

立法會
Legislative Council

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by the Administration)

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Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Tuesday, 26 March 2013, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

Members present : Hon CHAN Yuen-han, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Frankie YICK Chi-ming
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
Hon Alice MAK Mei-kuen, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH
Hon TANG Ka-piu

Members absent : Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon CHAN Han-pan
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, BBS, MH, JP
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan

Public Officers attending : Item I

Mr Matthew CHEUNG, GBS, JP
Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Labour and Welfare Bureau

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

Mr Patrick NIP, JP
Director of Social Welfare
Social Welfare Department

Mr KOK Che-leung
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Subventions)
Social Welfare Department

Clerk in attendance : Mr Colin CHUI
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Ms Catherina YU
Senior Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. Medium and long-term social welfare planning

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)824/12-13(01) and CB(2)620/12-13(07)]

At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") briefed members on the Administration's response to various issues on long-term social welfare planning raised by members and deputations at the meeting on 19 February 2013. He also highlighted the existing social welfare policies and the initiatives in respect of premises and manpower for social welfare planning.

2. SLW said that, comparing with the revised estimate for 2012-2013, the recurrent spending on social welfare in 2013-2014 had increased by \$13 billion (i.e. about 31%). It signified the Government's commitment to allocating additional resources for providing support to the disadvantaged. SLW stressed that the Administration would spare no efforts in providing services to meet the needs of the community at large.

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3. SLW further said that the Administration had, since 2012, implemented the enhanced planning mechanism as recommended by the Social Welfare Advisory Committee ("SWAC"). The mechanism aimed to collect views at three levels, namely district level, central level and advisory committees level and to ensure consultation and planning for the future development and delivery of welfare services on an ongoing and regular basis. As part of the planning process, the working meeting between the Administration and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service ("HKCSS") with its member organisations would be arranged in June 2013 to exchange views on social welfare priorities for the coming year.

4. SLW stressed that the current Government fully recognized the community's call for a retirement protection scheme. The Social Security and Retirement Protection Task Force ("Task Force") under the Commission on Poverty ("CoP") had invited Professor Nelson CHOW Wing-sun to conduct a study to review the existing three-pillar retirement protection system. The study would assess the combined retirement protection effect of the current three-pillar system, analyze the different retirement protection options put forth by the community, and recommend improvement measures having regard to the inadequacies of the existing three-pillar system and the future development options proposed by the community. The study was expected to be completed within 12 months.

Planning mechanism

5. Dr Fernando CHEUNG was of the view that the "Five-Year Plan" mechanism adopted in the past allowed members to review the plans on a regular basis and was flexible as far as planning was concerned. Instead of adopting a remedial approach, the Administration should be forward looking in addressing social welfare problems. Pointing out that there was no mention of development and services for youth, child care services and home-based support for the elderly and persons with disabilities ("PWDs") in the Administration's paper on long-term social welfare planning (LC Paper No. CB(2)824/12-13(01)), Dr CHEUNG expressed grave concern about the lack of systematic and holistic planning for social welfare services.

6. Mr Albert HO said that having a vision was important in long-term social welfare planning. Instead of merely responding to changing circumstances in a piecemeal manner, the Administration should map out what it aimed to accomplish within a specific timeframe in resolving long standing social welfare problems. Mr HO expressed his dissatisfaction that the Administration lacked the vision and did not have comprehensive

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planning and concrete targets in this regard. Citing elderly care services as an example, SLW said that the Administration had clear policy objectives for social welfare.

7. Mr TAM Yiu-chung disagreed with the Administration's view that the "Five-Year Plan" mechanism lacked flexibility. In his view, setting long-term plans for social welfare would enable active collaboration among the relevant Government bureaux in accomplishing the targets and allow service users to have an idea of when they would be able to receive the required assistance. As there should not be drastic changes in the types of welfare services required by the community, the Administration should be able to formulate long-term plans and set targets for the provision of such services.

8. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che and Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the Administration should draw up long-term plans having regard to the anticipated demand for welfare services. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che said that in formulating plans for social welfare services, the Administration should assess the changes in population, future demand for welfare services, whether the existing services could cope with future demand and, if not, how they should be fine-tuned to meet the needs, etc. As it took time to secure the required resources, such as sites and manpower, for the provision of welfare services, it was important for the Administration to plan ahead. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che and the Chairman hoped that the Administration could set long-term policy direction for elderly services and rehabilitation services for the next five to ten years. Mr CHEUNG also sought information on how the Administration would activate the long-term planning for elderly services and rehabilitation services.

