

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)973/11-12
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 12 December 2011, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex

Members present : Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Chairman)
Hon WONG Sing-chi (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
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
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Members absent : Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP

Member attending : Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan

Public Officers attending : Item IV

Mr Matthew CHEUNG Kin-chung, GBS, JP
Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Mr Stephen SUI
Commissioner for Rehabilitation
Labour and Welfare

Mr Patrick NIP, JP
Director of Social Welfare

Mrs Cecilia YUEN
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Rehabilitation &
Medical Social Services)

Item V

Mrs Anna MAK
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

Ms Caran WONG
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family & Child
Welfare)

Ms Wendy LEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare
(Welfare) 1

**Attendance by : Item V
invitation**

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr KWOK Wai-keung
Convenor, Network on IFSCs

Mr Moses MUI
Chief Officer (Family & Community)

Concern Group on Integrated Family Services of the
Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union

Ms MAN Pui-lin
Convenor

Mr NG Wai-chiu
Member

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Candice LAM
Senior Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Karen LAI
Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. Confirmation of minutes
[LC Paper No. CB(2)489/11-12]

The minutes of the special meeting held on 21 October 2011 were confirmed.

II. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)322/11-12(01), CB(2)480/11-12(01),
CB(2)481/11-12(01) and CB(2)514/11-12(01)]

2. Members noted that the following papers had been issued since the last meeting -

- (a) referral from the Public Complaints Office regarding the eligibility of owners of Tenant Purchase Scheme flats for rent allowance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme;
- (b) referral from the Public Complaints Office on policy issues relating to housing problems of partitioned flat households;
- (c) referral from the Public Complaints Office regarding child care services and support for family carers; and
- (d) referral from the Public Complaints Office on policy issues relating to rent control and review mechanism of rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme.

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III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)490/11-12(01) to (02)]

3. Noting that the Administration had provided a response to his earlier proposal to discuss the public transport concessions of \$2 per trip for persons with disabilities and definition of persons with disabilities, Dr PAN Pey-chyou said that the Administration had not addressed the issues of concern raised by him. The Panel might wish to follow up the subject before the Administration had finalised the implementation details. The Chairman advised that the Administration planned to submit the detailed proposal to the Panel in the second quarter of 2012. He would discuss with the Administration as to whether the timing could be further advanced.

4. Members agreed to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration at the next meeting to be held on 9 January 2012 at 10:45 am -

- (a) Report on Custody and Access by the Law Reform Commission; and
- (b) Development of social enterprises.

IV. Injection of funding into the "Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise" Project

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)455/11-12(01) and CB(2)490/11-12(03)]

5. Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") briefed members on the Administration's proposal to inject \$100 million into the Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project ("3E's Project") and the measures to enhance the employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The Administration planned to seek the Finance Committee ("FC")'s approval for the proposed injection of funding in January 2012. He stressed that the Government had been committed to encouraging employment of persons with disabilities. As announced in the 2011-2012 Policy Address, apart from the 3E's Project, a host of complementary measures, including the provision of subsidies to employers for procurement of assistive rehabilitation devices and workplace modifications as well as financial incentive to mentors assigned

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by employers to render workplace guidance to persons with disabilities, would be rolled out.

6. SLW then elaborated on the effectiveness of the 3E's Project over the past decade since its launch in 2001. He said that a total of 70 businesses had been funded since the introduction of the 3E's Project, of which 56 were still in operation, and creating over 550 job opportunities for persons with disabilities. SLW stressed that the Government strived to provide a wide range of employment and vocational rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities to secure suitable employment commensurate with their abilities.

7. The Chairman drew members' attention to rule 83A of the Rules of Procedure regarding personal pecuniary interest to be disclosed.

8. Whilst supporting the proposed injection, Dr PAN Pey-chyou was disappointed at the creation of relatively small number of job opportunities for persons with disabilities, i.e. 553 since the injection of \$50 million to the 3E's Project in 2001. He expressed concern whether this was due to the stringent approving criteria, and sought further information on the number of applications for funding of the 3E's Project and the percentage of successful applications.

9. SLW advised that the Administration had been committed to providing persons with disabilities with sustainable employment leading to self-reliance. To encourage more non-governmental organisations ("NGOs") to participate in the 3E's Project, the Administration proposed to lower the threshold of the length of participation in welfare and charitable activities required for non-subsided NGOs from five years to two years, and to extend the funding period for individual business from two years to three years to allow more time for the funded businesses to gain operating experience and become self-sustainable. He said that the Administration had kept in view the development of the 3E's Project and would inject more funding if necessary. A series of promotional publicity would be organised to encourage more NGOs to apply for the fund.

