

立法會
Legislative Council

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Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Wednesday, 20 October 2010, at 9:30 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Chairman)
Hon WONG Sing-chi (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LI Fung-ying, SBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip

Members absent : Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC

Members attending : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan

Public Officers : Labour and Welfare Bureau
attending

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)

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)

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

Staff in : Ms Yvonne YU
attendance Senior Council Secretary (2) 5

Miss Karen LAI
Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

Action

I. Briefings by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare and the Secretary for Home Affairs on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2010-2011

[The 2010-2011 Policy Address booklet entitled "Sharing Prosperity for a Caring Society", The 2010-2011 Policy Address - Policy Agenda booklet and LC Paper Nos. CB(2)23/10-11(01) to (03)]

Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") briefed members on the new welfare initiatives in the 2010-2011 Policy Address and Policy Agenda as detailed in the Administration's paper.

2. Secretary for Home Affairs ("SHA") said that the new initiatives which complemented the work of the Family Council and that of the Home Affairs Bureau ("HAB") on the promotion of the development of social enterprises ("SEs") were detailed in the Administration's paper.

Support for the elderly

3. Mr WONG Kwok-hing and Mr WONG Kwok-kin enquired about the implementation details of the proposal of providing a maintenance allowance for senior citizens who chose to retire on the Mainland.

4. In response, SLW said that there was a proposal in the community to introduce a maintenance allowance for elders who chose to retire on the Mainland, and that the Administration would study the merits and feasibility of such a proposal having regard to the legal, financial and technical issues involved.

5. With regard to the policy objective of encouraging elders to age in place, Ms LI Fung-ying enquired about the details of resources allocated for further enhancing the services for the elderly.

6. SLW said that additional resources would be provided for the new initiatives stated in the Policy Address, and the details of which would be made available after the announcement of the forthcoming Budget.

7. Ms LI Fung-ying and Mr IP Wai-ming urged the Government to consider introducing a carer allowance so as to relieve the burden and stress of family carers of the elderly. Mr IP considered that the introduction of the carer allowance could also relieve the demand for subsidised residential care services if the elders could reside at home.

Action

8. SLW said that the Government fully recognised that family carers played a crucial role in supporting elders who aged in place. However, the proposal for providing an allowance to family carers would require thorough and careful consideration in view of the impact on other types of family carers such as child carers, and the fact that impaired elders required various kinds of residential and community care services which would better be provided by professionals. SLW further said that in order to help frail elders age at home, the Pilot Scheme on Home Care Services for Frail Elders, would be implemented in early 2011 in Kowloon to provide tailor-made service packages for elders waiting for subsidised nursing home ("NH") places. To enhance carers' capability through training so as to alleviate their stress in taking care of elders, the Government had launched the District-based Scheme on Carer Training to provide funding for District Elderly Community Centres to partner with community organisations in organising carer training programmes.

9. The Chairman was of the view that the Administration should consider extending the Pilot Scheme on Home Care Services for Frail Elders to cover all elders living in the community.

10. Having regard to an ageing population, Mr Paul CHAN expressed grave concern about the waitlisting situation of subsidised residential care services for the elderly. Noting that the Government would increase the supply of higher-quality places under the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme ("EBPS"), he considered that it was the Government's responsibility to formulate a long-term plan to construct new residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs") to provide adequate subsidised residential care places for the elderly, instead of relying on the supply from the private market. He asked about the progress of identification of suitable sites for setting up new RCHEs.

