

立法會
Legislative Council

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seen by the Administration)

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Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of special meeting
held on Thursday, 22 October 2009, at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room B of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon WONG Sing-chi (Chairman)
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH

Members absent : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou

Member attending : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH

Public Officers attending : Labour and Welfare Bureau
Mr Matthew CHEUNG Kin-chung, GBS, JP
Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Mr Paul TANG, JP
Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Mr Patrick NIP, JP
Director of Social Welfare

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

Mr CHEUNG Hing-wah
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

Home Affairs Bureau

Mr TSANG Tak-sing, JP
Secretary for Home Affairs

Ms Florence HUI, JP
Under Secretary for Home Affairs

Ms Grace LUI, JP
Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs (1)

Mr Andrew TSANG, JP
Assistant Director of Home Affairs (2)

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

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

Ms Karen LAI
Council Secretary (2) 2

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. Briefings by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare and the Secretary for Home Affairs on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2009-2010

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)6/09-10(01) to (03), the 2009-2010 Policy Address booklet entitled "Breaking New Ground Together" and the 2009-2010 Policy Address - Policy Agenda booklet]

Secretary for Labour and Welfare (SLW) briefed members on the new welfare initiatives in the 2009-2010 Policy Address and Policy Agenda. SLW said that the Administration had adopted a novel multi-pronged approach in strengthening the services for the socially disadvantaged, namely, the elderly, persons with disabilities (PWDs) and victims of domestic violence. He highlighted the following major new initiatives as detailed in the Administration's paper –

- (a) strengthening elderly care services through enhancing the pace of increasing the provision of additional subsidised residential care places, launching a pilot scheme to provide residential care homes for the elderly (RCHes) with visiting pharmacist services, providing additional subsidised day care places for frail elders, extending the District-based Scheme on Carer Training, examining how to strengthen home care services for the elderly, and taking forward the work of the committee set up for the Elder Academy Development Foundation;
- (b) enhancing rehabilitation services for PWDs through providing additional places for rehabilitation services for PWDs, strengthening support for ageing service users in subvented residential care homes for persons with intellectual disability, introducing a bill to implement a licensing scheme to regulate the operation of residential care homes for PWDs (RCHDs), and introducing a pilot Bought Place Scheme to develop more service options for PWDs;
- (c) expanding social rehabilitation and medical social services for persons with mental health problems through setting up Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness in all 18 districts, and dovetailing with the Hospital Authority's "Case Management Programme" to provide timely support for patients with severe mental illness living in the community; and
- (d) tackling domestic violence through launching a Victim Support Programme for victims of domestic violence.

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2. Secretary for Home Affairs (SHA) highlighted the work of the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) concerning the Family Council and the development of social enterprises (SEs) as detailed in the Administration's paper. SHA said that the Family Council launched activities across the territory to promote family core values with a view to advocating for cherishing the family as a main driver for social harmony. This year, the Family Council would continue to actively promote the family core values with the emphasis on building "Happy Families" through launching a territory-wide "Happy Family Campaign" and setting up a multi-sectoral and cross-disciplinary "Happy Family Info Hub".

3. SHA further said that the Administration would continue to adopt a four-pronged approach to promote the development of SEs, namely, to enhance public understanding of SEs; to promote cross-sector collaboration; to nurture more social entrepreneurs; and to strengthen support for SEs. This apart, HAB was preparing for the establishment of a new "Social Enterprise Advisory Committee". SHA added that the Administration would invite SE operators, members of the business sector, academics and persons aspired to promote SE development to join the advisory committee with a view to developing measures for the further promotion of SE development.

Discussion

Old Age Allowance (OAA)

4. While welcoming the Administration's new initiatives in strengthening the elderly services and its policy of supporting "ageing in the community", Mr WONG Kwok-hing pointed out that many elders had chosen to age on the Mainland. In this respect, Mr WONG urged the Administration to further relax the annual permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong under the OAA Scheme.

5. In response, SLW said that the Administration was conducting a comprehensive review on the permissible limit of absence from Hong Kong under the OAA Scheme. It would brief the Panel on the outcome as soon as possible.

Welfare of children

6. Mr Albert HO expressed concern about the welfare and rights of children from broken families. He regretted that family tragedies could not be prevented even though, to his knowledge, welfare services and assistance had been provided to the families concerned by the relevant departments and welfare agencies. Noting that the Administration was implementing a two-year pilot project to review cases of children who died of non-natural causes, Mr Albert HO enquired if the Administration would extend the scope of the project to include

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serious child abuse cases and children who were victims of family tragedies. He also noted with concern that some children were living in extreme poverty because their newly arrived mothers could not meet the seven-year residence requirement under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme.