10. Director of Social Welfare ("DSW") added that the 3E's Project aimed to assist NGOs to create and run small businesses and enhance the employment opportunities for persons with disabilities through a market-driven approach. To this end, Assessment Panels comprising businessmen, financial/accounting personnel and government officials would be formed

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to provide the necessary commercial, financial, professional input in the assessment. In vetting the applications for the fund, the Assessment Panel would consider, among others, whether the proposed business was viable and sustainable. The approved business would normally be funded for two years, and after which it would be observed for another year; therefore advice would be provided to the concerned NGOs for a period of three years. DSW advised that a total of 125 applications had so far been received, of which 70 had been approved and the remaining 55 had not been pursued due to various reasons such as withdrawal of applications. Among the 70 funded businesses, 56 were still in operation and 30 of them had been running for more than five years. To encourage more NGOs to take part, the Administration had proposed to inject additional funding and to relax the application requirements. That said, the Administration would endeavour to strike a reasonable balance between encouraging more NGOs to participate in the Project and enhancing the sustainability of the businesses.

11. While acknowledging the contribution of the 3E's Project in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities, Ms LI Fung-ying enquired about the reasons why 14 funded businesses had ceased to operate, together with their business types and any complementary measures such as offering concessionary rental and reserving government contracts for priority bidding by funded businesses to enhance their sustainability.

12. SLW said that of the 14 businesses which had ceased operation, eight were due to the expiry of service contracts, two businesses merged, and only four having operational difficulties. DSW supplemented that of the eight businesses ceased to operate owing to expiry of service contracts, the contracts had been awarded to other NGOs running similar businesses. It was noteworthy that out of the 56 businesses which were still in operation, 30 had been operating for at least five years. Specifically, eight businesses had been operating for more than nine years, 11 for seven to nine years, and another 11 for five to seven years. DSW added that the Assessment Panel would critically examine the viability and sustainability of the funded businesses.

13. Expressing no objection to the proposed injection to the 3E's Project, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan raised concern on the effectiveness of the Project in enhancing sustainable employment of persons with disabilities. Referring to the Annex of the Administration's paper, Mr LEE noted with concern that the amount of funding approved was disproportionate to the number of

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job opportunities created for persons with disabilities. He reckoned that a large portion of funding had been spent on shop renovation and fitting-out works. He urged the Administration to review the cost effectiveness of the Project and consider awarding service contracts to businesses of 3E's Project by restricted tenders. Mr LEE asked whether employees with disabilities of the 3E's Project were paid in accordance with the minimum wage requirement.

14. SLW advised that most NGOs of the 3E's Project would use the seed money to cover the "set-up cost" including furniture and equipment, fitting-out works and initial operating expenses. He added that the Administration had been encouraging employment of persons with disabilities in open employment, for example, giving more weighting to enterprises employing persons with disabilities in awarding service contracts. DSW supplemented that the Leisure and Cultural Services Department had awarded certain service contracts to some rehabilitation organisations through restricted tenders.

15. DSW said that employees with disabilities of the 3E's Project were having an employer-employee relationship with the operating NGOs, thus the wage level should comply with the statutory minimum wage requirement. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Rehabilitation & Medical Social Services) ("ADSW") supplemented that the Administration had in July 2011 invited applications from NGOs running businesses under the 3E's Project for a one-off top-up allowance for meeting the additional expenses on staff cost arising from the implementation of the minimum wage legislation in May 2011. By September 2011, funding amounting to \$200,000 was allocated to three NGOs for compliance with the minimum wage legislation while other businesses funded under the 3E's Project had not applied for the one-off allowance because their employees with disabilities were already paid with the minimum wage level.

16. Mr Alan LEONG took the view that those funded businesses which had ceased to operate were mainly due to a lack of market sensitivity in running a business. The Administration should enhance the collaboration between the business sector and the NGOs concerned with a view to providing valuable experience and knowledge to the NGOs to run sustainable business. While the funding ceiling per business was \$2 million, Mr LEONG noted with concern that the approved fund was on average \$650,000 per business only. He wondered whether the approving criteria were too stringent.