11. In response, SLW said that the Administration would continue to allocate additional resources to increase the provision of subsidised residential care places through the construction of new contract RCHEs and making full use of the space in existing subvented RCHEs, as well as purchasing higher-quality places under EBPS. SLW elaborated that in view of the relatively long waiting time for subsidised NH places and the limited supply of places which could cater for the needs of frail elders requiring nursing care in the private market, the Government had decided to focus its efforts on increasing the provision of NH places and places

Action

offering a continuum of care. To this end, the Government adopted a multi-pronged approach to accelerate the provision of subsidised residential care places that provide nursing or continuous care, viz. increasing the proportion of NH places in existing contract RCHEs, purchasing vacant NH places from self-financing homes, and making full use of the spaces in existing subvented RCHEs to provide more long-term care places offering a continuum of care. It was worth noting that six additional contract RCHEs providing 1 172 residential care places in total would come on stream in the next four years, of which 1 095 places were NH places. SLW added that in line with the policy of supporting "ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up", the Government had been providing elders with subsidised community care services.

12. Mr Frederick FUNG said that apart from increasing the provision of subsidised residential care places, the Administration should also commit to setting a limit for the waiting time for subsidised residential care places.

13. SLW advised that the waiting time for a subsidised place in private RCHEs participating in EBPS was about nine months on average because some elders preferred waiting for places in designated RCHEs for various reasons such as religious or location preferences. SLW stressed that subsidised community care services were available to eligible elders living in the community irrespective of whether they were waiting for subsidised RCHE places. These included centre-based day care services and home-based services for elders who had difficulties in taking care of themselves.

14. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung was disappointed that the Administration had yet to demonstrate its commitment in increasing the provision of the residential care services to meet an ever increasing demand arising from the ageing population. The Administration should step up its efforts in enhancing the services and relieving the waitlisting situation.

15. Dr PAN Pey-chyou welcomed the proposal of increasing the amount of Dementia Supplement to subvented RCHEs, and providing Dementia Supplement to subsidised day care centres for the elderly to enhance their support for patients there. However, he was concerned that under the lump sum grant subvention system, operators of RCHEs and day care centres would not use the Dementia Supplement solely for enhancing support for demented elders. He urged the Government to enhance the monitoring of the proper use of the Dementia Supplement. SLW said that

Action

Dementia Supplement would be provided to day care centres for the first time. Operators of RCHEs and day care centres would be reminded of the requirement to use the Dementia Supplement for enhancing their support for demented elders there.

Support for youth

16. Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that the unemployment rate among young people remained high, he wondered whether the Administration would consider further extending the 3 000 temporary work opportunities for young people beyond 2012. Should the experience of the temporary work opportunities for young people be useful, the Administration should consider converting the temporary posts into permanent ones.

17. Noting that the creation of the 3 000 temporary job opportunities for young people was only a temporary measure, the Chairman and Mr WONG Sing-chi suggested that the Government should consider studying the feasibility of providing recurrent resources for these posts so as to relieve the unemployment problem of young people. Mr WONG Sing-chi added that the Administration should examine the job nature of these 3 000 temporary work opportunities such that the incumbents could gain relevant working experience and seek open employment afterwards.

18. SLW said that as a special measure introduced during the economic downturn, 3 000 temporary work opportunities were created for young people aged between 15 and 29 and allocated to the subvented welfare non-governmental organisations ("NGOs") in April 2008 for three years for the purpose of enhancing the employability of young people through providing working opportunities. These work opportunities also served as a stepping stone for the incumbents to seek open employment after gaining working experience. With the gradual recovery of the economy, the Government decided to extend the 3 000 temporary work opportunities for one year so that young people might have more time to equip and prepare themselves for joining the labour market for open employment before the cessation of the scheme.

19. Dr Samson TAM welcomed the launch of a pilot Cyber Youth Outreaching Project under which social workers would reach out to youths in need. In the light of the unique service under the project, he was concerned about the resources and training for social workers to identify

Action

the target youth through the internet for timely intervention and provision of support services. He asked about the resources and manpower allocated for the three-year pilot project. The Chairman added that the Administration should consider providing such outreaching services to youths in need under regular services.

