

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. FC32/08-09
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/F/1/2

Finance Committee of the Legislative Council

**Minutes of the 21st meeting
held at the Legislative Council Chamber
on Friday, 20 June 2008, at 3:05 pm**

Members present:

Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP
Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po, GBM, GBS, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon Margaret NG
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, SBS, JP
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, GBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong, GBS
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, SBS, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum, JP
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBM, GBS, JP
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, GBS, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, SBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP

Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, SBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon LI Kwok-ying, MH, JP
Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long, JP
Hon Daniel LAM Wai-keung, SBS, JP
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, SBS, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Ting-kwong, BBS
Hon CHIM Pui-chung
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG, JP
Hon KWONG Chi-kin
Hon TAM Heung-man
Hon Mrs Anson CHAN, GBM, JP

Members absent:

Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, SBS, JP
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon Bernard CHAN, GBS, JP
Hon SIN Chung-kai, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP
Hon Vincent FANG Kang, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC

Public officers attending:

Professor K C CHAN, SBS, JP	Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury
Mr Stanley YING, JP	Permanent Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury)
Miss Amy TSE, JP	Deputy Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury) 1

Mr Alfred FOK	Principal Executive Officer (General), Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (The Treasury Branch)
Mr Philip YUNG, JP	Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)1
Mr WAI Chi-sing, JP	Director of Highways
Mr WAN Man-lung, JP	Principal Government Engineer (Railway Development), Highways Department
Mr Malcolm GIBSON	Head of Project Engineering MTR Corporation Limited
Ms Maggie SO	Senior Manager (Projects and Property Communications) MTR Corporation Limited
Mr Thomas CHAN Chung-ching	Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Health) Projects
Mr Bruno LUK Kar-kin	Principal Assistant Secretary (Health) 3 Food and Health Bureau
Dr Heston KWONG Kwok-wai	Assistant Director (Special Health Services) Department of Health
Mr Anthony CHEUNG Wai-man	Senior Systems Manager Hospital Authority

Clerk in attendance:

Mrs Constance LI Assistant Secretary General 1

Staff in attendance:

Mr Jimmy MA, JP	Legal Adviser
Miss Becky YU	Chief Council Secretary (1)1
Ms Sarah YUEN	Senior Council Secretary (1)6
Ms Alice CHEUNG	Senior Legislative Assistant (1)1
Mr Frankie WOO	Legislative Assistant (1)2

Action

Item No. 1 – FCR(2008-09)32

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PUBLIC WORKS SUBCOMMITTEE
MADE ON 4 JUNE 2008**

The Chairman said that PWSC(2008-09)22 would be put to separate voting as requested by some members. He invited members' questions on the item.

PWSC(2008-09)22 52TR Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link – design and site investigation

Employment opportunities

2. Mr WONG Kwok-hing indicated support for the funding proposal to upgrade 52TR to Category A in respect of the design and site investigation for the Hong Kong section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link (XRL). He urged the Administration to ensure that local workers and professionals would be accorded priority when filling jobs so created. The Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport)1 (DS(T)) reported that some 5 000 and 10 000 new jobs would respectively be created during construction and operation of the Hong Kong section of XRL. The Director of Highways (D of Hy) supplemented that while both the Government and MTR Corporation Limited (MTRCL) entrusted with the project were subject to the World Trade Organization Agreement on Government Procurement (WTO GPA), the two would examine with relevant labour unions and worker organizations ways to ensure that local workers could participate in the project as far as possible.

3. Noting that many prefabricated materials would be used in the XRL project, Miss CHAN Yuen-han was concerned that not many local workers would benefit from the project. In reply to Miss Chan, D of Hy said that local labour unions would be consulted as soon as the design work commenced.

Fare level

4. Ms Emily LAU enquired how the Administration could ensure that the fare level of XRL would be reasonable. DS(T) advised that the fare level would be agreed between the Hong Kong and the Mainland operators after careful consideration of a host of factors, such as market competition and public affordability. Since the cross-boundary XRL services would have to compete not only with the existing alternative transport modes, but also with domestic rail services running on the Mainland section of XRL, the fare level should be very competitive and reasonable. The Chairman commented that the operators should take into account the competition when determining the fare level. DS(T) assured members that the operators would be made aware of the concerns about the fare level and public affordability.