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17. DSW advised that the Government fully agreed with the importance of enhancing the collaboration between the business sector and the operating NGOs. The Assessment Panel had been providing a platform under which members of the Assessment Panel would provide the necessary commercial, financial, professional and policy input to NGOs on their business proposals in the assessment process and would continue to give advice during the two-year funding period and the one-year observation period. DSW further advised that the amount of approved fund would depend on the actual amount applied and most businesses funded by the 3E's Project were relatively small enterprises and the amount of fund applied was generally lower than the maximum amount of the grant. DSW envisaged that after the funding period was extended from two years to three years, more NGOs would apply for a larger amount of grant to run their businesses.

18. Whilst supporting the proposed injection of funding, the Chairman sought more information on -

- (a) the work types of job opportunities created for persons with disabilities under the 70 funded businesses of the 3E's Project, together with a breakdown of the number of employees with disabilities in each work type and the respective proportion to the total number of job opportunities created;
- (b) the number of businesses which could sustain on its own after the funding period; and
- (c) the cost of rental expenses, if available.

The Chairman was of the view that more diverse job types should be introduced to fully develop the potentials and employability of persons with disabilities. For instance, vocational training and employment support could be provided to persons with disabilities so as to equip them with specialised skills and enhance their employability. The Chairman appealed to the Administration to designate specific sites in government buildings and premises with concessionary rental for the operation of business funded under the Project.

19. SLW advised that the 70 businesses funded under the 3E's Project could be broadly classified into retail service (27), catering service (16),

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cleansing service (9), and specialised service (18) including organic farm, barrier-free access technology service, beauty shop and eco-tourism service. DSW added that of the 56 businesses still in operation, 20 were under the three-year funding/observation period whereas 36 had completed the funding period. To enhance the sustainability of the funded businesses, the Marketing Consultancy Office (Rehabilitation) of the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") provided advisory services and organised various activities for the development and promotion of their products in collaboration with the Support the Employment of People with Disabilities Alliance, which was a registered trademark/brand name for products and services of persons with disabilities. That said, the Administration would continue to work with NGOs to develop more work types suitable for persons with disabilities.

20. ADSW said that the 553 job opportunities created for persons with disabilities under the 3E's Project represented around 70% of the total number of job opportunities created. About 50% of the employees with disabilities were ex-mentally ill persons who possessed different levels of skills and expertise. In assessing the business proposals submitted by NGOs, the Assessment Panel would consider factors such as training/development programmes to be provided for prospective employees with disabilities, if the applications were approved. On-the-job training and coaching would also be offered to persons with disabilities when they took up the employment.

21. Whilst appreciating that the 3E's Project had created employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, Mr WONG Sing-chi expressed concern whether the 3E's Project would compete with the sheltered workshops in bidding service contracts. Mr WONG was also concerned about the long waiting list for sheltered workshop places. He called on the Administration to increase the sheltered workshop places and develop better synergy between the 3E's Project and sheltered workshops such that the latter would provide vocational placements for persons with disabilities with a view to equipping them to take up employment in the funded businesses under the 3E's Project.

22. SLW advised that the average waiting time for sheltered workshop places was 16.9 months. Currently, a total of 5 133 placements were provided and some 2 428 persons with disabilities were on the waiting list. He further advised that small businesses funded under the 3E's Project posed no competition to sheltered workshops given that the latter aimed to

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provide vocational training to persons with disabilities who were not able to enter into open employment whereas businesses under the 3E's Project offered employment opportunities in an open labour market.

23. DSW said that the work types provided in sheltered workshops and businesses funded by the 3E's Project were not the same. About 80% of persons with disabilities employed under the businesses of the 3E's Project were referred by vocational rehabilitation organisations to take up genuine employment. This would help relieve demand for and release sheltered workshop places for those who were less likely to get employment in an open labour market.

24. ADSW supplemented that sheltered workshops and the 3E's Project were complements to each other as the 3E's Project, through offering jobs in a genuine employment setting, would provide extended support to persons with disabilities who had acquired the necessary skills for open employment. In response to a follow-up question by Mr WONG Sing-chi, ADSW advised that SWD had been committed to seeking more resources for additional sheltered workshop places. In this regard, it was announced in the 2011-2012 Policy Address that employment support to persons with disabilities, including provision of vocational rehabilitation and day training services, would be enhanced.

25. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan remained concerned that businesses of the 3E's Project would face problems of sustainability after the funding period expired. He requested the Administration, in preparing the relevant funding proposal to FC, to elaborate on the complementary measures, such as priority procurement of products and use of services of 3E's Project and the award of "restricted tenders" for bidding by businesses of 3E's Project, to enhance the sustainable development of the businesses of the 3E's Project and continuous employment of persons with disabilities.

