

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1710/08-09
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 11 May 2009, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip (Chairman)
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS

Member absent : Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP

Public Officers attending : Item IV

Miss Christine CHOW Kam-yuk
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (Civic Affairs) 2

Ms Elaine MAK Tse-ling
Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (2)1

Item V

Mr Stephen SUI
Commissioner for Rehabilitation
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mrs LI CHAN Chui-ngan, Agnes
Chief Social Work Officer
(Rehabilitation and Medical Social Services)1

Items V and VI

Mr FUNG Pak-yan
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

Item VI

Mrs Anna MAK
Assistant Director of Social Welfare
(Family and Child Welfare)

**Deputations
by invitation** : Item VI

Democratic Party Women Committee

Ms CHEUNG Yuet-lan
Member

Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women
Abuse (Kwan Fook)

阿花
Member

風雨同路

Ms LIU Ngan-fung
Chairperson

Civic Party

Mr Bill LAY
Member of Executive Committee

Clerk in attendance : Miss Betty MA
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Miss Florence WONG
Senior Council Secretary (2) 5

Miss Lulu YEUNG
Clerical Assistant (2) 3

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I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1450/08-09]

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2009 were confirmed.

II. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1492/08-09(01)]

2. Members noted that the Administration's response to the survey by Oxfam Hong Kong on the general public's perception of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients had been issued since the last meeting.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1451/08-09(01) and (02)]

3. Members agreed to discuss the Integrated Discharge Support Trial Programme for Elderly Patients proposed by the Administration at the next meeting to be held on 8 June 2009 at 10:45 am.

4. Mr WONG Sing-chi expressed concern about the post discharge follow-up services and community support services for ex-mentally ill persons. He suggested that the Panel should discuss the issue at the next meeting. Echoing Mr WONG's suggestion, Ms LI Fung-ying said that in addition to facilitate re-integration of ex-mentally ill persons into the community, it was equally important to provide support services to their families.

5. Mr Albert HO was of the view that the admission and discharge policies of psychiatric departments in public hospitals and the social rehabilitation services for people with mental health problems were related issues. He suggested that

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the Panel on Welfare Services and the Panel on Health Services should jointly discuss the matter.

6. The Chairman said that the Panel might wish to discuss the community support services for ex-mentally ill persons in the first instance such that the discussion could be more effective and in-depth. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che echoed the Chairman's view and said that the Panel could consider holding a joint meeting with the Panel on Health Services, if necessary, after the discussion. Members agreed to discuss the subject at the next regular meeting in June 2009.

7. Referring to item 14 of the Panel's list of outstanding items for discussion, Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed concern about the progress on the review of the system for processing applications for Disability Allowance under the Social Security Allowance Scheme. Members agreed that the Administration should be invited to advise on the timing for discussion.

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8. Referring to the letter from Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che dated 8 May 2009 suggesting the Panel to follow up the fatal falling gate incident at the Hang Ngai Manufacturing and Hostel in Hung Hom, the Chairman informed members that the Panel on Development would discuss issues arising from the incident at the next meeting to be held on 26 May 2009 and non-Panel Members were invited to join the discussion. Should there be specific issues required of follow-up by the Panel subsequently, members might consider holding a meeting as appropriate. Members agreed.

IV. Work progress of the Family Council

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1451/08-09(05) and (06)]

9. Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (Civic Affairs) 2 (PAS(CA)2) briefed members on the progress of work of the Family Council as detailed in the Administration's paper. PAS(CA)2 highlighted that the Family Council had identified family core values, discussed ways to achieve a pro-family environment and made recommendations on better synergy of work between the Council and the Elderly Commission (EC), the Women's Commission (WoC) and the Commission on Youth (CoY). On the working relationships with the three Commissions, PAS(CA)2 said that the Family Council considered that while the three Commissions would continue to perform the roles in relevant sector-specific areas, they would form a closer alliance with the Family Council and make more concerted efforts to help enhance support services for families. To facilitate communication and co-operation between the Council and the three Commissions, the Chairpersons of these Commissions had been appointed as ex-officio members of the Family Council with effect from 1 April 2009.

