle Street to the Mong Kok KCR Station, and the intersection between King's Park Road and Wylie Road) and wheelchair users were forced to travel on the roads, which was very dangerous.

#### Administration's response

9. Commissioner for Rehabilitation (C for R) said that over the past six months the Administration had organised two open forums to solicit the views of the PWD groups and other relevant parties on the review of Design Manual: barrier free access 1997 (DM97), and had received many written submissions on the subject. Upon the expiry of the consultation period at the end of June 2006, the Administration would prepare a revised version of the draft new Design Manual, having regard to the views received and the need to strike a balance between the interests of the various parties concerned. The revised proposal would then be submitted to the Panel for consideration, the earliest in around October 2006. It was expected that the legislative proposal to implement the revised Design Manual would be introduced in the Legislative Council (LegCo) in mid or late 2007.

Admin

10. C for R further said that the Administration would take into account the views given by the deputations on the draft Design Manual. She would forward the concerns expressed by the deputations on the inadequacies of the barrier-free access facilities in Lam Tin and Yau Tong MTR stations, and the difficulties encountered by wheelchair users, to the relevant departments for consideration and follow-up.

#### Discussion

##### *Measures to enforce compliance with the design requirements*

11. Mr James TIEN expressed agreement with the view of the Hong Kong Institute of Architects that in finalising the design requirements in the new Design Manual, the Administration should strike a right balance between the needs of PWDs and the practicalities of the design requirements. He asked the Administration what punitive measures would be taken against property owners or property management companies for making unauthorised changes to facilities designated for use by PWDs, such as doubling up toilets for PWDs as store rooms.

12. Assistant Director/New Buildings 1, Buildings Department (AD/NB 1) responded that the Buildings Ordinance had empowered the Building Authority to

Admin issue orders of reinstatement to property owners who had made unauthorised changes to facilities in buildings, and prosecution might be brought against those who failed to comply with the reinstatement orders. At the request of Mr James TIEN, AD/NB 1 agreed to provide information on the total number of inspections conducted by the Administration involving unauthorised changes to building facilities designated for use by the disabled in recent years, and the number of such inspections which eventually resulted in prosecution being brought against the owners or the parties concerned.

13. The Chairman said that he had in fact ascertained some information relating to Mr James TIEN's enquiry from the Administration earlier on. According to the Administration, the Buildings Department had inspected 66 large-scale shopping arcades or commercial buildings, found irregularities in some of the facilities designated for use by the disabled in these buildings, and had issued 66 advisory letters over the past 10 years. The Chairman added that the Buildings Department conducted inspections on 15 buildings each year. AD/NB 1 explained that the data quoted by the Chairman represented only the large scale inspections initiated by the Buildings Department. Apart from these large-scale inspections, the Buildings Department also conducted inspections upon receipt of complaints. The Chairman requested AD/NB 1 to provide in writing the data requested by Mr TIEN after the meeting.

*Requirements on illumination levels*

14. Mr James TIEN said that in determining the illumination levels of common areas in buildings, there was a need to strike a right balance between meeting the needs of PWDs and the elderly, and conserving energy. In response to Mr TIEN, AD/NB 1 advised that the Administration had earlier arranged a site-demonstration on various illumination levels. AD/NB 1 further said that the amount of energy used apparently would be doubled upon the increase of illumination level from 45 lux to 85 lux.

Admin 15. C for R agreed to provide a written response to Mr Frederick FUNG's enquiry on whether it was feasible to install in common areas of buildings lights which operated by sensory devices, with a view to conserving energy.

*MTR's barrier-free access and facilities*

16. Referring to points 1 to 3 of Annex II to the written submission from the MTR Corporation (MTR), Mr LEE Cheuk-yan sought clarification as to whether the facilities put in place in MTR stations under the Retrofit Programme provided barrier-free access from the street level down to the platform level.