26. SLW responded that the Administration was aware of the challenges faced by businesses of the 3E's Project in further developing the businesses and enhancing the employment of persons with disabilities. DSW reiterated that in vetting the applications for the seed grant to kick start the business, the Assessment Panel had given due consideration to the viability and sustainability of the proposed business plans. DSW added that the Administration would incorporate the information requested by Mr LEE in the paper to FC as far as practicable.

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27. In concluding, the Chairman said that the Panel supported the proposed injection of \$100 million into the 3E's Project for FC's approval in January 2012.

V. Review on the Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre Service Mode

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)490/11-12(04) to (05) and CB(2)571/11-12(01) to (02)]

28. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services) ("DDSW(S)") briefed members on the progress of follow-up action taken by the SWD on the 26 recommendations, which were grouped under eight major areas, in the Report on the Review on the Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre Service Mode (the Review as Report) released in May 2010, as detailed in the Administration's paper.

Meeting with deputations

Hong Kong Council of Social Service ("HKCSS")

29. Mr Moses MUI presented the views of HKCSS and highlighted two major concerns as detailed in its submission tabled at the meeting. First, when allocating additional resources for setting up the four new Integrated Family Service Centres ("IFSCs") as announced in the 2011-2012 Policy Address, the Administration should adopt a forward looking approach for service planning and objective criteria in assessing the service demand of individual districts, such as increasing population size, demographic characteristics and caseload of social workers of existing IFSCs in the districts. In taking forward the plan to set up new IFSCs, the Administration should address the problem of lack of suitable premises for setting up welfare facilities. To this end, he appealed to the Administration to engage the welfare sector including the operating non-governmental organisations ("NGO") in formulating the service plan as early as practicable.

30. Mr MUI pointed out that collaboration between IFSCs and the Housing Department ("HD") in handling housing assistance cases had been enhanced after setting up communication mechanisms at different levels to streamline the work procedures on handling such cases. However, IFSC staff continued to spend substantial time on handling housing assistance

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cases which related to housing management and tenancy issues, such as requests for splitting of households or transfer to another housing estate. This would more appropriately be dealt with by HD staff, such that IFSC social workers could be dedicated to the core business of family services.

Concern Group on Integrated Family Services of the Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union ("the Concern Group")

31. Ms MAN Pui-lin of the Concern Group said that as professional social workers, IFSC frontline staff were very frustrated at handling housing assistance cases which were often related to housing management and tenancy issues and were beyond the scope of IFSC services. In her view, HD staff should be responsible for handling housing issues of its tenants whereas IFSC social workers should be dedicated to the core business of family services. She called on the adoption of a clear delineation of responsibilities between IFSCs and HD in handling housing assistance cases.

32. Ms MAN further said that the work of IFSCs was often hindered by a lack of community support services. Citing her experience as an example, as it was extremely difficult to find a temporary placement for a child of a single parent who needed immediate hospitalisation, she had always spent long hours to liaise with service providers but to no avail. Ms MAN added that notwithstanding that the workload of IFSCs had been increased in recent years to meet the rising service demand from single parent families and ethnic minorities, no additional resources had been provided to IFSCs correspondingly. Ms MAN called on the Administration to formulate long-term planning for welfare services to meet the specific needs of service users.

Discussions

33. Dr PAN Pey-chyou pointed out that the number of supervisory posts in IFSCs had been increased from 62 to 93 representing an increase of 50% in the past few years, whereas the number of frontline social workers had been increased from 896 to 1 056 representing an increase of 18% only. He was concerned that new frontline posts had not been created in order to offset the cost for creation of supervisory posts. Noting that only one of the four new IFSCs would commence operation shortly, Dr PAN was concerned about the availability of suitable sites for setting up the other three new IFSCs in districts with higher service needs.

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34. Responding to Dr PAN and concerns raised by deputations, DDSW(S) advised that in planning for the provision of new IFSC service, consideration would be given to the social indicators and service demand of individual districts in the light of the characteristics and needs of the districts, such as the number of CSSA households, cases of domestic violence and juvenile crimes. In deciding the location of the four new IFSCs as announced in the 2011-2012 Policy Address, the above considerations and views of the stakeholders would be taken into account. The Committee on IFSCs would fully consult the stakeholders including HKCSS in planning new IFSC services. Apart from the new IFSC in Sham Shui Po, the remaining three would go into service after resources were earmarked under the forthcoming Budget. DDSW(S) stressed that SWD would endeavour to identify suitable sites and premises for setting up new IFSCs. Pending availability of suitable premises for the new IFSCs, the selected operators would be requested to use existing premises to deliver the service so as not to hold up the service delivery. SWD had maintained close communication with the relevant authorities and departments as well as NGOs to earmark suitable sites and locations for setting up welfare premises in new housing estates, vacant school premises and any other feasible places.