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10. PAS(CA)2 added that to facilitate the work of the Council, subcommittees had been set up to conduct more in-depth deliberations on specific areas. For instance, apart from the Subcommittee on Promotion of Family Core Values, two subcommittees on family support and family education had just been formed under the Family Council.

11. Mr WONG Sing-chi was of the view that the Family Council should formulate strategic directions on family-related policies, instead of launching promotional activities which could be undertaken by district organisations. Mr WONG asked about the specific work plan put in place by the Family Council, say, to create a pro-family environment.

12. PAS(CA)2 said that as an advisory body to the Government, the Family Council provided a high-level platform for discussion of major issues from the family perspective and strategic directions and priorities on family-related policies. The provision of services to support families would continue to be delivered by different relevant service providers. PAS(CA)2 further said that the three Commissions, District Councils and the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, etc were the major stakeholders of the Family Council, and the Council did not seek to replace their work. A list of initiatives currently undertaken by the Family Council and the major stakeholders was detailed in the Administration's paper. PAS(CA)2 added that as mentioned earlier, the Family Council had set up three subcommittees to conduct in-depth deliberation on the strategic directions on promotion of family core values, family support and family education, in particular parental education.

13. Mr WONG Sing-chi remained of the view that the Family Council should draw up a list of discussion items for future meetings, in particular identifying ways to create a pro-family environment including stipulating maximum working hours and promoting social harmony. PAS(CA)2 said that the subcommittees of the Family Council would seek to identify deliverables to meet objectives on family-related matters set by the Council. For instance, the Subcommittee on Family Support (SFS) would collaborate with the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and WoC to identify ways and engage employers to create a pro-family work environment.

14. Referring to paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper, Ms LI Fung-ying expressed concern how the Family Council was to identify ways to foster pro-family measures and promote family-friendly employment practices. Ms LI enquired about the concrete work plan and the criteria for according priority to these areas of work.

15. In response, PAS(CA)2 said that the Family Council had set out its priority tasks in last year. Specifically, the Family Council had identified family core values as set out in the footnotes of the Administration's paper, encouraged

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policy-makers to take into account the family perspective in policy formulation, and undertaken a series of initiatives to promote family core values. PAS(CA)2 further said that the newly formed SFS would accord priority to devise a framework on fostering a family-friendly environment.

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16. Mr LI Fung-ying requested the Administration to provide information on the priority of work and work plan of SFS. PAS(CA)2 responded that as SFS had just been formed, the Administration would need some time to prepare the information. She would provide the requested information in due course.

17. Pointing out that the membership of the Family Council lacked representatives from the labour sector, Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired if the Administration would consider appointing representatives from the labour sector in the new term such that the employees' needs could be fully reflected and considered during the discussion relating to pro-family work environment.

18. PAS(CA)2 said that the new term of the Family Council had been effective from 1 April 2009. Except the official members and the Chairpersons of EC, WoC and CoY who were appointed as ex-officio members, other members of the Family Council were appointed in their personal capacity. The Council and its subcommittees would consider co-opting talents and advice from experts and professionals outside the Council, including representatives from the labour sector, on need basis. Nonetheless, she would convey members' views to the Family Council for consideration.

19. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed dissatisfaction at the Administration's failure to include representatives from the labour sector in the membership of the Family Council. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan considered the arrangement unacceptable.

20. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed concern about the work progress regarding identification of ways to create a pro-family environment including work environment and promoting family-friendly employment practices given that the Family Council had accorded priority to this area of work at its first meeting in December 2007. He considered that the long working hours would have hampered family harmony.

21. PAS(CA)2 advised that the Family Council had discussed the promotion of family-friendly employment practices for better work-life balance, such as employee support schemes, flexible work arrangements. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan requested the Administration to provide further information on the discussion by the Family Council on the promotion of family-friendly employment practices.

(Post-meeting note : The Family Council's paper entitled "Promotion of family-friendly employment practices for better work-life balance" provided by the Administration was tabled at the meeting.)