7. Director of Social Welfare (DSW) advised that the objective of the review was to examine the relevant child death cases with a view to identifying patterns and trends for formulation of prevention strategies and promoting multi-disciplinary and inter-agency cooperation in the prevention of child death. DSW further said that a Review Panel had been set up by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to review child death cases captured by the Coroners' Court in 2006 and 2007. It was expected that SWD would publish the first annual report in the last quarter of 2009 to set out the initial findings and recommendations of the Review Panel, and the Administration would revert to the Panel in due course.

8. Echoing Mr Albert HO's concern about the welfare of children, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung urged the Administration to abolish the seven-year residence requirement under the CSSA Scheme, which, in his view, was discriminatory against the newly arrived women and their children, and had created many family and social problems. For instance, these children were always left unattended when their parents went to work.

9. SLW said that DSW would exercise discretion to waive the seven-year residence requirement under the CSSA Scheme for households in genuine hardship having regard to their individual circumstances. He also explained that CSSA was not the only form of assistance for people in need. Other forms of assistance in the nature of direct services were available to new arrivals (including newly arrived women) to meet their needs.

Family Council

10. Noting that the Family Council would continue to actively promote the family core values with the emphasis on building "Happy Families", Ms LI Fung-ying pointed out that many parents had little time to foster relationship with their children due to the long working hours. Ms LI raised particular concern about the ways to achieve a pro-family environment and family-friendly employment practices.

11. Under Secretary for Home Affairs (USHA) advised that the Administration was collaborating with the business sector and the stakeholders to create a pro-family environment. It was encouraging that some private enterprises had adopted family-friendly employment practices such as flexible working hours, home-based work and other flexible work arrangements as well

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as organised seminars and workshops on stress management for their employees, with a view to promoting a work-life balance. In addition, some religious bodies had organised family-related programmes and the Hong Kong Jockey Club had launched a three-year study on how to build up good family relationship. USHA added that the Administration would continue its effort to promote cross-sector collaboration to create a pro-family environment.

12. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that the Panel would follow up the work progress of the Family Council and the concrete measures to achieve a pro-family environment and family-friendly employment practices.

Poverty alleviation

13. Pointing out that the Gini Co-efficient of Hong Kong was comparably higher than those of other affluent economies, Ms LI Fung-ying expressed grave concern about the widening income disparity between the rich and the poor. Although the Administration had stressed that most of the recommendations of the former Commission on Poverty (CoP) had been implemented, Ms LI was of the view that the Administration should put more efforts and formulate additional concrete measures to tackle the problem of poverty.

14. SLW stressed that the Administration attached great importance to poverty alleviation work and adopted a multi-pronged approach to tackle the problem. The Task Force on Poverty had duly followed up the recommendations of the former CoP. Attention had also been given to the needs of individual districts, for example, Tin Shui Wai. Pointing out that the key to tackling poverty lay in creating more job opportunities, SLW said that the Administration had been providing training and retraining opportunities to raise the skills and employability of low-income earners and the unemployed. SLW further said that in addition to the provision of CSSA, other forms of assistance were available to the needy, such as public healthcare services, housing and education which were highly subsidised by the Government. SLW added that the Administration would continue to monitor the progress in implementing the former CoP's recommendations, as well as to monitor the overall poverty situation and any need for new initiatives and measures.

15. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung was of the view that poverty was the root of many family problems. To his knowledge, some children on CSSA had to share the monthly payments with other family member(s) as the latter was ineligible for CSSA because they were unable to meet the seven-year residence requirement. Mr LEUNG also noted with concern that 1.23 million people were living in poverty. In his view, the Administration should draw a poverty line, and provide income subsidies to the low-income families.

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16. SLW said that the Administration had been providing assistance to the low-income families through the CSSA Scheme. Currently, there were about 16 000 low earnings CSSA cases. SLW further said that while the Hong Kong Council of Social Service regarded persons whose household monthly income fell below half of the median household income as living in poverty, such an income-based approach had not taken into consideration the assets/savings they possessed or whether they were genuinely in hardship. He supplemented that the former CoP had deliberated fully the issue of how to measure poverty in Hong Kong and was of the view that one should not rely upon a single line or figure to measure income poverty. The actual situation and needs of the disadvantaged groups, including their access to essential services and opportunities such as housing, healthcare, education and employment, should also be taken into consideration. The Government agreed with CoP and thus had been adopting a set of 24 multi-dimensional indicators for monitoring the overall poverty situation in Hong Kong. Among these 24 poverty indicators, 18 were life-cycle based and six were community based. These indicators provided support for the formulation and evaluation of policies to assist the needy.