9. SLW responded that social welfare planning was in place. Instead of continuing with the "Five-Year Plan" mechanism, the Administration had adopted a more flexible approach in formulating its plans. SLW said that the working meeting with HKCSS to be held in June 2013 would allow the Administration to tap views of HKCSS and its members. The Administration had also been discussing with HKCSS on how to make better use of the land owned by the non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") through redevelopment or in-situ expansion to provide diversified subvented and self-financing facilities to meet the needs of welfare services.

10. On manpower planning, SLW said that the University Grants Committee would increase the number of training places for nurses by 40 places and allied health professionals (including physiotherapists,

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occupational therapists, etc.) by 140 places for three years starting from 2012-2013. The Administration had also proposed to allocate \$160 million in the five-year period starting from 2013-2014 to 2017-2018 to organize 10 more classes of the two-year full-time Enrolled Nurse Training Programme for the welfare sector. The programme would provide a total of 1 240 training places. These initiatives formed the blueprint and directions for long-term welfare services.

11. In response to Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's enquiry about whether a committee comprising members of the public and representatives from the welfare sector would be formed to study planning strategies for elderly services and rehabilitation services, SLW said that there were already advisory bodies in place such as the Elderly Commission and the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, which were composed of representatives from the welfare, business and academic sectors. The Administration had all along been taking their advice in drawing up a blueprint for services for the elderly and PWDs.

12. Pointing out that there was very little coverage on service users in the consultancy study for the production of a "Best Practice Manual" recommended by the Lump Sum Grant Independent Review Committee, Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the Administration had neglected the service users in its planning for social welfare services which, in his view, was unacceptable. Director of Social Welfare ("DSW") responded that although service users would not be involved directly in issues such as human resource management, financial management and corporate governance, these management issues would bring about enhancement in the services which would be beneficial to service users at the end of the day.

13. The Chairman said that the Administration's social welfare plans were short-term in nature. The Administration should find ways to tackle the technical problems which hindered its medium and long-term planning. She concurred with the view of HKCSS that on-going reviews of social welfare policies and services could allow timely adjustments to the plans. As such, the Administration should not do away with long-term planning.

14. In response to Dr Fernando CHEUNG's enquiry on the position of the report on Long-term Social Welfare Planning in Hong Kong ("the Report") prepared by SWAC, SLW said that the Administration briefed the Panel in the last legislative session on its response to the Report. The Administration had already implemented the enhanced planning mechanism proposed by SWAC which allowed for full and interactive

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participation of the welfare sector and other stakeholders. SLW stressed that the Administration was user-oriented in adopting social welfare measures.

Retirement protection

15. Mr TANG Ka-piu, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung and Mr Ronny TONG said that the Administration had taken unduly long time in studying retirement protection. They worried that the Government would continue to delay the implementation of a universal retirement scheme. Mr TANG enquired about the timetable for conducting public consultation on Professor Nelson CHOW Wing-sun's study and the implementation schedule for the retirement protection scheme. He also sought information on the poverty alleviation policies to be implemented, particularly whether subsidy would be provided to low-income families, after CoP had drawn up the poverty line.

16. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the Administration had used community consensus as an excuse to defer the introduction of a universal retirement protection scheme. In his view, it was incumbent upon the Administration to forge consensus within the community. The Chairman and Mr POON Siu-ping said that the Administration should draw up a concrete plan, including the arrangements and timetable, for the implementation of a retirement protection scheme.

17. SLW responded that CoP would discuss the findings of the study conducted by Professor Nelson CHOW Wing-sun on retirement protection and work towards a consensus in the community on how retirement protection should be taken forward. It was therefore premature to conclude whether a consensus had already been reached in the community at this stage. Regarding the provision of subsidy for low-income families, SLW said that the Administration was open-minded in this regard.

18. Mr Ronny TONG said that an ageing population was an imminent challenge faced by the current Government and the Administration should deal with the issue of universal retirement protection expeditiously. Pointing out that the implementation of universal retirement protection had been discussed at length in the community and the Central Policy Unit ("CPU") had taken account of the proposals put forth by the community in its studies, Mr TONG cast doubt on the need for another study on retirement protection. He requested the Administration to promise that CoP would make a decision upon the completion of Professor Nelson CHOW Wing-sun's study.

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19. SLW responded that the study undertaken by Professor CHOW was expected to be completed within twelve months. After examining the report of the study, the Task Force would suggest to CoP on the way forward. The study would cover opinions expressed by various community and political groups.

