

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)262/06-07
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seen by the Administration)

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Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 13 October 2006, at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP (Chairman)
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Bernard CHAN, GBS, 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 Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki
- Members absent** : Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
- Members attending** : Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
- Public Officers attending** : Dr York Y N CHOW, SBS, JP
Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
- Ms Sandra LEE, JP
Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Health and Welfare)

Mr Paul TANG, JP
Director of Social Welfare

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

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

Staff in attendance : Mrs Vivian KAM
Assistant Secretary General 2

Miss Betty MA
Senior Council Secretary (2) 1

Mr Chris LAI
Senior Council Secretary (2) 7

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. Briefing by the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2006-2007
[LC Paper No. CB(2)27/06-07(01)]

Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (SHWF) briefed members on the Administration's paper which set out the welfare initiatives in the 2006-2007 Policy Address and Policy Agenda, and also gave an account on the progress of work of initiatives relating to welfare services covered in the Policy Agenda. He said that the major new initiatives included –

- (a) studying the feasibility of establishing an integrated, holistic and high-level Family Commission;
- (b) providing more flexible day care services for children;
- (c) preparing legislative amendments to the Domestic Violence Ordinance within the current legislative session;

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- (d) further strengthening specialised services and support to tackle domestic violence and family crisis;
- (e) providing additional subsidised residential care places for the elderly, and enhancing the care for infirm and demented elders in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHes); and
- (f) enhancing community mental health support.

Family policies

2. Mr WONG Kwok-hing noted that the proposed Family Commission would bring under one roof the various commissions and committees currently responsible for handling issues covering different age groups and genders. Mr WONG was of the view that men were facing more difficulties in life as compared to the situation several decades ago. As there was no dedicated organisation similar to the Elderly Commission and Women's Commission to handle issues relating to men, representatives of men should be included in the proposed Family Committee to advise the Government on issues relating to men. Mr WONG also enquired about the structure and terms of reference of the proposed Family Commission.

3. SHWF responded that on the welfare services front, the Administration adopted a family-oriented strategy. The proposed Family Commission would study and address problems from a family, instead of individual, perspective with a view to taking a more holistic approach in supporting families. SHWF said that as he had explained earlier, the Administration was studying the feasibility of establishing a Family Commission to address family problems from a cross-policy perspective. The Administration would fully consult the parties concerned and examine the re-organisation of resources among Government bureaux and departments if necessary. SHWF added that the Administration would take the opportunity to examine how the proposed Family Commission could better protect the well-being and interests of various social groups, including men.

4. Noting that the proposed Family Commission would be a high-level body, Ms LI Fung-ying asked how the Administration planned to take forward the study on the feasibility of establishing the Family Commission, such as whether a consultant would be commissioned to conduct the study. Ms LI further enquired about the commissions and committees which would likely be put under the roof of the proposed Family Commission.

5. SHWF said that family issues were complicated and cut across many bureaux and departments, and different commissions and bodies had been set up specifically to handle issues relating to youth, women and the elderly. SHWF

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advised that the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau would take the lead in the study, with a view to examining the relationship between the proposed Family Commission and the Youth Commission, Women's Commission, Elderly Commission and other bodies which were also handling family-related issues. The Administration would first study whether the setting up of a Family Commission could enhance the implementation of social policy and be conducive to building a harmonious community. It would also examine the need for re-organisation and re-allocation of resources of existing commissions and committees. SHWF added that views from academics and members would also be sought. A report on the study was expected to be completed in six months' time and a final decision would be made by the next Administration.

6. Ms Emily LAU said that the concept of family, i.e. a nuclear family comprising a married couple and their unmarried children, referred to in paragraph 39 of the Policy Address booklet was outdated. Ms LAU pointed out that the types of family units nowadays were much more diversified and included, for example, single-parent families. She doubted whether family policies formulated on the basis of such a traditional concept would address the current social problems. She was of the view that the Administration's study should adopt a wider definition of family.