17. Mr Malcolm GIBSON of MTR explained that Annex II referred to the 38

stations constructed before 1990. Mr GIBSON clarified that point 1 of Annex II referred to unassisted access from the street level down to the concourse level. Currently, 25 stations had at least one entrance with such barrier-free access, and MTR hoped to complete the retrofitting work in other stations by 2008. Mr GIBSON further said that the pre-1990 stations were not designed with the provision of a public lift between the concourse level and the platform level, and MTR had tried to retrofit such lifts in the pre-1990 stations where technically feasible. Among the 38 pre-1990 stations, 35 had now been installed with passenger lifts between the concourse level and the platform level, as shown in point 2 of Annex II.

18. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan asked how MTR planned to solve the problems of inconvenient barrier free accesses in Lam Tin and Yau Tong Stations as pointed out by the Parents' Association of Pre-school Handicapped Children.

19. Mr Malcolm GIBSON responded that MTR appreciated the difficulties faced by the disabled. However, it could not solve the problems on its own and had to work with the Government and the developers to do so. He further said that MTR would like to provide in the Lam Tin Station a barrier-free access leading to Kai Tin Road. However, such access had to go through a private development, and there were difficulties in doing that. As for the Yau Tong Station, he advised that some housing developments were progressing north of the station, and MTR would explore with the Housing Authority on the provision of barrier-free access from the station through to the shopping centre concerned.

20. At the request of Mr LEE-Cheuk-yan, Mr Malcolm GIBSON agreed to provide in writing information on MTR's plan to spend \$100 million in retrofitting its stations to bring about a better travelling environment for PWDs in the next five years as stated in paragraph 9 of its submission, including information on any difficulties MTR encountered in enhancing its existing facilities for PWDs.

*Barriers for wheelchair users*

21. Mr SIU Tung-choi asked the Administration why the concrete bunds of many roads did not meet the standard height of four inches, and when improvements would be made to rectify the problem. C for R responded that she would relay his concern to the Highways Department for follow-up actions.

Admin

*Access and facilities of pre-1997 private buildings*

22. Mr James TIEN noted from paragraph 9 of the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(03)) that 54% of the 34 000 pre-1997 private buildings were technically not feasible to comply with the design standards of DM97, meaning that 46% were technically feasible to do so. If the owners of

these 46% of pre-1997 private buildings were willing to spend money to enhance the designs of their buildings to comply with the design standards of DM97, Mr TIEN asked whether the Administration would consider excluding the areas set aside for providing barrier-free access and appropriate facilities for PWDs from the calculation of the plot ratio of the buildings concerned.

23. In reply, AD/NB 1 said that for post-1997 buildings, facilities for PWDs, like other building facilities, were generally included in the calculation of the plot ratio of the buildings concerned, except for some specified facilities such as carparks (including parking spaces for PWDs). For pre-1997 buildings, the Building Authority would consider, on a case-by-case basis upon application, whether there were sufficient grounds for him to exercise his/her discretion to exempt the facilities for PWDs from the calculation of the plot ratio of the buildings concerned.

24. For those pre-1997 private buildings which were technically feasible to comply with the design standards of DM97, Mr Frederick FUNG asked what percentage of the buildings had already enhanced their facilities to comply with the requirements of DM97. He also enquired whether the Administration had any plan to enforce the compliance of the pre-1997 buildings with the design standards of DM97.

25. AD/NB 1 responded that the percentage of pre-1997 private buildings which were not technically feasible to comply with the design standards of DM97 as stated in the Administration's paper, was a rough estimate made on the basis of an analysis of a sample of 150 pre-1997 buildings. He further said that in considering whether to make it mandatory for all the pre-1997 buildings to provide access and facilities for PWDs in compliance with the standards of the DM97, the Administration had to take into account a number of factors, including: (i) the needs of PWDs; (ii) technical feasibility; and (iii) the impacts on the general public. He added that all buildings under major alteration after 1997 were required to provide access and facilities in compliance with the standards of the DM97.