20. SLW expressed gratitude for the Chairman and Dr Samson TAM to put forward the enlightened proposal to the Administration. SLW advised that the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") would subsidise three NGOs to implement the pilot project with funding support of \$17 million from the Lotteries Fund ("LF"). The pilot project would be implemented for three years from 2011 to 2014. SWD would commission a consultant to conduct an evaluation study to examine the effectiveness of the pilot project and the feasibility of interfacing the new service mode with the existing youth services and make recommendations on the way forward. SLW assured members that the Administration would monitor the implementation of the pilot project and seek additional fund if necessary.

Community Care Fund ("CCF")

21. Mr Albert HO said that although he did not oppose the proposal of setting up a CCF, it was Government's primary responsibility to put in place a comprehensive social security system to help people in need. Instead of setting up CCF to support people in need in areas not covered by the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme, the Government should strive to improve the existing social security system if there were deficiencies and inadequacies in the system. Mr HO was concerned that CCF would have adverse impact on the fund raising activities of other charitable organisations.

22. Mr WONG Sing-chi shared a similar view of Mr Albert HO. In his view, the objective of CCF was not to supplement the social security system, but to try out new ideas with a view to incorporating them into mainstream services or assistance schemes as appropriate.

23. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the Administration was on the wrong track to provide assistance to people in need through the setting up of CCF. Having regard to the diverse needs of the poor, Mr LEE cast doubt about the effectiveness of CCF in helping the poor. In his view, the Administration should review the adequacy of the existing social security system in providing a safety net and enhance support for people in need

Action

through a tax reform. SLW said that the Administration had been reviewing the standard payment rates under the CSSA Scheme periodically according to the established mechanism.

24. Mr Ronny TONG said that setting up CCF was agreeable if it had no bearing on the resources for other welfare services. Pointing out that the Government and the business sector would each contribute \$5 billion to CCF, Mr TONG asked whether the Government would increase its contribution to CCF if the funds raised from the business sector exceeded \$5 billion.

25. Mr WONG Kwok-kin said that he saw no reason to oppose setting up CCF to help people in need, but was concerned whether the objective of the Fund would overlap with other charitable funds. He appealed to the Administration to promulgate further details of CCF as soon as practicable. Mr WONG also asked whether CCF would be replenished after it was used up.

26. Mr Albert CHAN said that the League of Social Democrats had put forward a proposal of setting up an Improvement of Grass-roots Livelihood Fund of \$20 billion for the Administration's consideration in the past four years. Mr CHAN further said that while the Home Affairs Bureau ("HAB") was collecting views on CCF, the execution of the Fund should be carried out by the Labour and Welfare Bureau. Mr CHAN added that as the objective of a number of charitable funds was, to a certain extent, similar to that of CCF, he suggested that HAB should consider co-ordinating the applications for these funds so as to save the administrative cost of CCF.

27. Dr PAN Pey-chyou said that in the absence of concrete details of CCF, he was given the impression that CCF was a conceptual idea and a public relation tactic. He urged the Administration to provide the execution plan together with the target beneficiaries as early as practicable.

28. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung cast doubt about the effectiveness of CCF. In his view, the Administration should tackle the poverty problem through the tax reform to redistribute the wealth between the rich and the poor.

29. In response, SHA said that the proposal of CCF aimed to bring in new ideas to promote tripartite collaboration among the Government, the business sector and the community in helping and supporting people in

Action

need. It was by no means a replacement of the safety net provided under the existing social security system. Nor would CCF overlap with other charitable funds. HAB was collecting views on the proposal, including the mode of contribution, and the Administration would put forward an execution plan afterwards. SHA added that the relevant funding proposal on the Government's contribution to CCF would be put forward for consideration and approval of the Finance Committee in due course.

30. In the light of members' concerns, the Chairman urged the Administration to announce the details of CCF in the coming one to two months.

Poverty alleviation

31. Mr Albert HO held the view that the Government should re-establish the Commission on Poverty ("CoP") to actively study and formulate long-term policies to alleviate the poverty problem, as well as set a poverty line and concrete targets for poverty alleviation. Mr Albert CHAN was of the view that the Government should set performance targets for reducing poverty.