Poverty line

20. Mr TANG Ka-piu said that there were different views on how poverty lines should be drawn up. Some suggested that the poverty line should be drawn up based on the concept of absolute poverty. Some others considered that the concept of relative poverty should be adopted and the line should be set at 50% or 60% of median monthly domestic household income. There was also a view that the poverty line should correspond to an income level that maintained subsistence living. Mr TANG sought information on whether the poverty line to be set by CoP would comprise the aforesaid elements and the policy direction to support the families and individuals whose income was below the poverty line, regardless of whether they were comprehensive social security assistance ("CSSA") recipients.

21. SLW responded that the poverty line would enable the Administration to identify and target various groups of people in need, formulate poverty alleviation initiatives targeted at the specific characteristics and needs of these groups and monitor the effectiveness of these initiatives. CoP would base on the concept of relative poverty in drawing up the poverty line.

Care services for the elderly and PWDs

22. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the supply of residential care places for the elderly and PWDs fell short of the demand seriously. Noting that the number of elderly who passed away while waiting for subsidized residential care places in a year had accounted for about 18% of the total waitlistees for subsidized residential care places, Dr CHEUNG opined that it had reflected that the Administration was not thoughtful of the demand for such places in its planning. The Administration's poor planning for the provision of residential care places attributed to the fact that it had not attempted to project the demand for such places by looking into the causes of elderly withdrawing their applications from or dropping out of the central waiting list for subsidized residential care places. Dr CHEUNG said that many waitlistees for residential care homes for the elderly

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("RCHEs") were frail elders and had imminent need for the service. Notwithstanding the unacceptably long waiting time for RCHEs and residential care homes for PWDs ("RCHDs"), the Administration refused to set a target time for admission. Dr CHEUNG criticized the Administration's inability to formulate long-term plans for social welfare services.

23. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen echoed that the Administration had no planning for the provision of residential care places for the elderly and PWDs and had done very little in shortening the waiting time for these places. Mr TANG Ka-piu said that the Administration should demonstrate its determination to meet the needs for residential and community care services ("CCS") of the elderly and PWDs and make public its plans and targets in this regard.

24. SLW said that the Administration had put a lot of efforts in enhancing residential care services. He said that the waiting time for subsidized residential care places was mainly affected by the applicants' preference for the location of elderly homes, their request to join family members in a particular elderly home and their preference for subsidized places over bought places in private homes. More than 90% of the RCHE applicants had a preference for the location of the elderly homes and 31% of them had declined the offer of the homes of their preferred locations. For applicants who had no preference or special request, they could be admitted to homes within three months and, in some cases, the waiting time for RCHEs of these residents could be as short as one month. The Administration considered it necessary to respect the preference of RCHE applicants.

25. SLW reiterated that the Government was committed to increasing the supply of residential care places. More than 2 300 residential care places for the elderly would commence operation from now till 2015-2016 and the redevelopment project at the former site of Siu Lam Hospital in Tuen Mun would provide about 1 150 residential care places for PWDs in 2017-2018. SLW hoped that members could allow the Administration some time to accomplish its tasks in this regard.

26. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the Administration should consider providing residential care places in districts such as Kowloon East, Kowloon West and the North East New Territories which were more accessible.

27. In response to Mr TANG Ka-piu's view on the inadequate provision

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of CCS for RCHE applicants, SLW said that "ageing in place as the core, institutional care as the back-up" was the policy objective of elderly care services. To this end, the Administration would continue to allocate additional resources with a view to strengthening subsidized CCS.

28. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that the Administration should step up its efforts in shortening the waiting time for RCHEs. The Administration's refusal to make service pledges for admission to RCHEs on the grounds of applicants' preference gave an impression that it was not prepared to do its best to resolve the problems.

29. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung criticized the Administration for using RCHE applicants' preference as an excuse for not making pledges on shortening the waiting time for RCHEs. SLW reiterated that the special preference of applicants should be respected.

30. In response to Mr POON Siu-ping's enquiry about the arrangements and progress of making use of lands owned by NGOs for welfare facilities, SLW said that through communicating with NGOs, the Administration would be able to take stock of the number of NGO sites available for welfare facilities and evaluate how these sites could address the demand for welfare services in the long run.

31. Mr POON Siu-ping noted from the Administration's paper on the work of CoP and the Steering Committee on Population Policy ("the Steering Committee") (LC Paper No. CB(2)845/12-13(01)) for the special meeting of the House Committee on 22 March 2013 that, in view of labour shortage in some trades, the Steering Committee would study the importation of labour in order to replenish local workforce. Mr POON was concerned that importation of labour might conflict with the Administration's policy of strengthening training for local elderly care workers. Mr POON also said that The Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions had reservations about importation of labour.