5. Dr Fernando CHEUNG pointed out that there were railway fare concessions for the elderly and persons with disabilities (PwDs) in the Mainland, but these concessions were not available for the Hong Kong section of XRL. DS(T) said that members' views would be conveyed to the operators for consideration.

Design

6. While expressing support for the XRL project, Miss CHAN Yuen-han was concerned whether the Administration would give sufficient attention to environmental impacts when designing the Hong Kong section of XRL. DS(T) responded that the project was a designated project under the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Ordinance (Cap. 499), and an environmental permit was required for its construction and operation. MTRCL would be required to submit the relevant EIA report to the Director of Environmental Protection for approval under the EIA Ordinance, including making the EIA report available for comments by the public. Apart from the above statutory consultation procedure, green groups, District Councils and other local communities concerned would, as in the case of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge, also be consulted at an early stage to ensure that the design would be acceptable to parties concerned.

7. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked about barrier-free access for both the Hong Kong and Mainland sections of XRL. Mr Malcolm GIBSON, Head of Project Engineering, MTRCL (H of PE, MTRCL), advised that there would be barrier-free access for the Hong Kong section, and MTRCL would also do its best to urge the Mainland operator to provide the same for the Mainland section. Dr CHEUNG considered that the Administration should specifically request the Mainland operator to ensure barrier-free access at the stations along the Mainland section. DS(T) advised that the Mainland section not only served XRL but was also part of the national high-speed railway network.

Interchange arrangements

8. Mr LAU Kong-wah expressed support for the XRL project which would bring substantial benefits to Hong Kong. He urged the Administration to pay special attention to the following when conducting the design and site investigation for the Hong Kong section of XRL -

- (a) Adequate transport interchange facilities should be provided for the large number of passengers using the transport hub in West Kowloon where the XRL terminus would be located. In particular, there should be adequate underground railway links to facilitate interchange between different railways, otherwise the Austin Road and the Jordan Road would be overloaded, causing serious traffic congestion in West Kowloon; and
- (b) It was of paramount importance that the Administration should negotiate with the Mainland authorities to work out a common immigration and customs clearance system at XRL's West Kowloon terminus, so as to enhance the efficiency of XRL, and to facilitate through connection with other national high-speed railways to major cities outside Guangdong. While complex issues were involved in

enacting legislation for co-location of boundary control facilities (BCF), co-location should be feasible in Hong Kong given its successful implementation in Shenzhen.

9. DS(T) and H of PE, MTRCL responded that to encourage more people to use XRL, the provision of convenient and adequate passenger linkage both above ground and underground for the Hong Kong section of XRL would be an important consideration during the design stage. DS(T) further advised that an inter-departmental working group had already been formed to look into matters relating to the BCF co-location. Meanwhile, provisions for co-location had already been included in the design of the West Kowloon terminus of XRL.

10. Ms Miriam LAU said that the West Kowloon terminus was already conveniently connected to West Rail and the Tung Chung Line. She considered that there should be convenient conveying facilities for passengers interchanging between these railways, to obviate the need for passengers to go above ground for road transport services. The Administration noted members' views.

Direct entrustment of MTR Corporation Limited to undertake the design and site investigation

11. While expressing support for the construction of the Hong Kong section of XRL, Mr Andrew CHENG made the following comments -

- (a) He did not accept the Administration's claim that the option of open tender for the XRL project was not feasible because of time constraints. Given the scale of the XRL project, there should be an open tender exercise allowing overseas railway operators to bid for the project to ensure value for money; and
- (b) He had reservations about adopting the usual on-cost rate of 16.5% for XRL, which had given rise to a provisional figure as high as \$330 million. He considered that there should be an on-cost ceiling for the project, instead of allowing the final overall on-cost payable to MTRCL to be agreed through negotiation with MTRCL in due course.