7. SHWF said that while he agreed that family units nowadays were not necessarily confined to a nuclear family, a married couple with their unmarried children remained the most typical type of family units in Hong Kong. SHWF further said that the primary consideration of the study would be on ways to enhance mutual care and support between two generations and extended families, as well as to achieve more effective co-ordination of Government resources and services. He added that the Administration had not taken a view on the definition of a family, and the study would take into account the different types of family units in the society.

8. Mr TAM Yiu-chung expressed support for the policy initiatives to promote family harmony. He said that many initiatives in the Policy Address were in fact in line with the proposals put forward by the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong, with the exception of the introduction of a mechanism to assess whether Government policies would have an impact on families. Mr TAM asked whether consideration would be given to the requirement for such an assessment in the policy making process.

9. SHWF said that the Administration would assess the impact of new policies and legislation on families even though this had not been spelt out explicitly. SHWF believed that the Family Commission, if formed, would further study the matter, notably whether a checklist modelled on the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist developed by the Women's Commission should be introduced to assist the Administration to assess the impact of policies and

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legislation on families.

10. Mr Bernard CHAN noted that the Government would actively promote family-friendly measures in the business sector. Mr CHAN said that apart from launching publicity and promotional campaigns to foster the adoption of family-friendly measures in the business sector, the Administration should consider providing incentives to the participating organisations by, say, the award of commendations.

11. SHWF said that while the Administration would actively promote family-friendly working environment in the business sector, the details had yet to be worked out. Notwithstanding this, SHWF noted that some organisations in the private sector had adopted good human resources management practices to assist employees in meeting work and family needs.

Social welfare planning mechanism

12. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed dissatisfaction at the Administration not having undertaken to formulate a long-term planning of welfare services to tackle challenges facing Hong Kong, in particular the ageing population. Mr LEE recalled that when retirement protection was discussed at previous Panel meetings, members were advised that the Central Policy Unit had developed a research agenda on financial security in old age. However, members were unaware of the progress and the expected completion date of the study. He stressed the need for the Administration to come up with a comprehensive retirement protection plan for people in Hong Kong. Mr LEE expressed disappointment that SHWF had only attended two Panel meetings in the last session, and did not attend meetings which involved discussions on the long-term planning of welfare services.

13. Mr Albert HO shared a similar view with Mr LEE and said that the Administration should formulate a blueprint on welfare policies. The Chairman added that when the subject matter was discussed, the Panel had strongly requested the Administration to formulate a long-term development plan of social welfare services.

14. SHWF responded that the Administration would adopt different planning mechanisms for different service areas, having regard to individual needs and the situation of each service area. The Administration had adopted a flexible approach which allowed the Administration and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to be responsive to the latest demands and changing circumstances in the community. The existing welfare planning mechanism was effective and he did not see the need for a major revamp at the moment. SHWF believed that should the need arise for the Administration to work out a long-term plan to guide the development of social welfare services, the primary focus would be on the

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identification of problems faced by the welfare sector.

15. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed disappointment at the absence of new welfare initiative in the Policy Address. He was particularly dissatisfied that the Administration had not acceded to the repeated requests from the welfare sector for a blueprint for the development of welfare services. Dr CHEUNG considered that the lump sum grant (LSG) subvention system was beset with problems and had led to grievances in the welfare sector. The Administration had not taken heed of the Panel's request for a review of the system. Dr CHEUNG urged the Administration to expeditiously review the LSG subvention system.

16. SHWF responded that to his understanding, the grievances of frontline staff of NGOs were not targeted at the LSG subvention system itself, but a change in their employment terms resulting from the introduction of LSG subvention system. In this connection, workshops had been organised by the Social Welfare Department to assist the management of NGOs to strengthen governance and communications with their staff. SHWF added that most NGOs had indicated that the new arrangement under the LSG subvention system had provided greater flexibility in resource allocation. The Administration considered LSG subvention system an effective mechanism and did not see the need to conduct a comprehensive review. Nevertheless, the Administration would review the operational arrangement in the light of experience in due course.