32. SLW advised that following the conclusion of the work of CoP in June 2007, the Government set up in October 2007 an inter-bureau/departmental Task Force on Poverty ("TFP"), chaired by himself, to follow up and monitor the implementation of the 53 recommendations of CoP. Most of the former CoP's recommendations had been or were being implemented, such as the introduction of the Transport Support Scheme, the establishment of the Child Development Fund and the relaxation of the disregarded earnings arrangements for CSSA recipients. As the poverty situation was attributable to various factors, it would be very difficult to set specific targets to reduce poverty. SLW stressed that the Government attached great importance to poverty alleviation and would continue adopting a pragmatic approach to implement the recommendations of the former CoP and explore initiatives and measures which could help the disadvantaged and people in need.

33. To facilitate members to be fully informed of the Government's poverty alleviation work, the Chairman urged the Administration to make periodic reports to the Panel on the work progress of TFP.

Action

Rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities ("PWDs")

34. Mr WONG Sing-chi expressed disappointment that the Administration had not made any commitment in the 2010-2011 Policy Address in respect of the targets for increasing the provision of residential care places for PWDs and for shortening the waiting time of these places. Mr Ronny TONG expressed a similar view.

35. SLW said that the Government was mindful of the increasing demand for various rehabilitation services for PWDs. The Government had been adopting a three-pronged approach to encourage participation from different sectors in providing residential care services for PWDs, namely (a) continuing to steadily increase the number of subsidised residential care homes places; (b) regulating the residential care homes for PWDs through a statutory licensing scheme and helping the market to develop more service options for PWDs; and (c) supporting NGOs to develop self-financing homes. An additional 955 residential care places would come on stream in the next two years. Amongst them, 504 places would be provided upon the service commencement of two new integrated rehabilitation services centres in Kwai Chung and Ho Man Tin, which were converted from the ex-Ma Tau Wai Girls' Home and Ex-South Kwai Chung Jockey Club Polyclinic. It was worth noting that the average waiting time for Hostel for Severely Physically Handicapped Persons had been reduced from 112 months in 2008-2009 to 62 months in 2009-2010.

36. Ms LI Fung-ying took the view that the Administration should allocate additional resources to strengthen the rehabilitation services for ex-mentally ill persons and the manpower of medical social workers so that the latter could provide more timely and appropriate support to persons with mental health problems living in the community. SLW said that additional resources would be provided for enhancing mental health social rehabilitation services, and details of which would be available after the announcement of the forthcoming Budget.

37. Mr Ronny TONG took the view that the eligibility of PWDs for fare concessions offered by public transport operators was too stringent. In his view, the Administration should expedite its discussions with the public transport operators on the provision of concessionary fares to PWDs.

Action

Family Council

38. Noting that the Family Council would continue to promote family core values and foster an environment conducive to harmonious family relationships, Mr WONG Sing-chi considered that parents who attended relevant training courses should be eligible to claim reimbursement from the Continuing Education Fund.

Mental health services

39. Dr PAN Pey-chyou expressed disappointment that only one district-based Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness ("ICCMW") had secured permanent accommodation while the ICCMWs in other 17 districts were currently providing services at temporary accommodation. He requested the Government to step up its efforts to enhance the understanding of the services of ICCMWs and secure local support for setting up these centres in the community such that ICCMWs could secure permanent accommodation as early as practicable.

Development of SEs

40. Noting that the Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme ("ESR Programme") had so far approved a total grant of about \$110 million to 106 new SE projects, Mr Paul CHAN expressed concern about the development and sustainability of SEs in Hong Kong and asked whether the Administration would conduct a review to evaluate the effectiveness of the ESR Programme. In response, SHA said that the Government was reviewing different aspects of the ESR Programme and would continue to solicit community support for promoting the development of SEs. The Social Enterprise Advisory Committee was reviewing measures on the further development of SEs. The Government would release the review findings in due course.

II. Any other business

41. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:46 am.