12. DS(T) responded that MTRCL had been assigned the project because of the need to connect the Hong Kong section of XRL with the Mainland section as soon as possible and preferably by 2015 (or even 2014). The open tender option would delay the project by at least two years to the detriment of XRL and also Hong Kong's economy. He emphasized that although MTRCL had been assigned as the project manager and they would oversee the implementation of the XRL project and, on completion, operate the railway line, open tenders would still be called by MTRCL for design and construction of the railway according to WTO GPA. As regards the on-cost rate, D of Hy explained that the reasons for adopting a provisional figure had been given in paragraph 5 of the supplementary information paper

(PWSCI(2008-09)6) provided for the Public Works Subcommittee (PWSC) meeting on 4 June 2008. He assured members that the Administration would examine MTRCL's records and audited accounts of railway projects, and apportion the actual on-cost incurred for XRL to ensure that MTRCL would not be overpaid.

13. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed concern that there would be conflict of interests for the Government, being MTRCL's majority shareholder, to directly entrust the commercially operating MTRCL to undertake the \$330-million XRL project without going through open tender. He considered such arrangement unacceptable as it departed from the WTO principles. It was regretful that members could not vote against the funding proposal because of the need to undertake the XRL project. DS(T) pointed out that apart from the justifications for assigning the project to MTRCL as he had highlighted, MTRCL was also experienced in railway construction in both Hong Kong and the Mainland. It was therefore appropriate to entrust the design and site investigation to MTRCL.

14. While indicating support for the XRL project, Mr Albert CHAN said that he had voted against the funding proposal when it was considered by PWSC, because he considered the Direct Entrustment arrangement improper. He was of the view that such arrangement lacked transparency and might involve transfer of benefits, which would set a dangerous precedent for future public projects. Since the design and site investigation for the Hong Kong section of XRL was the first of a series of XRL projects to come, and given that MTRCL was now a listed private company, Mr CHAN requested that the Legal Adviser of the Legislative Council (LA) should advise whether the Direct Entrustment was in line with WTO GPA or the principles for awarding public works contracts. In his view, instead of entrusting MTRCL with both construction and operation of the Hong Kong section of XRL, the Government should award the construction of the Hong Kong section through open tender.

15. DS(T) clarified that under the concession approach to be adopted for the Hong Kong section of XRL, MTRCL would only manage and operate the railway through a service concession arrangement upon completion of the railway. After deducting the on-cost payable to MTRCL for managing and supervising the Hong Kong section, 90% of the net income to be derived from the section would be returned to the Government who would be the owner of the railway. Mr Albert CHAN maintained his view that the project should be open to international companies.

16. Mr Abraham SHEK declared that he was an independent non-executive director of MTRCL. He said that the Direct Entrustment could save time and money and was appropriate for three reasons. Firstly, the former Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC) had already conducted a study on the feasibility and design of the Hong Kong section of XRL. After the Rail Merger, many former KCRC staff involved in the study were absorbed by MTRCL. Therefore, MTRCL's familiarity with XRL surpassed all other companies which did not have

such experience. Besides, foreign companies did not have the necessary local experience. Secondly, under the Rail Merger arrangements, all relevant KCRC contracts had been transferred to MTRCL which had taken over the operation of the KCR network. Thirdly, 75% of MTRCL were in fact owned by Hong Kong people. He considered the Direct Entrustment the most appropriate and economical option to pursue the design and site investigation project.

17. Pointing out that the Hong Kong section of XRL was long overdue, Ms Miriam LAU urged the Administration to take forward the project expeditiously. Mr LAU Kong-wah and Ir Dr Raymond HO shared similar view. Mr LAU highlighted that the XRL project was of great importance in safeguarding Hong Kong's interests and preventing Hong Kong from being marginalized. Ms LAU said that she was disappointed at the negative views expressed by some members on the Direct Entrustment. She pointed out that the concession approach had in fact been discussed in detail by the LegCo Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Railways and also the Bills Committee on Rail Merger Bill.

18. Mr Albert CHAN clarified that his concern was not so much about the concession approach, but about the Direct Entrustment. He recalled that all design and site investigation contracts for public works projects had all along been awarded through open tender. The need to expedite the Hong Kong section of XRL should not be used as an excuse to deviate from the long established practice. Mr Abraham SHEK pointed out that the Finance Committee had in the past approved the award of many entrustment agreements and the present funding proposal was not unprecedented.