17. Mr IP Wai-ming was of the view that the 24 multi-dimensional indicators recommended by the former CoP were different from the general understanding of ways to measure poverty. Pointing out that Hong Kong's Gini index ranked the highest in the very high human development economies as revealed in the Human Development Report 2009 published by the United Nations Human Development Programme, Mr IP expressed concern about the income inequality in Hong Kong and urged the Administration to formulate concrete policies and measures to assist those living in poverty.

18. Mr Albert CHAN expressed dissatisfaction that no single initiative pertaining to poverty alleviation was set out in the Policy Address 2009-2010 taking into account that about 1.2 million people were living in poverty. He strongly called on the Administration to step up its efforts in the work of poverty alleviation. As one of major policies of HAB was to foster social harmony, Mr CHAN called upon SHA to attach due importance to the poverty situation in Hong Kong as the phenomenon reflected that the society was in disharmony.

19. SHA said that the Administration would endeavour to promote social harmony as it was one of the Government's policy directions.

Development of SEs

20. Referring to paragraph 10 of the Administration's paper on policy initiatives of HAB, Mr IP Wai-ming expressed concern about the concrete ways to nurture social entrepreneurs. He cast doubt about the effectiveness of organising the business plan writing competitions. Noting that 54 contracts

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were identified for priority bidding by SEs this year, Mr IP asked about the proportion of these contracts to the total government service contracts and the number of job opportunities created.

21. USHA advised that the business plan writing competitions aimed at strengthening the understanding of the younger generation of SEs and encouraging them to adopt entrepreneurial approaches to solve real world problems. USHA said that over 800 students from 12 post-secondary institutions had joined the competitions. More importantly, prior to the competition, the participating institutions would offer advice on the proposal writing skills and organise sharing sessions for the SE operators to advise the participants on the knowledge and skills to run SEs successfully. Upon completion of the competitions, participating institutions were also encouraged to take forward the proposals of the winners.

Admin

22. Responding to Mr IP Wai-ming, Assistant Director of Home Affairs (2) said that the 54 contracts reserved for priority bidding by SEs would create some 400 job opportunities. He would provide the proportion of the contracts reserved for priority bidding by SEs to the total number of government services contracts after the meeting, if available.

23. The Chairman enquired if HAB would collaborate with the Housing Department in promoting the development of SEs by giving priority leasing vacant premises at public housing estates to SEs.

24. Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs (1) responded that as a matter of principle, SEs should operate like a business similar to other commercial enterprises. It was inappropriate for the Administration to provide rent subsidies or offer rent concession for SEs.

Other concerns

25. Referring to the Administration's paper on policy initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau for 2009-2010, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che asked about –

- (a) the respective numbers of additional subsidised residential care places for the elderly and PWDs relating to various initiatives as set out in the Policy Address 2009-2010;
- (b) the Administration's plan for rolling out the second batch of the Child Development Fund (CDF), in particular the number of children to be benefited;
- (c) the timetable for consulting the welfare sector on the long-term social welfare planning; and

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- (d) the compliance of existing policies and measures for PWDs with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Convention).

26. SLW said that around 500 additional places could be provided through the development of five new contract RCHEs in the next three years. In addition, about 1 000 residential care places for the elderly would be provided upon completion of the 12 development projects under planning. In respect of the additional places arising from the conversion programme and bought place schemes, SLW said that the details would be made available after the Financial Secretary had announced his forthcoming Budget.

27. Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare (PSLW) said that the Administration aimed at rolling out the second batch of CDF projects in early 2010 and that the number of children to be recruited would be larger. To ensure that the operating non-governmental organisations could recruit sufficient mentors, the Administration would not rush to roll out too many projects in one go. As regards the study on the long-term social welfare planning, PSLW advised that the Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) had invited relevant stakeholders to offer initial views on a number of key issues pertinent to the study. A Task Group on Welfare Planning was formed under SWAC earlier this year to take forward the study. PSLW further said that the Administration aimed to submit a report on the Convention as part of China's combined report to the United Nations next year, and it aimed to revert to the relevant Legislative Council Panel in the first quarter of 2010 on its draft report outline.

II. Any other business

28. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:35 pm.