26. The Chairman said that at the last meeting when the draft Design Manual was discussed, a deputation had told members that a wheelchair user had not left his home for seven years. For those pre-1997 buildings with PWDs residing in them, the Chairman asked whether the Administration would enforce their compliance with DM97 on a mandatory basis.

27. In response, C for R said that PWDs' rights to access to premises were protected under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, which provided that it was unlawful for a person to discriminate against a PWD by refusing to provide him/her with facilities or services, unless the provision of such facilities or

services would impose unjustifiable hardship on the person who have to provide them, or was technically infeasible. She added that PWDs could lodge complaints to the Equal Opportunities Commission if they felt being discriminated against in this respect.

28. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that for buildings which did not have proper access and facilities for PWDs, the Administration should require that a large sign be erected in front of the buildings indicating the absence of such facilities. Such “labelling effect” would force the owners concerned to make changes to comply with the requirements stipulated in the Design Manual.

29. C for R responded that it would be difficult to implement Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung’s suggestion, as it involved inspecting each and every building to ascertain whether they complied with the requirements set down in the Design Manual. She added that the legal and technical aspects of the suggestion would also need to be looked into.

*Access and facilities of Pre-1997 government buildings and public rental housing*

Admin 30. At the request of Mr Frederick FUNG, C for R agreed to provide the Panel with a written response in respect of the following –

- (a) the implementation timetable for the modification works for the remaining 24 government buildings as mentioned in paragraph 12 of the Administration’s paper; and
- (b) a table setting out the relevant information of those hospitals, public clinics and public transport interchanges which could not provide barrier-free access and facilities due to technical problems as stated in paragraphs 16-19 of the Administration’s paper, including information on whether such technical problems could be resolved; and if so, the timetable for the necessary modification works.

31. Miss CHAN Yuen-han expressed dissatisfaction with the slow progress of the improvement works carried out by the Administration to enhance the provision of barrier-free facilities for PWDs in public rental housing estates and on pedestrian roads. She hoped that the Administration would expeditiously tackle the problems in the provision of barrier-free access and facilities which had been discussed for many years. Referring to paragraph 15 of the Administration’s paper, she also asked why it took as long as three years to implement the improvement works in public housing estates for the visually impaired listed therein.

32. In response, C for R said that, as stated by the Secretary for Health, Welfare

Action

Admin and Food in his reply to the oral question raised by Dr Fernando CHEUNG at the Council meeting on 24 May 2006, the Administration had done its best to enhance the provision of barrier-free access and facilities in government buildings and public housing estates where technically feasible to do so. Senior Maintenance Surveyor/Strategy Development, Housing Department supplemented that in the past few years, the Hong Kong Housing Authority had undertaken improvement works to provide drop kerbs, signage, tactile warning strips for drop kerbs and ramps, as well as ramps and handrails for access where technically feasible in existing housing estates. He further said that the improvement works for most public housing estates were expected to complete by the end of 2006. The Chairman requested the Administration to provide a written response to the concerns raised by Miss CHAN Yuen-han.

*Conclusion*

33. The Chairman hoped that the Administration would take into account the views of the deputations in finalising the draft Design Manual. He said that some of the best practices stated in the draft Design Manual should be turned into obligatory design requirements, so as to enhance the facilities for PWDs.

Admin 34. The Chairman said that further discussion on the subject would be held upon the Administration's submission of the finalised draft Design Manual in October 2006. He also requested the Administration to provide within one month its written response to the various questions raised by members at the meeting. C for R agreed.