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Referring to the paper tabled at the meeting, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan requested the Administration to provide an update on the progress of the efforts undertaken by the Family Council in promoting the family-friendly employment practices.

22. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che took the view that the Family Council should focus its discussion on family-related policies instead of launching promotional campaign. Referring to the terms of reference of the Family Council, Mr CHEUNG asked about the work progress of the Council in respect of advising the Government on the formulation of policies and strategies for supporting and strengthening the family, and the integration of family policies and related programmes across different bureaux and departments for individual age and gender sectors to ensure effective coordination.

23. PAS(CA)2 said that the Family Council had tasked to foster closer and harmonious relationships among family members, which could not be achieved simply by launching ad-hoc programmes and activities. The Family Council would continue to work with the relevant stakeholders to further promote and publicise family core values in a sustainable manner, identify ways to enhance effectiveness and co-ordination of family education, and ways to foster pro-family measures.

24. Mr CHUENG Kwok-che cast doubt about the effectiveness of the promotional and educational programmes in promoting a pro-family environment in the absence of family-friendly employment practices, such as stipulating the maximum working hours. Echoing Mr CHEUNG's view, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung asked about the Family Council's concrete plan to coordinate and foster pro-family measures. He took the view that the Council should strengthen its role to advise the Government on strategic directions and priorities on family-related policies.

25. PAS(CA)2 responded that since the formation of the Family Council, one of its priority tasks was to foster a family perspective among policy makers. Different policy bureaux and departments had been encouraged to look into the family perspective in the policy making process. The subcommittees under the Family Council had identified four priority policy areas for study, including housing and social welfare services. Citing social welfare services as an example, PAS(CA)2 said that subject to endorsement by the Family Council, LWB would be invited to instil the deliberations on ways to foster and co-ordinate support services to meet the needs of individual groups.

26. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung urged the Government to critically examine its policies and improve the supportive services to better meet the needs of specific groups, for example, the low-income families. Sharing similar concerns, Mr

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Albert HO said that the Family Council should study the specific problems faced by different types of families such as single-parent families, families of ethnic minority, families with new arrivals, families with disabled members, etc. Instead of promoting the family core values, Mr HO held the view that the Family Council should examine the existing policies, with a view to improving those policies which were not conducive to harmonious relationships amongst family members. Citing the requirement to apply for CSSA on a household basis as an example, family members of the elderly applicants had to make the statement on non-provision of financial support, or alternatively the elderly applicants had to move out of the family so as to become eligible for application. In his view, such requirement warranted more in-depth study by the Family Council.

27. PAS(CA)2 said that as explained earlier, the Family Council had identified four policy areas, including social welfare services, for more in-depth deliberations.

28. Mr Ronny TONG said that in response to his request for setting up a Children's Commission to safeguard the rights and well-being of children, the Chief Executive had advised that the needs of children would be taken into account by the Family Council. Mr TONG wondered whether the Family Council had taken into consideration the children's perspective in its work. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che raised a similar question. Pointing out that no representatives from academics or legal practitioners were appointed to the Family Council, Mr Ronny TONG expressed disappointment that the Family Council would not consider human rights perspective in its study.

29. PAS(CA)2 stressed that the setting up of the Family Council was to study and address problems from a family and cross-policy perspective, with a view to taking a more holistic approach in supporting families. While the Administration had currently no plan of setting up of a Children's Commission, different policy bureaux, departments and non-governmental organisations would take into account the needs of children in formulating policy recommendations and delivering targeted services and programmes. PAS(CA)2 further said that one of the terms of reference of the Family Council was to advise the Government on the integration of family policies and related programmes across different bureaux and departments for individual age and gender sectors to ensure effective coordination. Groups in need, including children, would be duly considered by the Family Council in its work.

30. Expressing agreement with the concept of taking a holistic approach in supporting families and addressing family problems from a cross-policy perspective, Mr Alan LEONG said that with reference to the Administration's paper, the Family Council's priority task was, however, undertaking promotional and publicity programmes. He asked whether the Family Council would

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reprioritise its work to study strategic directions and measures on pro-family policies.