19. DS(T) stressed that MTRCL was only the project manager for the Hong Kong section of XRL, and tenders would be invited for the design and construction of the railway in compliance with WTO GPA's open tender requirements. H of PE, MTRCL added that MTRCL was preparing the detailed specifications for appointment of the design consultant and getting ready for the construction. Most of the funds presently sought would be for appointing consultants and contractors who would be identified through competitive tendering. Mr Albert CHAN pointed out that MTRCL still had the power to decide whether to contract out any works under XRL.

20. Ir Dr Raymond HO opined that the Direct Entrustment was acceptable because MTRCL's tendering system was long-established and highly regarded as fair and proper. He added that WTO GPA requirement mainly applied to construction projects. D of Hy confirmed that MTRCL's tendering system was in compliance with WTO GPA requirements. Mr Albert CHAN said that he was questioning the legitimacy of the Direct Entrustment and not MTRCL's tendering system.

21. Mr Martin LEE agreed with Mr Albert Chan that LA should be requested to advise on the legitimacy of the Direct Entrustment. DS(T) and the Principal

Government Engineer (Railway Development), Highways Department (PGE(RD), HyD) responded that similar queries had been raised before when members discussed the funding proposal for developing the Shatin to Central Link (SCL) under the concession approach. LA had advised that the approach in the SCL case was in order. PGE(RD), HyD advised that MTRCL was an entity listed in Annex 3 of the Hong Kong Schedule of WTO GPA (the HK Schedule) and, in accordance with Annex 5 of the HK Schedule, the provisions of WTO GPA would only apply to the construction works tendered out by MTRCL. The grant of a service concession to MTRCL to manage and operate a completed railway was a franchise, and according to the General Conditions Applicable to Entities and Services Specified in Annexes 1 to 5 of the HK Schedule, WTO GPA should not apply to consultancy and franchise arrangements. Therefore, the XRL service concession was not covered by WTO GPA. Mr Martin LEE opined that the XRL case might be different from the SCL case and LA's advice was necessary.

22. At the Chairman's invitation, LA attended the meeting and advised that the SCL case and the XRL case were different. The focus in the SCL case was whether SCL could be classified as capital works to be financed by the Capital Works Reserve Fund, whereas the present concern in the XRL case was the Direct Entrustment. He said that he had difficulty in providing specific advice in this regard before he had the opportunity to study the issues of whether, and to what extent, WTO GPA should apply. DS(T) said that according to the Government's legal advice, granting of the XRL service concession to MTRCL was not subject to restrictions of WTO GPA.

23. Pointing out that District Council projects were also awarded through open tender, Mr Martin LEE considered it necessary to carefully examine the Direct Entrustment arrangement.

24. Mrs Selina CHOW opined that the XRL project should be allowed to proceed immediately without further delay. As KCRC had all along been entrusted with the operation of railways, MTRCL should naturally be similarly entrusted after the Rail Merger. She pointed out that construction of the Hong Kong section of XRL would be contracted out by MTRCL through its long-established open tendering system which was transparent and fair.

25. Mr Albert CHAN and Mr Martin LEE stressed that the Administration should provide details on the legal advice it had obtained on the issue. Dr Fernando CHEUNG requested the Administration to provide a paper on the WTO requirements on procurements, and LA should also study the subject and provide legal advice in writing. He suggested that the item should be deferred to the next meeting.

26. Noting members' concern about the Direct Entrustment and to allow time for LA to examine the issues involved, the Administration withdrew the proposal and would re-submit it to the Finance Committee at its next meeting.

