

Panel on Welfare Services

List of outstanding items for discussion
(position as at 5 March 2009)

Proposed timing for discussion

1. Report of the Subcommittee on Guardianship and Custody of the Law Reform Commission

At the meeting held on 11 March 2002, members agreed that the Administration should brief the Panel on the above report when it became available.

2nd quarter of 2009

The Report on Custody and Access by the Subcommittee on Guardianship and Custody of the Law Reform Commission was released on 7 March 2005. The Administration has advised that it is studying the recommendations carefully and will consider how to take forward the relevant recommendations together with the recommendations made in the other two earlier reports, namely, the Report on Guardianship of Children and Report on International Parental Child Abduction.

2. Residential care services for the elderly

The subject of subsidy arrangements for residential care services for frail elders was discussed at the Panel meeting on 12 May 2003. The Administration was requested to report work progress to the Panel taking into account members' views and suggestions. Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki proposed to discuss measures to enhance the services of residential care homes for the elderly at the meeting on 12 October 2006.

2nd quarter of 2009

The Subcommittee on Elderly Services discussed with the Administration on residential care services for the elderly at the meetings on 22 January and 19 February 2008. Another meeting was held on 11 April 2008 to follow up the views expressed by the Subcommittee on, among other things, the subsidy arrangement for residential care services for frail elders. In concluding its deliberations, the Subcommittee proposed a series of recommendations relating to residential care services for the elderly in its report for the Administration's consideration. The Subcommittee recommended that the Panel should follow up the recommendations with the Administration.

Proposed timing for discussion

At the meeting on 14 October 2008, members agreed that the Panel should discuss, as soon as possible, the long-term planning of and subsidy arrangements for residential care services for the elderly and measures to ensure the quality of services in private homes.

The Administration is studying the long-term planning for subsidised residential care services for the elderly through a consultancy study led by the Elderly Commission, which is expected to be completed by the second quarter of 2009.

3. Latest situation on the implementation of review of family services

Item proposed by Hon Albert CHAN at the Panel meeting on 12 October 2004.

March 2009

The Administration has advised that transformation of all existing Family Services Centres/counselling units into 61 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) was completed in March 2005, and that a review on the implementation of the IFSC service mode would take place in 2008.

In October 2008, the Administration commissioned a review on the implementation of IFSC service mode. It is expected to be completed by the end of 2009. The Administration will report progress to the Panel in due course.

At the meeting on 14 October 2008, Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung proposed to discuss the merit of re-opening Single Parent Centres to enhance support services for single parents. The Administration was requested to comment on this after completing its review on IFSCs in one year's time.

The Panel will discuss and receive views from deputations on the implementation of IFSC service mode on 9 March 2009.

Proposed timing for discussion

4. Infirmiry care in non-hospital setting

The Administration consulted the Panel in December 2004 on a proposal to launch a trial scheme to provide infirmiry care places for medically stable elders in a non-hospital setting. The latest plan of the Administration is to upgrade some of the places in subvented residential care homes for the elderly to provide infirmiry care. The Administration is in discussion with the sector on various requirements in relation to the upgrading exercise (e.g. staffing requirements) and aims to report progress in the second quarter of 2009.

2nd quarter of 2009

5. Social security assistance for needy elderly

The above item was discussed by the Panel on 13 June 2005. The Administration was requested to brief the Panel on its thinking on how better to provide retirement protection to the current and future generation of older persons. Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG has separately proposed to discuss retirement protection.

To be decided

The Administration has advised that the Government has launched two studies on "Household Survey on the Financial Disposition and Retirement Planning of Current and Future Generations of Older Persons" and "Sustainability of the Three Pillars of Retirement Protection in Hong Kong". The Government will consider the findings of the studies in deciding the future course of action.

At the meeting on 17 March 2008, members expressed grave concern about the progress of the studies. Members agreed that the Panel should write to the Chief Executive (CE) enquiring about the latest position of the studies. CE's Office has replied on 24 April 2008 vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1766/07-08(01).

The Subcommittee on Elderly Services had studied, inter alia, financial assistance for the needy elderly, and proposed a number of recommendations, as detailed in its report to the Panel (LC Paper No. CB(2)2163/07-08), for the Administration's consideration.

Proposed timing for discussion

At the meeting on 14 October 2008, Hon WONG Kwok-hing and Hon WONG Kwok-kin proposed to discuss financial assistance and support for poor elders, including providing income supplement for poor elders and implementing a universal retirement protection scheme.

6. Residential care services for the mentally disabled

Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki proposed to discuss measures to enhance the services of residential care homes and private homes for mentally disabled at the Panel meeting on 12 October 2006.

To be decided

On licensing of residential care homes for persons with disabilities, the Panel discussed the subject on three occasions on 21 March 2006, 11 June 2007 and 8 May 2008. At the meeting on 8 May 2008, the Administration advised that it aimed to introduce a Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) Bill to the Legislative Council (LegCo) in the 2008-2009 session.

At the meeting on 12 January 2009, the Panel was briefed on the progress of the preparatory work for introducing a licensing scheme to regulate the operation of residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs). Members expressed concern about the impact of the proposed licensing regime on the operation of RCHDs and the well-being of RCHD residents. A special meeting of Panel was held on 25 February 2009 to receive views from deputations on the proposed licensing system. The Administration was requested to make a progress report on the proposed licensing regime in three months' time.

Proposed timing for discussion

7. Charitable fund-raising activities

The existing framework for the monitoring of charitable fund-raising activities was discussed at the meeting on 11 June 2007. Members agreed to further discuss the matter in the next session, especially the monitoring of the use of income generated from public charitable fund-raising activities.