31. PAS(CA)2 assured members that the Family Council would continue to study policy initiatives and conduct in-depth deliberations on its areas of work. While acknowledging the public expectation on the work of the Family Council, PAS(CA)2 reiterated that the Family Council was an advisory body to the Government. Provision of services to support families would continue to be delivered by different relevant service providers and delivery agents. She would convey members' views to the Family Council for consideration in its future work.

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32. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che requested the Administration to provide information on the past discussions by the Family Council relating to the integration of family policies and related programmes across different bureaux and departments, and the needs of children as well as the future plan on the above areas.

Admin

33. Mr WONG Kwok-hing asked whether the Family Council had studied the specific needs and rights of men in the context of their role in the family, in particular the progress on introducing paid paternity leave.

34. The Chairman said that as the Family Council was chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration, it was expected that the Council would study from a high-level perspective in reviewing and improving family-related policies. In his view, the following policy areas that had hindered family harmony should be reviewed –

- (a) the policy to require well-off public housing tenants to pay double rent under which grown-up children would move out of the housing units;
- (b) lack of education policy to facilitate siblings to study in the same primary and secondary schools;
- (c) dependant allowances under the taxation policy were not applicable to dependent children over 25 and parents aged below 55;
- (d) no statutory maximum working hours;
- (e) foreign domestic helpers were not allowed to take care of their employers' aged parents if they were not living together; and
- (f) scheduling of racing days on public holidays.

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35. The Chairman said that the Panel might wish to appoint a subcommittee to discuss matters relating to work of the Family Council after the Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation had completed its work.

V. Two new Integrated Rehabilitation Services Centres for persons with disabilities

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1451/08-09(03) and (04)]

36. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services) (DDSW(S)) briefed members on the Administration's proposal to set up two new Integrated Rehabilitation Services Centres (IRSCs) for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Kwai Chung (Kwai Chung IRSC) and Ho Man Tin (Ho Man Tin IRSC) as detailed in the Administration's paper. DDSW(S) highlighted that through setting up the two new IRSCs, 490 subvented residential care places together with 450 day training/vocational rehabilitation services places would be provided in 2010.

37. Noting that the funding estimates were based on a notional staffing of 194 staff for the Kwai Chung IRSC and 124 staff for the Ho Man Tin IRSC, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che expressed concern about the criteria in determining the staff establishment of the two centres and whether it was in line with the minimum staffing requirement as set out in the Code of Practice for Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities.

38. DDSW(S) responded that the staff establishment was in principle based on the notional staffing requirement for the respective service units of the IRSC as set out in the Handbook on Rehabilitation Services. He added that the staff establishment of an IRSC would be different from that of a residential care home for PWDs (RCHD) set out in the Code of Practice due to the difference in service modes.

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39. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che requested the Administration to provide information on the estimated staff establishment, together a breakdown of the personal emoluments and other charges for the two centres.

40. While supporting the proposal to set up two new IRSCs, Ms LI Fung-ying expressed grave concern about the long waiting time for residential care services for PWDs, notably the average waiting time for Hostel for Severely Physically Handicapped Persons (HSPH) in 2008 was as long as 106.8 months. Noting that only 490 subvented residential care places would be provided in 2010 through setting up the two new IRSCs, Ms LI enquired if the Administration would set out a pledge of shortening the waiting time. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed a similar concern.

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41. DDSW(S) responded that the Administration was concerned very much about the waitlisting situation and had accorded priority for the provision of new subvented residential care places for PWDs. He advised that 1 529 new subvented residential care places for PWDs had been provided in the past five years. In the coming two years, in addition to the 490 residential care places to be provided through the setting up of two new IRSCs, 181 residential care places would also be provided through other projects. The Administration would continue its efforts to bid for more resources to increase the supply of subvented residential places for PWDs. However, the provision of additional RCHDs would depend on the availability of suitable sites/premises. Nonetheless, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) had dedicated efforts to increase the number of subsidised residential care places by the following ways –

- (a) for long-term planning, it would continue to liaise with the relevant authorities in town planning and housing to identify suitable venues for developing rehabilitation facilities for PWDs;
- (b) for medium-term planning, it would continue to liaise with the relevant authorities to identify idle properties such as unused schools and vacant premises in public housing estates with a view to retrofitting and converting these premises into IRSCs or RCHDs; and
- (c) for short-term measures, it would continue to support NGOs operating RCHDs to study the feasibility of further increasing residential care places by insitu-expansion; and actively consider buying places from private RCHDs in the course of introducing a statutory licensing scheme for RCHDs.