Item No. 2 – FCR(2008-09)33

HEAD 37 – DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

♦ Subhead 700 General non-recurrent

New Item "Health Care Voucher Pilot Scheme"

**HEAD 140 – GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT: FOOD AND HEALTH
BUREAU (HEALTH BRANCH)**

**Capital Account New Subhead "Hospital Authority – Information Technology
System for Health Care Vouchers"**

**New Item "Hospital Authority – Information Technology System for Health
Care Vouchers"**

27. The Chairman said that the Panel on Health Services was consulted on the proposal at its meeting on 14 April 2008. Panel members strongly requested the Government to include elderly aged 65 or above in the proposed three-year Elderly Health Care Voucher Pilot Scheme, and to increase the face amount of each health care voucher from \$50 to \$100. The Government should endeavour to implement the Scheme in 2008. The number of vouchers for each elderly person should increase from five to 10 each year. The Government should also take measures to prevent private health care services providers from profiteering from the Scheme.

Value and number of vouchers

28. Ms LI Fung-ying urged the Administration to improve the Scheme as members generally considered the annual issue of only five health care vouchers worth \$50 each insufficient, given that the cost of using private health care services was at least \$120 per visit and even \$200 for night visits. The Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Health), Projects (DS(H)P) responded that the Administration had taken note of members' views. However, as the Scheme was a pilot scheme aiming at providing additional choices for the elderly persons through partially subsidizing the use of private health care services on top of the existing public primary health care services, the Administration considered it prudent to launch the Scheme at a lower voucher value to ensure smooth and efficient implementation at the pilot stage. Notwithstanding, the Administration would conduct an interim review of the Scheme in the second year of implementation and a comprehensive review at the end of the three-year pilot period to assess the effectiveness and the scope of the Scheme, including the quantity and value of the vouchers.

29. Ms LI Fung-ying opined that the subsidy under the Scheme was insufficient, and urged the Administration to increase the value of the vouchers without waiting for the reviews. DS(H)P advised that the operational details of the Scheme would be fine-tuned in the light of experience gained during the pilot period. Having regard to the health care charges in the private sector, the Administration was confident that the Scheme could serve its purpose of providing partial subsidy for the elderly in using private health care services. In response to Ms LI, DS(H)P said that the reviews would cover the utilization rate of the health care vouchers, the

types of health care services used by the elderly persons with the voucher subsidy, the operating cost and arrangements of the Scheme, and the use of public health care services by the elderly persons after implementation of the Scheme.

30. Dr Fernando CHEUNG highlighted the result of a survey conducted on elderly persons in the Central and Western districts, which indicated that half of the respondents would not use the Scheme because the vouchers could not support continued use of private health care services. As public health care services were more affordable to many elderly, they would continue to use public services. The Scheme might therefore only benefit those elderly who were already using private services, and could not reduce the reliance of those poor and chronically ill elderly persons on public services. Dr CHEUNG questioned whether the Administration had consulted the stakeholders before arriving at the proposed voucher value. Ms Emily LAU added that many Panel members supported an annual subsidy of \$1,000 to each elderly person under the Scheme. She also expressed disappointment at the slow pace in introducing the Scheme. Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr LI Kwok-ying and Dr Joseph LEE also shared the view that the value and number of the vouchers were insufficient.

31. DS(H)P reiterated that the Scheme intended to provide elderly persons with partial subsidy so as to enable them to flexibly choose the private primary health care services within their local communities that best suited their needs, in addition to the existing public primary health care services available to them. He said that elderly persons should be able to benefit from additional choice offered by the Scheme, and it appeared premature to rule out the effectiveness of the pilot scheme before its implementation. The Administration would submit a report to the Panel on Health Services after completing the interim review. The views of elderly persons on how best to facilitate their use of vouchers would be sought through various channels, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and elderly homes.

Admin 32. Mr Abraham SHEK requested the Administration to take into consideration members' views during the review of the scheme. The Administration noted the comment.

Protection of personal data

33. Noting that a great number of medical professionals would have access to the electronic health care voucher system under the Scheme, Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed concern about the privacy impact and security of the System. DS(H)P advised that privacy impact and security risk assessments would be conducted during the design stage so that any comments or improvement could be incorporated into the system. He assured members that the security of the system would be comparable to that of electronic banking. Two-factor authentication, which included the use of security token in conjunction with password, would be required for access and retrieval of data with adequate security.