35. DDSW(S) said that the Administration was fully aware of the various concerns raised by IFSC frontline staff. With reference to the provision of respite services and temporary placements to meet urgent needs, SWD was discussing with operators of private homes participating in the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme to provide respite / short-term places for elders with urgent residential needs. As announced in the 2011-2012 Policy Address, there would be additional places of foster care service as well as residential child care services coming into stream. To save the time and efforts of IFSC staff in searching for the availability of emergency placements for children, SWD had launched an online information system on the updated vacancy position.

36. On the provision of additional manpower support, DDSW(S) clarified that the increase in the number of supervisory staff was responding to the stakeholders' request for strengthening clinical and supervisory support for frontline social workers. Responding to Dr PAN Pey-chyou, DDSW(S) said that the manning ratio of IFSCs was in general one supervisory staff to around 10 frontline social workers.

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37. DDSW(S) said that to address the concerns about handling of housing assistance cases by IFSC staff, SWD had set up a liaison mechanism with HD. The liaison groups so formed at the headquarters and district levels had already developed mechanisms to enhance collaboration and communication between SWD/NGO IFSCs and HD as well as to review and streamline work procedures on handling housing assistance cases. Specifically, HD would process cases relating to purely housing management issues, such as requests for addition of family members to the tenancy, household splitting and transfer by existing public housing tenants. The liaison groups would continue to accord priority to discussion items aiming at achieving a clear delineation of roles of IFSC social workers and HD staff in handling housing assistance cases.

38. Noting that additional resources were provided for IFSCs to strengthen manpower and supervision, Mr WONG Sing-chi said that the Administration should provide adequate funding for meeting the additional staff cost taking into account that social workers of IFSCs were usually experienced personnel. He was concerned that under the Lump Sum Grant subvention mode, IFSC operators might not use the additional funding merely for strengthening manpower support. Mr WONG further said that he fully understood the concerns of IFSC staff about handling housing assistance cases, but it was not an easy task to delineate the role of IFSC social workers and HD staff in handling such cases. He elaborated that as a member of the Housing Authority, he drew members' attention to the guidelines on processing applications for public rental housing flats under which HD staff would reject those applications which did not meet the eligibility criteria. Such applications could be further processed if they warranted consideration for compassionate rehousing. However, HD staff were concerned that they were incapable of assessing the welfare needs of the applicants. Therefore, they would rely on the recommendations of IFSC social workers for compassionate rehousing to further process housing assistance cases. Mr WONG invited views from the attending deputations on how to deal with the dilemma of HD staff in this respect.

39. With reference to the experience of IFSC social workers, Mr KWOK of HKCSS said that HD staff would normally not reject housing assistance cases, but referred such cases to IFSCs for follow-up actions. This had created unrealistic expectations of the applicants. Consequently, the applicants were disappointed and aggrieved with the unsuccessful outcome and blamed the IFSC social workers for not rendering appropriate assistance. This was also a waste of time and effort of all the parties

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concerned. Mr KWOK further said that the welfare sector considered that HD should draw up clear policy and procedures for handling "other housing assistance cases", such that HD should provide a negative reply to the applicants if they did not meet the eligibility criteria, and refer cases to IFSCs for following up the welfare needs of the applicants. To address the concern of HD staff as to whether individual cases should be referred to IFSCs for follow-up, HD staff might consult IFSC social workers as appropriate prior to making a decision for such referrals.

40. Mr LEE Cheuk yan considered that the existing arrangement for handling housing assistance cases was not desirable. He asked whether SWD had discussed with HD ways to address the concerns of IFSC social workers.

41. DDSW(S) said that to address the concerns about handling of housing assistance cases by IFSCs, SWD had set up a liaison mechanism with HD at both the headquarters and district levels. The Liaison Groups had stressed the need for HD staff to explain clearly to the applicants of housing assistance cases under what circumstances would their cases be referred to IFSCs for follow-up in order not to give rise to unrealistic expectations of the applicants. In addition, experience sharing sessions on the handling of housing assistance cases were considered useful in enhancing the communication between IFSC social workers and HD staff. The Liaison Groups would continue with their work with a view to further streamlining the work procedures on handling housing assistance cases.