42. Ms LI Fung-ying maintained the view that the Administration should set out the concrete timetable and implementation plan for increasing the residential care places for PWDs. Moreover, the provision of residential care places could also help create job opportunities.

43. Mr WONG Kwok-hing welcomed the Administration's funding proposal. Pointing that the proposed Kwai Chung IRSC would be located at Kwai Shing Circuit, Mr WONG said that residents in the vicinity and users of South Kwai Chung Jockey Club Polyclinic nearby had been complaining of its inaccessibility. Mr WONG urged SWD to liaise with the Transport Department to study the feasibility of constructing a lift tower at Kwai Shing Circuit connecting to Hing Sing Road to facilitate the accessibility of both the new Kwai Chung IRSC and South Kwai Chung Jockey Club Polyclinic.

44. DDSW(S) said that the Administration would explore and study the feasibility of Mr WONG's suggestion.

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45. Pointing out that the waiting time for the Hostel for Severely Mentally Handicapped Persons and HSPH were 68.4 months and 106.8 months respectively, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan considered the waiting time outrageous. He wondered to what extent the waiting time could be shortened after the provision of additional 490 places through setting up the two new IRSCs. He further enquired about the feasibility of further increasing the number of residential care places in the two new IRSCs by constructing more storeys.

46. In response, DDSW(S) said that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to estimate the average waiting time so shortened resulted from the set-up of the two new IRSCs since there were other factors affecting the waiting time such as the number of applicants, turnover rates of subvented residential care places, longer life expectancy due to improved healthcare services, etc. As regards the feasibility of constructing more storeys, DDSW(S) clarified that the two new IRSCs were not set up in newly constructed premises but existing premises that were retrofitted and converted.

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47. The Chairman requested the Administration to provide information, as far as practicable, on the improvements in shortening the waiting time for subvented RCHDs after setting up two new IRSCs prior to submitting the funding proposal to the Finance Committee (FC).

48. In the light of the long waiting time for RCHDs and difficulties faced by family members of PWDs, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung was of the view that there was an imminent need to increase the residential care places for PWDs. He asked about the difficulties encountered by the Administration in identifying suitable sites for RCHDs.

49. DDSW(S) said that the Administration would continue to liaise with other authorities in town planning to strive for suitable long-term venues for RCHDs as well as study the viability of turning vacant premises into RCHDs. In view that such proposals sometimes met with local opposition, the Administration would also need to conduct public consultation.

50. While expressing understanding that the proposals to turn existing premises to RCHDs would often meet with local opposition, Mr WONG Sing-chi took the view that the Administration should strive for providing more residential care places for PWDs so as to shorten the waiting time.

51. DDSW(S) assured members that the Administration had endeavoured to increase the number of and shorten the waiting time for residential care places for PWDs. Citing the two proposed IRSCs as an example, DDSW(S) said that SWD had consulted the Kwai Tsing District Council in December 2008 and the Kowloon City District Council in October 2008 respectively on the proposed

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projects before it obtained permanent land grant for the premises from the Lands Department in February 2009 and endorsement of the Lotteries Fund Advisory Committee for the setting-up costs in March 2009. SWD planned to invite NGOs to submit proposals in July 2009 after obtaining FC's funding approval in June 2009 and the two IRSCs were targeted to commence operation in the third quarter of 2010-2011.

52. To enlist local support for RCHD projects, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che said that the Administration might consider inviting views from District Councils on suitable sites/premises for conversion into RCHDs.

53. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung expressed dissatisfaction at the Administration's failure to provide a concrete long-term plan in addressing the waitlisting situation for residential care services for PWDs. He urged the Administration to accord priority and set out specific targets on the provision of subvented residential care places for PWDs.

54. DDSW(S) reiterated that the Administration had accorded priority in providing more residential care places for PWDs through different approaches. As mentioned earlier, an additional 1 529 residential care places had been provided over the past five years and an additional 671 places would be provided through the set-up of the two proposed new IRSCs and other projects in the coming two years. The Administration would continue to identify suitable premises for conversion into RCHDs.

55. To enhance the provision of residential care places for PWDs, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che suggested that the Administration should actively liaise with the Education Bureau (EDB) and other departments in identifying suitable premises, such as unused schools and vacant industrial buildings, for conversion into RCHDs. Mr TAM Yiu-chung expressed a similar view.

56. In response, DDSW(S) said that from time to time SWD had been liaising with EDB and other authorities in identifying suitable premises including unused schools for conversion into RCHDs, and would continue with such liaison work.

57. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman suggested that the Panel should write to the Secretary for Education and the Government Property Administrator requesting EDB and the Government Property Agency to accord priority in identifying suitable premises for conversion into the provision of day training and residential care services to PWDs. Members agreed.

(Post-meeting note : The Chairman's letters to the Secretary for Education and the Government Property Administrator were issued on 15 May 2009.)

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[At the suggestion of the Chairman, members agreed to extend the meeting for 30 minutes.]

VI. Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centres service mode

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)978/08-09(03), CB(2)1451/08-09(07), CB(2)1502/08-09(01) and (02) and CB(2)1526/08-09(01)]

58. The Chairman said that this meeting was arranged to further receive views from deputations on the implementation of the integrated family service centre (IFSC) service mode from the perspective of service users.

Meeting with deputations

Democratic Party Women Committee

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1502/08-09(01)]

59. Ms CHEUNG Yuet-lan presented the views of the Democratic Party Women Committee (DPWC) as detailed in the submission. The Committee was concerned about the effectiveness of IFSC service mode in providing a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services to the community and in meeting the special needs of single parents and new arrivals, taking into account each IFSC served a boundary with a population of 100 000 to 150 000. As most of the resources of IFSCs were deployed for case work, provision of preventive services was far from sufficient. Noting that social workers of IFSCs had been overloaded, the Committee was much concerned about the service quality of IFSCs, and the support and remedial services provided to the high-risk families. As such, DPWC considered that the Administration should establish a mechanism for conducting regular review on the services provided by IFSCs. This apart, Ms CHEUNG enquired about the mechanism in assessing the risk level of domestic violence cases and determining whether the cases should be referred to the Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs).

Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse (Kwan Fook)

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1502/08-09(02)]

60. Ah Fa told the meeting about her helpless situation in seeking help from IFSCs owing to the fact that some social workers in IFSCs did not possess adequate knowledge about the prevailing social welfare policies. She said that she had been divorced and was molested by her ex-spouse. While staying in a refuge centre, an IFSC social worker advised her to remove her name from the public housing tenancy agreement for the purpose of applying for compassionate

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rehousing. However, she was later advised that her application was unsuccessful for not meeting the eligibility criteria for compassionate rehousing. The social worker then advised her to apply for the Conditional Tenancy Scheme on her own and rent a private housing flat while waiting for the allocation of a public housing unit. Voicing out that she had been misled by the IFSC social worker on the housing arrangements, she questioned why her case was not referred to FCPSU for assistance.

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61. Ms LIU Ngan-fung held a strong view that since family violence cases were complicated, such cases should be handled by FCPSUs which were specialised units under SWD manned by experienced social workers in providing services to victims and families of domestic violence. With reference to the case of Ah Fa, Ms LIU considered that her situation was eligible for applying to the Housing Department (HD) for household splitting on the recommendation of SWD. She opined that all domestic violence cases reported to the Police should be referred to FCPSUs instead of IFSCs for follow-up. This apart, Ms LIU expressed concern about the referral mechanism amongst IFSCs. Given that there were 61 IFSCs across the territory, she saw no reason why some victims of domestic violence who had moved to other districts were still required to attend services in the district where the domestic violence cases took place. To avoid being molested by the abusers, such cases should be transferred to the IFSC in the district where the clients resided.