34. Ms Emily LAU expressed concern about the privacy implications of using the personal particulars of the elderly persons for verification and eligibility confirmation purposes under the Scheme. DS(H)P responded that under the Scheme, eligible elderly persons could use the vouchers by simply presenting their Hong Kong identity cards. To prevent fraud, the information of the elderly persons input into the system by the service providers would be validated with the records kept by the Immigration Department. The Administration would consult the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data on the validation procedure and obtain the consent of the elderly persons concerned for conducting the validation. The Senior Systems Manager, Hospital Authority supplemented that apart from the use of security token, password and user name, personal particulars would be encrypted and double fire walls installed to prevent divulging of information.

35. On the estimated number of service providers who would have access to the system, DS(H)P advised that the number of private healthcare service providers with their own individual practices in Hong Kong was approximately around 20 000.

Financial implications

36. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed concern that \$30 million out of the proposed funding of \$535.33 million would be used for developing and installing the system and for its operation and maintenance during the pilot period. In addition, \$38 million was earmarked to cover the additional non-recurrent staff cost and operational expenditures arising from the implementation of the Scheme. He considered such administrative costs too expensive, and that such provisions should better be used to extend the scope of the Scheme to cover more elderly persons and increase the value of the vouchers.

37. DS(H)P clarified that out of the \$30 million, about \$19 million was a one-off investment in the hardware and software for the system which could be used to support similar initiatives in future to achieve cost-effectiveness. The implementation cost of the Scheme would be kept below \$50 million, i.e. within 10% of the total expenditure of the Scheme. If the scope of the Scheme was expanded after the pilot period, the average operational cost would be reduced correspondingly. He advised that if the issue and usage of vouchers and calculation of reimbursement to the service providers was to be done manually rather than through an electronic system, the staff cost and operational expenditure of the Scheme would be higher. He added that an electronic system could provide greater convenience to the elderly as they would not need to register for the Scheme, nor collect/present the vouchers each time.

38. Mr WONG Kwok-hing noted that the Administration would provide support to participating service providers so that they could access the system through various means, including computers, personal digital assistants, mobile phones, fixed-line telephones, etc. He enquired about the estimated quantity of such equipment and how they would be disposed of without wastage if the Scheme turned

out to be unsuccessful. DS(H)P clarified that the Administration would only provide support services to healthcare providers for accessing the electronic system rather than providing the actual equipment for doing so as the latter would be the providers' own responsibility.

Other issues

39. Miss CHAN Yuen-han asked whether and how the list of service providers participating in the Scheme would be provided to the elderly. She was concerned that many elderly persons, especially those living alone, would need assistance in using the Scheme. DS(H)P responded that the Social Welfare Department and NGOs would be involved to provide assistance, particularly in identifying measures to enable the hidden elderly and the institutionalized elderly to benefit from the Scheme. The list of service providers would also be uploaded onto the website of the Scheme (www.hcv.gov.hk) for easy reference. Alternatively, practitioners could also use fixed-line telephones to access the system.

40. Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr LI Kwok-ying and Dr Joseph LEE questioned the reasons for setting the eligible age of the Scheme at 70, since people normally retired, and hence in greater need of financial assistance, at the age of 65 or earlier. DS(H)P responded that it was prudent to launch the pilot scheme on a smaller scale targeting at a smaller population group as a start. The scope and the eligible age of the Scheme would be covered in the planned reviews.

41. Dr Joseph LEE opined that in recognition of dieticians' important role in health protection, they should be allowed to participate in the Scheme although they were not registered medical practitioners. DS(H)P responded that as a start, only health care professionals who were registered in Hong Kong were eligible to participate in the Scheme. As to allied health professionals such as dieticians who were not registered, the Administration would examine how they could participate in the Scheme in future. In this connection, the Administration had undertaken to review the organization structure and operation mode of the Supplementary Medical Professions Council in the next legislative session.

42. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked what measures would be taken to prevent the health care sector from taking this opportunity to increase fees. DS(H)P responded that it was difficult for the sector to raise fees only for elderly persons paying for the services by vouchers. Nevertheless, the Administration would closely monitor the situation.

43. The Chairman put the item to vote. The Committee approved the proposal.

44. The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.