Pending completion of the review by the Law Reform Commission

The Administration has advised that the subject matter involved various bureaux and departments. As the Law Reform Commission is now conducting a review of the law and regulatory framework relating to charities in Hong Kong, the Administration has suggested deferring Panel discussion to after the completion of the review.

8. Child Development Fund

At the Panel meetings on 14 January and 14 February 2008, the Administration's proposal to set up a \$300 million Child Development Fund (CDF) was discussed. While members expressed general support for the establishment of CDF, they were concerned about the implementation details and the way forward. The Administration was requested to revert to the Panel on the progress of the pioneer projects under CDF six months after implementation.

2nd quarter of 2009

Proposed timing for discussion

9. Work progress of the Family Council

The Panel was briefed on the establishment of the Family Council on 14 February 2008. According to the Administration, the Family Council would seek to rationalize the work of the Elderly Commission, Women's Commission and Commission on Youth by March 2009. The Administration was requested to revert to the Panel on the work progress of the Family Council.

May 2009

The Administration has subsequently advised that it aims to report progress in the second quarter of 2009.

10. Implementation of the Lump Sum Grant subvention system

In the last term, the Panel urged the Administration to review the implementation of the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) subvention system. The Administration appointed an Independent Review Committee (IRC) in January 2008 to conduct such a review, and the IRC submitted a report to the Secretary for Labour and Welfare on 16 December 2008.

To be advised

The Panel was briefed at the special meeting on 19 December 2008 on the IRC's Report. A further special meeting of the Panel was held on 17 January 2009 to receive views from deputations on the report.

The Panel was briefed at the meeting on 9 February 2009 on the Administration's responses to the IRC's report and its recommendations. The Administration advised that it accepted in principle all the 36 recommendations with a view to introducing most of them by the end of 2009. The Panel passed a motion urging the Administration to, among other things, report the implementation progress to the Panel regularly.

Proposed timing for discussion

11. Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

The Panel and the Subcommittee on Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme had studied the existing arrangements for the CSSA Scheme in the last term. In concluding its deliberations, the Subcommittee made a number of recommendations in its report to the Panel (LC Paper No. CB(2)871/07-08). A motion urging the Administration to take note of the Subcommittee's report was moved at the Council meeting on 20 February 2008. The motion was carried.

To be decided

At the Panel meeting on 12 June 2008, members urged the Administration to shorten the interval of each adjustment cycle of CSSA and review the adequacy of the CSSA standard payment rates and items to be included in the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices.

At the meeting of the Subcommittee on Review of CSSA Scheme on 2 April 2007, the provision of public dental care services for the needy, including CSSA recipients, was discussed. As the subject of public dental care services for the needy was beyond its purview, the Subcommittee agreed that the matter should be referred to the Panel on Welfare Services and the Panel on Health Services for follow-up, and a joint meeting of the two Panels could be held as appropriate. The Panel on Health Services discussed the health care services for the elderly on 12 November 2007.

Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki has separately proposed to discuss the provision of dental grant for the CSSA recipients (LC Paper No. CB(2)1047/07-08 issued on 12 February 2008).

The Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation will discuss the Administration's responses to the Report of the Subcommittee on Review of the CSSA Scheme at the meeting held on 5 March 2009.

Proposed timing for discussion

12. Research report on "Strategies and measures in tackling domestic violence in selected places"

At its meeting on 8 July 2008, the Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Family Violence studied the research report on "Strategies and measures in tackling domestic violence in selected places" prepared by the Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) of the LegCo Secretariat and requested RLSD to provide supplementary information. The Subcommittee recommended that the Panel should follow up with the Administration on the findings of the research report in the next legislative term.

To be decided pending advice by the Panel

13. Review of Old Age Allowance

CE announced on 24 October 2008 that Old Age Allowance (OAA) would be increased to \$1,000 a month under the existing system, and the proposal of introducing a means test mechanism to OAA would be shelved for the time being. The Panel was briefed on the relevant funding proposal on 10 November 2008. Members were advised that the Administration was conducting a review on the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong under OAA, which was expected to be completed by end 2008/early 2009. It would revert to the Panel on the findings of the review in the first half of 2009.

1st half of 2009

14. Review of the system for processing applications for Disability Allowance under the Social Security Allowance Scheme

Item proposed by Hon WONG Kwok-hing and Hon WONG Kwok-kin at the meeting on 14 October 2008. The proposal was detailed in their joint letter which was circulated vide LC Paper No. CB(2)50/08-09(03).

To be decided

Hon WONG Kwok-hing raised an oral question on Disability Allowance at the Council meeting on 5 November 2008.

Proposed timing for discussion

15. Poverty alleviation

At the meeting on 14 October 2008, members agreed that the Panel should follow up with the Administration on the implementation of the recommendations in reports of the Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty and the former Commission on Poverty, and the work progress of the Task Force on Poverty.

2nd quarter of 2009

The Administration will report on progress of the Task Force on Poverty in the second quarter of 2009, together with the progress report on CDF.

A Subcommittee on Poverty Alleviation was formed under the Panel in January 2009. The Subcommittee will hold the next meeting on 5 March 2009.

16. Support services for street-sleepers

The Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social Work Officer Grade Branch has written in vide its letter dated 13 February 2009 (LC Paper No. CB(2)919/08-09(01)) requesting the Panel to discuss the support services for street-sleepers in the light of the upsurge in the number of street-sleepers amid the financial tsunami.

To be decided

The Administration will respond to a question on this subject at the Council meeting of 11 March 2009.