Civic Party

62. Mr Billy LAY expressed the concern of the Civic Party about the tremendous pressure faced by the frontline social workers of IFSCs due to insufficient resources to meet the multifarious needs of families and individuals of the community. The Civic Party requested the Administration to set objective workload indicators for IFSCs to assess whether social workers were overloaded. As regards the review being conducted by the University of Hong Kong (HKU) Consultant Team on the implementation of IFSC service mode, the Civic Party appealed to the Administration to undertake not to interfere with the review and make public the report once it was available. Mr LAY suggested that to relieve the workload of frontline social workers of IFSC, the Consultant Team of HKU should consider studying the viability of allowing the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) and HD to engage their own social workers to deal with IFSC cases which were related to domestic violence and housing arrangements.

63. DDSW(S) said that while the Administration had commissioned the HKU Consultant Team to conduct a review on the implementation of IFSC service mode, it maintained an open-minded and would listen to views on the issue. Based on the recommendations to be made by the Consultant Team, it would see

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what improvements could be made to further refine the mode. In response to the deputations' concern about the capability of IFSCs in providing preventive services, DDSW(S) made the following points –

- (a) the design of IFSC service mode aimed to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services so as to meet the changing needs of families in a holistic manner. The Consultant Team would study its effectiveness in providing these services and make recommendations as appropriate;
- (b) the output and outcome indicators for different services of IFSCs, i.e. preventive, supportive or remedial, were stipulated in the Funding & Service Agreements, though IFSCs could deploy flexibly their resources having regard to the needs and circumstances of individual communities; and
- (c) additional resources had been allocated to IFSCs over the past few years to strengthen services including those preventive in nature. For example, the launching of the Family Support Programme in 2006-2007 was to proactively outreach to vulnerable families that were unmotivated to seek help with an aim to encouraging them to receive various supportive services for preventing further deterioration of their problems. Besides, the Comprehensive Child Development Service which was launched in 2005 aimed to identify children and families at risk and prevent problems from occurrence through early intervention. A referral system was established between Maternal and Child Health Centres, public hospitals and IFSCs to provide the necessary interventions.

64. As regards the population served by each IFSC, DDSW(S) said that quite a number of IFSCs were serving the lower end of the population range proposed by the consultant. Nonetheless, the HKU Consultant Team would review whether the population size currently served by an IFSC was appropriate.

65. Noting that some deputations were concerned about the quality of service provided by IFSC social workers, DDSW(S) said that IFSC social workers were versed with the procedures relating to rehousing arrangement and handling of domestic violence. In addition, they were provided with guidelines on the delineation of work between FCPSUs and IFSCs in handling domestic violence cases. While the former specialised in assisting high-risk families and safeguarding the interest of the children under custody/guardianship disputes and referred by the Courts and cases involving close coordination of different departments, the latter provided supportive and remedial services to the low-risk families. DDSW(S) added that IFSCs could refer domestic violence cases to FCPSUs for follow-up as appropriate. As regards the individual cases cited by

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the deputations, he said that the Administration would follow up as appropriate after the meeting.

66. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung considered that the IFSC service mode, which was modelled on overseas experience, was not applicable to the local context in the light of the dense population of Hong Kong. It was unreasonable for an IFSC to serve a geographical boundary with population of 100 000 to 150 000.

67. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan held the view that integrated services provided by IFSCs could not totally replace those of the specialised units. Mr LEE saw no reason why domestic violence cases would be handled by the generalist IFSCs, instead of handling by the FCPSUs which were specialized in providing support services for victims and families of domestic violence. By the same token, Mr LEE considered that the former Single Parent Centres (SPC) were more effective in meeting the specific needs of single parents. He enquired if the Administration would consider re-opening these centres. Expressing similar concern, Mr WONG Sing-che hoped that the review on the implementation of IFSC service mode would also study whether IFSCs could effectively meet the specific needs of single parents and new arrivals.