Measures to help the needy

17. Mr Albert HO said that while the Chief Executive admitted that the widening wealth gap was one of the challenges facing Hong Kong, the Chief Executive had not put forth concrete strategy in the Policy Address to alleviate the problem. Mr HO was of the view that consideration should be given to establishing a poverty line. In addition, the Administration should formulate a long-term plan of welfare services and put in place a mechanism to assess the impact of public policies on the wealth gap in the society, with a view to narrowing the disparity between the rich and the poor.

18. SHWF responded that the problem of poverty was a very complex issue on which the Commission on Poverty (CoP) had been conducting a comprehensive study. He said that similar to other developed economies, there was a widening gap between the rich and the poor. Although there were disadvantaged people in need of assistance, no one was living in abject poverty in Hong Kong. SHWF added that to alleviate the problem of poverty, the Administration had introduced various measures and committed considerable resources in providing a safety net to the needy including housing, medical and educational benefits. In addition, CoP was deliberating on strategies to assist

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the disadvantaged to move from welfare to self-reliance at district level.

19. Dr YEUNG Sum pointed out that the general public were sometimes misled by reports on cases of defraud and abuse of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) payments and stigmatised CSSA recipients as being unproductive and a burden on the society. Dr YEUNG asked whether consideration would be given to the following –

- (a) cracking down the number of cases of defraud and abuse of CSSA payments through enhanced inspections and heavier penalty;
- (b) enhancing public education to remove the stigmatisation of CSSA recipients, so as not to deter people with a genuine need from applying for CSSA; and
- (c) promoting self-reliance and helping unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients to rejoin the workforce.

20. SHWF responded that the CSSA Scheme aimed to help people suffering from financial hardship to meet their basic needs. The Government would step up public education and convey a correct message of the objective of the CSSA Scheme to the public. SHWF said that the Government had launched various schemes to encourage able-bodied CSSA recipients to rejoin the workforce. For instance, the Administration was reviewing the provision of disregarded earnings under the CSSA Scheme, with a view to encouraging able-bodied CSSA recipients to seek and remain in employment.

21. Director of Social Welfare (DSW) supplemented that to step up efforts in combating CSSA fraud cases, the Administration had enhanced the checking of CSSA cases and appointed retired Police Officers to assist in handling difficult cases. On the other hand, the Government was committed to providing assistance to those in genuine need under the CSSA Scheme. For example, needy elders, who were unaware of the existing welfare services due to physical or social isolation, were reached through the community networks. As regards the suggestion of providing incentives to encourage unemployed CSSA recipients to seek and remain in employment, DSW said that under the District Employment Assistance Trial Project, an one-off amount of \$1,500 was payable to participants to enable them to meet work-related expenses in the first four months of continuous employment. DSW further said that since the launch of the intensified support for self-reliance measures, the number of unemployed CSSA cases had decreased.

22. Mr Bernard CHAN noted from paragraph 23 of the Administration's paper that only 43 applications for the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged

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had so far been approved. Mr CHAN asked whether the Administration was satisfied with the response and if not, the actions which would be taken to attract more applications.

23. DSW responded that to encourage more applications for the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged, the Administration had revised the maximum allocation for each project from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000. In addition, each NGO could submit a total of three applications at any one time.

Services for elderly and disabled

24. Ms LI Fung-ying noted that about \$28 million had been earmarked for the Infirmity Care Supplement (ICS) and about \$13 million for the Dementia Supplement (DS) to enhance care services for the elderly in 2006-2007. Ms LI enquired about the usage of the fund and the mechanism in place to monitor the proper use of the fund.

25. DSW responded that the introduction of ICS and DS aimed to help subvented RCHEs to strengthen their manpower to provide enhanced care for the infirm and demented elders. The ICS had been extended to private homes participating in the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme since 2003. As the elderly care homes participating in the schemes were on Government subsidy, their performance was monitored under the existing quality control mechanism.

26. Referring to the Government's proposal to provide fee assistance to parents of children aged three to six in the form of an "education voucher", Mr TAM Yiu-chung pointed out that the Elderly Commission had discussed a similar proposal of providing fee subsidy to elders living in RCHEs. Mr TAM asked whether the Administration would further consider the proposal.