**V. Workload of and challenges faced by social workers**

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2265/05-06(11) to (15) and CB(2)2292/05-06(01))

35. The Chairman declared that his office had commissioned the Department of Social Work of the Hong Kong Baptist University, which was one of the deputations at the meeting, to conduct a survey on the work pressure and mental health of frontline social workers employed by the non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Views of deputations

*Union of HK Rehabilitation Agencies Workshop Instructor*

36. Mr SIN Kin-ming said that all staff employed in the welfare sector, including social workers and support staff, were suffering from immense work pressure caused by the implementation of the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) subvention system. He further highlighted the following problems brought about by LSG –

- (a) under LSG, SWD no longer imposed control on the staff establishment of NGOs. To save money, many NGOs had cut down their staff number, resulting in increased workload for the remaining staff. This in turn had led to a higher rate of work injuries among NGO staff;
- (b) some NGO staff did not want to be promoted, as their employment would be changed to contract basis (one-year contract) upon promotion; and
- (c) to save money, some NGOs would not make Mandatory Provident Fund contributions for employees during their period of sick leave due to work injuries.

*Dr Marcus Y L CHIU, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Hong Kong Baptist University*

37. Dr Marcus CHIU referred to the findings of the two surveys he had conducted on the work pressure and mental health of employees in the welfare sector, as detailed in his submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2397/05-06(03)) which was tabled at the meeting. A total of over 1 000 respondents had been interviewed in the two surveys.

38. Dr CHIU said that in the first survey conducted last year, 483 Assistant Social Work Officers employed by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) had been interviewed. The respondents had on average served in the SWD for 10 years. The findings showed that the respondents had to work overtime for an average of 10 hours a week, about 33% of them exhibited symptoms of depression, 60% suffered from anxiety, and about 10% used alcohol or tranquillisers to ease the pressure of their workload. The survey also showed that the major sources of their work pressure included inability to handle the huge case load, the anxiety that their cases would go wrong, understaffing in SWD, and problems encountered during work.

39. Dr CHIU further said that the second survey, the findings of which were released yesterday, was commissioned by Dr Fernando CHEUNG's office. A total of 544 frontline social workers employed by NGOs had been interviewed. The findings of the survey, which echoed those of the first survey mentioned in paragraph above, showed that the great majority of the respondents always felt very tired, did not want to go to work and were unable to sleep well. Furthermore, around 25 % of the respondents suffered from depression or anxiety, 30% had a pessimistic outlook on life, and around 75% indicated that they wanted to quit their job. While most of the respondents said that they sought help from

families, colleagues and friends, 10% indicated that they drank alcohol or took tranquillisers for relief from stress.

40. Dr CHIU said that the findings of the two surveys showed that social workers, whether employed by the Government or NGOs, were suffering from great work pressure, the major sources of which were excessive workload, tight staffing situation, and tense relationship with supervisors. Dr CHIU urged the Administration to tackle the problem of professional burnout among social workers expeditiously.

*Social Work Assistant Branch, Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association*

41. Mr LAI Wing-shing presented the views of the Social Work Assistant Branch of the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(13)) and highlighted the following points –

- (a) as there were grey areas in the guidelines governing the provision of assistance in kind, some people had tried to abuse the system by making applications for assistance in kind on all sorts of dubious grounds. As a result, frontline social workers in SWD had to spend a lot of time doing administrative work arising from such applications, leaving them little time to help service users who were in genuine and urgent need for assistance;
- (b) as SWD had not drawn up guidelines on the appropriate number of cases to be handled by different ranks of social workers working in the Integrated Family Service Centres, there were variations in workload among social workers working in different centres. This had bred dissatisfaction and suspicion among the social workers concerned;
- (c) because of shortage of manpower, some social workers who were on shift duties had to start work at 7:30 in the morning after manning a shift which ended at 10 pm the night before. For social workers who would be working in Tuen Mun Children and Juvenile Home which would be commissioned in December 2006, the Administration should provide those who lived far away from Tuen Mun with staff quarters to relieve their stress and weariness in travelling to work; and
- (d) with the rising number of complaints launched against private elderly homes, there was a serious shortage of social workers in the Licensing Office of Residential Care Homes for the Elderly



(LORCHE) of SWD to conduct inspections upon receipt of complaints, particularly during after-office hours. Consideration should be given to hiring more social workers for LORCHE to conduct inspections.