68. In response, DDSW(S) said that both FCPSUs and IFSCs would handle cases relating to domestic violence. As explained earlier, FCPSUs would specialise in assisting families with problems of child abuse and spouse battering, but IFSCs would inevitably come across cases related to domestic violence in their day-to-day work. There was a referral mechanism for IFSCs to refer cases to FCPSUs for follow-up or vice versa as elaborated in paragraph 65 above. Moreover, social workers, irrespective of their service units, received training on handling domestic violence cases.

69. As regards the services provided to single parents, DDSW(S) said that there were only five SPCs in the territory before the implementation of IFSC service mode. As compared with SPCs, IFSCs were more accessible to the service users. IFSCs also organised support groups and programmes to meet the specific needs of single parents. DDSW(S) added that the review on the implementation of IFSC service mode included the effectiveness of IFSC services in serving specific targets, such as single parents, new arrivals and ethnic minorities, etc.

70. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che opined that the cases cited by deputations and media reports had revealed that the fundamental problems faced by social workers in IFSCs were lack of experienced and supervisory staff to handle high-risk cases, and unclear delineation of responsibilities among relevant departments, particularly in handling domestic violence cases. To relieve the problem of inadequate manpower resources in individual IFSCs, Mr CHEUNG suggested that consideration be given to setting up a central reserve of social

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workers under which a team of social workers could be deployed flexibly to specific IFSCs according to the changing service demands in individual districts.

71. Mr WONG Sing-chi said that it was unreasonable to require social workers to make recommendations in respect of applications for social resources, say, compassionate rehousing, if their recommendations were not taken into consideration by the approving department at all. In his view, the problem could largely be resolved if IFSC social workers were empowered to deploy social resources to meet the specific needs of needy groups.

72. DDSW(S) said that by experience, HD would, under normal circumstances, accept recommendations made by social workers on compassionate rehousing arrangement. Should individual frontline social workers encounter problems in their work, they were encouraged to raise to the Administration.

73. Mr WONG Sing-chi reiterated that the Administration should consider, in addition to the existing mechanism, authorising IFSC social workers to approve/deploy resources to provide timely assistance to the needy.

74. Mr Albert HO said that the Administration should set workload indicators for social workers in IFSCs. Mr HO enquired if the review being conducted by the HKU Consultant Team would include a service user opinion survey, and if so, whether the survey would cover different categories of families, such as single parents, new arrivals, ethnic minorities, etc so as to better evaluate the specific needs of different target groups. He added that a longitudinal study should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the services provided by IFSCs in meeting the needs of various target groups.

75. DDSW(S) responded that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to set objective workload indicators taking into account the variety of services provided by IFSCs and different complexity of the cases. He added that the HKU Consultant Team would conduct a user survey with a sample size of over 2 000 service users which were selected by random sampling method.

76. The following supplementary points were made by the deputations –

(a) Ms LIU Ngan-fung of "風雨同路" hoped that the review underway would collect information on the number of cases that were being handled by IFSCs had eventually escalated to family tragedies. This apart, Ms LIU expressed concern that IFSC social workers might not have capacity to provide immediate crisis intervention to the high-risk cases due to the heavy workload;

(b) Ms CHEUNG Yuet-lan of DPWC hoped that the review underway would look into the criteria for rendering services by IFSCs and the

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responsibilities of various departments in handling domestic violence cases; and

- (c) Mr Billy LAY said that the Civic Party held a strong view that the Administration should put in place caseload indicators for IFSCs. He reiterated that the Administration should undertake that it would not exert influence on the review being carried out by the HKU Consultant Team and would make public the full review report.

77. Responding to the concern about the impartiality of the review, DDSW(S) assured members that the HKU Consultant Team was committed to conducting an objective and comprehensive review on the implementation of IFSC service mode. He advised that the review was expected to be completed by the end of 2009 and the findings would be made public. The Administration aimed to revert to the Panel on the findings and recommendations of the review tentatively in the first quarter of 2010.

VII. Any other business

78. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:17 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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