27. SHWF said that the Administration was aware of the discussion in the Elderly Commission. He believed that the Family Commission, if formed, would include this proposal in its agenda for future discussion.

28. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed concern about the long waiting time for care places in subsidised residential care homes for the elderly and disabled persons. This created great difficulties for families with infirm elderly and/or disabled family members. He enquired if there was any concrete plan to solve the problem of shortage of care places in residential care homes for the elderly and disabled persons. Dr CHEUNG said that according to a research conducted by the Hong Kong Council of Social Services, there was a projected shortfall of 500 nursing staff in the welfare sector. Having regard to the growing number of elders as a result of the ageing population, he asked if there was any plan to increase the number of nursing staff in the welfare sector to meet the increasing demand for nursing care for infirm elders.

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29. SHWF responded that the Administration was fully aware of the demand for subsidised care places for the elderly. The Administration was planning to provide additional subsidised residential care places for the elderly, and the details would be available after the announcement of the forthcoming Budget by the Financial Secretary. SHWF said that to address the shortage of enrolled nurses, the Administration would, as highlighted in the 2006-2007 Policy Address, continue to train additional enrolled nurses for the welfare sector. As a new initiative, additional enrolled nurses would be trained to provide nursing care in RCHEs.

Rehabilitation services

30. Referring to paragraph 25 of the Administration's paper, Dr KWOK Ka-ki said that the continuing rehabilitation services currently provided to discharged patients with mental, neurological or physical impairments were inadequate. He pointed out that the demand for rehabilitation services was even greater consequent upon the introduction by the Hospital Authority of measures to reduce reliance on in-patient services. Dr KWOK asked about the measures taken to address the problem of inadequate rehabilitation services for these patients. Dr KWOK also expressed concern about the problem of drug abuse by teenagers. To his knowledge, 40% of these teenagers were long-term drug abusers. He asked whether additional resources would be allocated for rehabilitation and support services for juvenile drug abusers.

31. SHWF responded that while health services for patients with mental illnesses were hospital-based, the Administration would allocate more resources at the community level to facilitate early prevention and care of mental illnesses. As regards the problem of drug abuse by teenagers, SHWF said that in addition to the enforcement actions against drug trafficking, the Administration would continue to combat drug abuse through inter-departmental efforts, including promotion of a positive attitude towards life among teenagers and enhancement of their awareness of the harmful effects of drug abuse. The Chairman said that the issue of services and support for juvenile drug abusers had been included in the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion and would be followed up by the Panel.

32. In response to Dr KWOK Ka-ki's further question, SHWF said that the number of residential places for discharged patients with mental illness in the next financial year would be available after the announcement of the Budget.

Other issues

33. Mrs Sophie LEUNG welcomed the welfare initiatives covered in the Policy Address. She considered that the Administration was in the right

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direction to promote mutual support among families through the community networks. The launch of pilot projects at district level could provide useful experience for formulating policies on welfare services. Mrs LEUNG asked about the Administration's plan to take forward the proposal to promote quality parenting education outlined in paragraph 38 of the Policy Address booklet. She added that the Women's Commission had taken about eight months in 2003 to promote quality parenting and suggested that the Administration could make reference to the Commission's work in this regard. Noting from paragraph 18 of the Administration's paper that two pilot projects of batterer intervention had been launched, Mrs LEUNG considered that the pilot projects should be extended to the neighbourhood level so that batterers and their victims could be provided with early assistance.

34. SHWF acknowledged that community groups and NGOs had made valuable contributions to the provision of welfare services at district level. In this regard, the Administration would promote the involvement of community groups and NGOs in the quality parenting pilot projects. Regarding the batterer intervention programme, SHWF said that it might be extended to other groups in the community subject to the review of the two pilot projects.

II. Any other business

35. In closing, the Chairman hoped that SHWF would attend more meetings of the Panel in future. SHWF said that he would attend Panel meetings as far as practicable, and the Administration would continue to solicit members' views through different channels.

36. There being no other business, the meeting end at 5:40 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
10 November 2006