32. SLW responded that in the light of the ageing population, it was projected that the workforce would begin to shrink after 2018. To address manpower shortage, the Administration would enhance the training and development for local workforce and seek resources outside Hong Kong. SLW said that the Supplementary Labour Scheme had been effective in alleviating the manpower shortage in various trades and there were around 1 000 imported workers in private RCHEs at present.

Elderly CSSA applications

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33. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the Administration should consider allowing declaration of income and assets on a personal basis by the elderly before the implementation of a universal retirement protection scheme. Pointing out that CE had pledged in his manifesto that the Administration would consider combining the elderly CSSA and Old Age Allowance ("OAA") schemes, explore the possibility of allowing declaration of income and assets on a personal basis by the elderly and assess its impact on the family policy and public finance, Dr CHEUNG enquired about the work done so far, the progress and timetable for taking forward the CE's pledges.

34. SLW responded that CSSA aimed to provide financial support to needy families for meeting basic needs. Allowing elders to apply for CSSA on their own in the absence of a declaration of their financial position might discourage their children from continuing the provision of financial support for them, thereby imposing great financial burden to the Government in the long run. Under special circumstances, DSW would consider on a case-by-case basis and might allow a needy elder to apply for CSSA on his/her own.

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35. DSW supplemented that if an elderly applicant who had poor relationship with his/her family members or there were special reasons for which his/her children could not provide financial support for him/her, he/she could apply for CSSA on his/her own provided that he/she declared non-provision of financial support by his/her children. At the request of Dr CHEUNG, the Administration undertook to provide the number of elderly who had applied for CSSA on individual basis on the grounds that they were not financially supported by their children.

(Post meeting note: The Administration's response to Dr CHEUNG's request was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1068/12-13(01) on 2 May 2013.)

36. Miss Alice MAK said that to her knowledge, some elders with mobility difficulty could not obtain CSSA because they lived with their family members. In her view, it ran counter to the "ageing in place" policy. The Administration should critically review the relevant policies and ensure that the most needy could receive the required assistance.

Child care services

37. Miss Alice MAK said that the Administration advocated releasing

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more women to join the labour market and promoted mutual help in the community but some of its policies had departed from these objectives. In her view, with the meager allowance paid to home-based child carers under the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project ("NSCCP") launched by the Social Welfare Department ("SWD"), the Administration would not be able to achieve these objectives. She said that the Administration had played down the child carers' role and many child carers considered the meager allowance a form of discrimination in respect of their work. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung opined that the rate of payment for home-based child carers was very low because the Administration had expected voluntary services. Mr LEUNG was of the view that such a policy principle was wrong.

38. Miss Alice MAK further said that since the operation hours of the child care services and after-school care services subvented by SWD did not complement with the working hours of some parents, especially those who lived in remote areas such as Tung Chung and Tin Shui Wai, many parents had to give up their employment in order to take care of their children. The Administration should critically rationalize contradictions among the existing policies.

39. SLW responded that home-based child care services under NSCCP aimed to foster community participation and mutual help in the neighbourhood, and provide needy families with flexible child care support service. Home-based child carers provided services as volunteers in the spirit of care for others and would receive an incentive payment at an hourly rate ranging from \$18 to \$22. Since home-based child service operated from 7 am to 11 pm, it could provide child care service for parents who had to work at late hours. The Administration would consider enhancing NSCCP if necessary.

40. SLW further said that any changes in the social security policies might impact other welfare schemes as they were interrelated. It was therefore pragmatic to wait for the outcome of the study on retirement protection to be conducted by Professor Nelson CHOW Wing-sun, which would cover a review on the social security system as well as the options proposed by the community, before considering any major changes to the existing social security and welfare policies.

Assistance for the working poor

41. The Chairman said that social security measures should not be regarded as a giving but rather a means to help the grass-roots to become self-reliant, thereby escape poverty. The Administration should formulate

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policies to facilitate the provision of employment opportunities, create a favourable environment for the development of small businesses and assist the grass-roots to earn their own living. To this end, the relevant Government bureaux and departments should maintain close dialogue in drawing up a long-term plan to address issues relating to working poverty.

42. The Chairman said that the Administration should brief the Panel every three months on the progress of medium and long-term social welfare planning which should cover issues on child care services, releasing more women to join the labour force, support for the elderly, PWDs and the working poor, etc. The Administration should solicit views of the welfare sector in the course of working out its plans for social welfare services.

II. Any other business

43. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:44 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
25 June 2013.