*Staff Union of Mental Health Association of Hong Kong*

42. Mr LAU San-ching presented the views of the Staff Union of Mental Health Association of Hong Kong as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(14)).

43. Mr LAU considered the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(11)) unacceptable as it failed to address the problem of excessive workload faced by social workers, which had impacted adversely on service quality. In particular, he refuted the following points raised in the Administration's paper –

- (a) paragraph 2 – the rapid changes in social and economic conditions and the growing complexity of social issues mentioned in the paragraph were not the real causes for the heavy work pressure of social workers. Rather, the true sources were excessive workload, including piles of administrative work and applications for funding; lack of job security due to contract terms of employment, and salary cut upon promotion;
- (b) paragraph 8 – enforcing a self-reliance philosophy, which was a social welfare policy, would not help ease the work pressure of social workers;
- (c) paragraph 9 – reengineering of welfare services had increased, rather than reduced, the workload of social workers;
- (d) paragraph 11 – social workers' specialty did not lie in making business proposals. To engage them in making applications for various kinds of funds was not only a waste of professional resources, but had also further added to their work pressure;
- (e) paragraph 12 – the abolition of staff establishment in NGOs arising from the implementation of LSG and corporate governance in NGOs was the main cause of the heavy workload and work pressure suffered by social workers;
- (f) paragraph 13 – the Administration mentioned in the paragraph how it encouraged the sharing of IT knowledge and enhanced the use of Information technology in the welfare sector. However, the main

responsibilities of social workers were to interact with people and help them solve their problems, rather than working on their computers;

- (g) paragraph 14 – the \$1.93 million spent on social workers’ training in 2005-06, which represented only 0.02% of the \$10.1 billion annual recurrent expenditure on social welfare (excluding the expenditure on social security), was ridiculously small in amount; and
- (h) paragraph 15 – social workers, like policemen, were providing essential service to the public. However, unlike the police force, SWD had not offered much psychological services or other special services to social workers to help them better manage their stress and emotional problems.

*Government Social Work Officer Association*

44. Mr FONG Kai-leung presented the views of Government Social Work Officer Association as detailed in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(15)). Major views of the association were summarised as follows –

- (a) the problems plaguing social workers included huge workload and little job satisfaction; and unjustified criticisms by the media and politicians which resulted in a lack of public recognition for the work done by social workers; and
- (b) while injecting additional resources could help alleviate to some extent the work pressure of social workers, it could not eradicate the problem. The Administration should spend more resources on measures aimed at preventing the occurrence of social problems in the first place, such as strengthening community networks. Legislative Council Members should recognise the contributions of social workers and help enhance communication between social workers and the general public.

*The Church of United Brethren Social Service Division Staff Committee*

45. Mr TSANG Chiu-kit said that he was a frontline staff and had solicited the views of some frontline staff before the meeting. He said that since the implementation of LSG, there had been a shortage of staff in NGOs, resulting in heavy workload for NGO staff. Social workers had to spend a lot of time making applications for funding for new services, leaving them little time to serve people in need. Because of their heavy workload, frontline staff had little spare time for

relieving their work pressure, let alone pursuing professional training. Mr TSANG further said that after LSG had been introduced, NGO staff were employed on contract, rather than substantive, terms as in the past. The consequent contract renewal process imposed great pressure on staff and reduced their sense of job security as well. Mr TSANG added that the Administration should put the objectives of social welfare services in perspective, and should not try to commercialise all the operations of NGOs.

*Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union*

46. Mr YUM Kwok-tung highlighted the following points in the submission of Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union (LC Paper No. CB(2)2397/05-06(04)) –

- (a) the policy on competitive bidding of welfare services had reduced the resources of the subvented welfare sector by more than 10%;
- (b) it was misleading for the Administration to say in its paper that it had injected additional resources on social welfare, while the truth was that over 80% of those resources were spent on the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme;
- (c) the various examples quoted by the Administration on its commitment to inject additional resources to strengthen service provision, as mentioned in paragraph 7 of the Administration's paper, added up to less than \$100 million, which was insufficient for solving the problem of inadequate welfare service provision; and
- (d) the origin of the work pressure suffered by frontline social workers was the implementation of LSG. Since the implementation of LSG, the NGO management had tightened their supervision over the frontline staff. Furthermore, social workers had to undergo the contract renewal process every year and did not have any sense of job security.

47. Mr NG Yut-ming advised that according to the survey conducted by Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union, over 90% of the 182 respondents felt that excessive workload had taken a toll on their health, their work efficiency, as well as the quality of their service. Furthermore, over 90% of the respondents considered that their ever increasing workload was the result of funding cuts by the Government. According to the respondents, their current workload was on average 37.7% in excess of the normal workload, and in one extreme case, the respondent had indicated that his/her workload was 180% more than the normal workload.

48. Mr NG further requested the Administration to –
- (a) return to NGOs the amount of subventions which had been cut arising from the 9.3% reduction from the lump sum grant implemented over the past few years as a result of the Enhanced Productivity Programme and Efficiency Savings;
  - (b) expeditiously put in place a long-term welfare planning mechanism;
  - (c) expeditiously review the LSG subvention system;
  - (d) draw up guidelines on maximum workload of staff and staff establishment of NGOs; and
  - (e) set up an arbitration mechanism, comprising representatives from the Administration, the management, and the staff side, to settle disputes between management and staff.

*Staff Association of Hong Kong Young Women Christian Association*

49. Mr TSE Sai-kit said that LSG was the major culprit for the heavy work pressure faced by staff in the welfare sector. Contrary to the Administration's claim that LSG would increase the flexibility of NGOs in meeting their service objectives, it had actually deprived NGOs of their professional autonomy. Apart from the funding cuts imposed by the Government, the policy on competitive bidding of welfare services also increased the workload of staff and affected the financial viability of NGOs. 3 000 social workers took to the street last year to show their dissatisfaction and requested for additional resources from the Administration. The Administration, however, had turned a deaf ear to the numerous requests for tackling the problems plaguing the welfare sector.

*Community Care and Nursing Home Workers General Union*

50. Ms CHEUNG Wai-lin presented the submission of the Community Care and Nursing Home Workers General Union (LC Paper No. CB(2)2397/05-06(05)) and highlighted the following points –

- (a) to alleviate the heavy demand for elderly home places, the Administration had promoted the idea of “ageing in place” and launched the Integrated Home Care Services (IHCS). However, due to funding cuts by SWD, the IHCS Centres were seriously understaffed, resulting in heavy workload of staff and rising cases of work injuries. Also, most of the staff providing IHCS were

employed only on short-term contracts and some were even on hourly-basis;

- (b) according to the survey conducted by the Union in 2005 among 321 workers in the IHCS Teams, 80% of the respondents indicated that they had suffered from physical pain of different degrees, while 40% had suffered work injuries;
- (c) the Administration should allocate adequate resources for IHCS and draw up guidelines on staffing requirement for IHCS Centres; and
- (d) the Administration should undertake a review of LSG as soon as possible.

*Social Welfare Organizations Employees Union*

51. Miss LAM Ying-hing told the meeting that since LSG was implemented, NGOs no longer employed short-term staff to take up the work of staff who were on sick leave, including those who were on sick leave due to work injuries. This had further increased the workload and work pressure of other staff. For staff engaged in manual labour, such as care workers in Residential Home Care Centres for the Elderly and IHCS Teams, excessive workload would also expose them to high risks of sustaining work injuries. Miss LAM urged the Administration to look squarely at the problem of heavy workload and work pressure of frontline staff and expeditiously review LSG which had put NGOs into financial difficulties.

*Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions Committee of Public Services (Social Services)*

52. Mr TANG Wai-wah presented the views of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions Committee of Public Services (Social Services) as set out in its submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)2397/05-06(06)) which was tabled at the meeting.

53. Mr TANG said that LSG had brought about excessive workload and heavy work pressure for staff in the welfare sector, and the incidence of work injuries among welfare staff had been on rapid increase in recent years (an increase of more than 50% since 1999). The average amount of compensation for a work injury case was also on the rise, reflecting that the work injuries sustained were getting more serious. Mr TANG further pointed out that unlike the previous practice whereby SWD would arrange employment insurance for all NGO staff, now NGOs had to arrange for their own employment insurance. Some staff had been pressurised not to report cases of work injuries to their insurance underwriter

so as to prevent the escalation of the insurance premium paid by their employers. Mr TANG added that the implementation of LSG had adversely affected service quality and imposed severe hardship to employees in the subvented welfare sector. He requested the Administration to expeditiously review LSG, with participation of staff and staff associations in the review process.

#### Other submissions received

54. Members noted that written submissions had been received respectively from the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (LC Paper No. CB(2)2355/05-06(01)), the Against Elderly Abuse of Hong Kong (LC Paper No. CB(2)2265/05-06(12)) and the Hong Kong Student Aid Society Front Line Staff Union (LC Paper No. CB(2)2292/05-06(01)).

#### Administration's response

55. Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Family) (PASHWF(F)) said that in the face of the economic and social challenges brought about by rapid changes to the global environment, as outlined in paragraph 2 of the Administration's paper, there was a need to adopt innovative approaches to tackle the growing complexity of the social issues. The Community Investment and Inclusion Fund, which encouraged the use of community resources and volunteering support in building up a harmonious community, was a case in point.

56. Referring to the comment of Mr YUM Kwok-tung of the Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union that the bulk of the additional welfare expenditure had been spent on CSSA, PASHWF(F) said that it had been stated in paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper that, even excluding the expenditures on social security, social welfare expenditures had expanded for about 90% over the past decade. Subventions from the Social Welfare Department to NGOs exceeded \$6.7 billion a year. Furthermore, special one-off grant totalling over \$900 million would be provided to NGOs in the coming few years for providing salary increment and training to staff. He further pointed out that at present, recurrent public expenditure on social welfare, which accounted for 16.2% of the total recurrent public expenditure, had far exceeded that on health services.

57. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Development) said that contrary to the comments made by some deputations, the Administration recognised the work pressure faced by social workers, particularly in the light of the rising expectation of the public, and had adopted various measures to help ease their work pressure and improve the corporate governance of NGOs. He stressed that tackling the complex social issues faced by our society required the concerted effort of all Hong Kong people and all sectors, and not just social workers. He hoped that the

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general public would understand the difficulties and limitations of the social workers and give due recognition to their work and contributions.

Discussion

Admin 58. Due to time constraint, Ms LI Fung-ying suggested that discussion between members and the Administration on the subject be deferred to another meeting. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan agreed with Ms LI's suggestion, and requested the Administration to provide the Panel with a written response to the views raised by deputations so as to facilitate discussion at the next meeting. Members agreed. After discussion, members also agreed that discussion on the subject would continue, without the need to invite deputations as their views had already been clearly presented, at the next regular meeting on 10 July 2006.

59. Mrs Sophie LEUNG said that around two years ago, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service had organised a forum on the subject of social workers' fatigue and burnout, with overseas speakers invited to share their experience on ways to address the problems faced by social workers. She said that the subject should also be included in next meeting's discussion.

60. Miss CHAN Yuen-han said that she had recently received more complaints from the general public concerning the service provided by social workers. She considered this unfair to social workers who simply could not cope with the high number of cases they had to handle. She further said that the Administration should seriously reflect over and respond to the concerns and problems arising from the implementation of LSG as raised by the welfare sector over the past few years, rather than continue to avert the problems.

61. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:31 pm.

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