42. Citing her experience as an example, Ms MAN of the Concern Group said that the inconsistent procedures for handling housing assistance cases by HD staff had given rise to grievances of service users and thereby caused undue hardship to IFSC social workers in managing the expectations of service users.

43. While considering that concerns over the handling of housing assistance cases should be a major area for improvement, Ms LI Fung-ying enquired about the work priority and implementation timetable of the Administration to take forward the 26 recommendations under the eight major areas in the Review Report and whether additional resources would be allocated for the improvement measures. Ms LI also asked for an update of caseload of IFSC social workers.

44. DDSW(S) said that the Administration had set up various working

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groups or liaison groups to carry out necessary follow-up actions in respect of the eight major areas for improvements recommended in the Review Report. In taking forward the recommendations, SWD would give priority to enhance the coordination in the referral system for housing assistance cases. As explained earlier, the liaison groups at the headquarters and district levels would continue with their work to enhance coordination and ensure the proper implementation of the agreed operational procedures in actual operation. The Liaison Group at the headquarters level would convene its next meeting shortly during which she would convey members' views to it for consideration. DDSW(S) further said that the setting up of three other new IFSCs in districts with higher service demand would also be ranked top in the list of follow-up actions to be taken. Regarding the caseload of IFSC social workers, DDSW(S) advised that IFSCs handled 37 421 new and reactivated cases in 2005-2006 and 42 282 cases in 2010-2011. In 2010-2011, each social worker of IFSCs on average handled 41.6 new and reactivated cases in a year and 45.1 active cases per month.

[To allow sufficient time for discussion, the Chairman directed that the meeting be extended for 15 minutes.]

45. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the problems with the handling of housing assistance cases were simply due to inadequate public rental housing units. He asked if SWD had studied the resource implications if all the requests were to be acceded to. DDSW(S) said that, for planning purpose, 2 000 public rental housing units had been reserved for compassionate rehousing in each year. That said, the Housing Authority had given policy support to increase the number of housing flats for compassionate rehousing if the requests exceeded the number of reserved housing units. She stressed that SWD and HD had been in collaboration to enhance the coordination in the referral system and the delineation of responsibilities of IFSCs and HD in handling housing assistance cases.

46. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan took the view that the Panel should consider holding a special meeting and invite representatives of HD to the meeting to further discuss ways to address the concerns of IFSC social workers over the handling of housing assistance cases. Mr LEE enquired whether the Administration would consider reopening single parent centres to provide dedicated and one-stop support services for single parent families, including temporary placements for unattended children as necessary.

47. DDSW(S) said that as compared with the former single parent centres, the implementation of the IFSC service mode would provide an

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integrated and continuum of services to meet the service needs of specific target groups in their own communities, including single parent families. The integrated approach was confirmed more effective by the consultant reviewing the service mode of IFSCs and should be continued. DDSW(S) added that to provide more flexible child care for families in need in the community, the Administration had since 2008 launched the pilot Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, which became a regularised service with its coverage extended to all 18 districts over the territory in October 2011.

48. Responding to Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's enquiry as to whether dedicated support services centres would be provided for ethnic minorities, DDSW(S) said that there were four service support centres under the Home Affairs Department for ethnic minorities in the territory. Activities had been organised specifically for ethnic minorities by IFSCs in those districts with more ethnic minorities. Having regard to the language and cultural differences, IFSCs had collaborated with local schools and related organisations in providing targeted services for ethnic minorities.

49. The Chairman said that while liaison groups had been set up between SWD and HD to enhance collaboration in the handling of housing assistance cases, the agreed operational procedures and the delineation of responsibilities between IFSC social workers and HD staff had not been disseminated to the frontline staff in HD. This explained the inconsistent practices adopted by HD staff in dealing with referrals to and from IFSCs. He considered that HD should enhance training for frontline staff in handling housing assistance cases according to the agreed operational procedures. This apart, IFSCs should consider reporting cases on inappropriate referrals from HD to the liaison groups for follow-up. In addition, SWD should organise briefing sessions for personal assistants of District Council Members and Legislative Council Members on the role and functions of IFSCs in handling housing assistance cases such that they would make appropriate referrals to IFSCs and HD for follow-up.

50. The Chairman said that in the light of the concerns over handling of housing assistance cases, the Panel would hold a special meeting to further discuss the matter. Members would be informed of the meeting date in due course.

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VI. Any other business

51. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:57 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
9 February 2012