

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1481/15-16

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

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Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 25 January 2016, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex**

Members present : Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Chairman)
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Frankie YICK Chi-ming, JP
Hon YIU Si-wing, BBS
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, BBS, MH, JP
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH
Hon TANG Ka-piu, JP
Hon CHUNG Kwok-pan

Members absent : Hon Gary FAN Kwok-wai
Dr Hon Helena WONG Pik-wan

Member attending : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, BBS, MH

**Public Officers : Item I
attending**

Labour and Welfare Bureau

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

Miss Annie TAM, JP
Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Mr David LEUNG, JP
Commissioner for Rehabilitation

Mr Donald CHEN, JP
Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2

Social Welfare Department

Ms Carol YIP, JP
Director of Social Welfare

Miss Cecilla LI
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)

Mr LAM Ka-tai, JP
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

Home Affairs Bureau

Ms Florence HUI Hiu-fai, SBS, JP
Under Secretary for Home Affairs

Ms Karyn CHAN Ching-yuen
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (Civic
Affairs) 2

Miss Gloria LO Kit-wai
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (Civic
Affairs) 3

Mr Nick AU YEUNG Lik
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs
(Community Care Fund)

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

Staff in attendance : Miss Kay CHU
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 2016 Policy Address

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)624/15-16(01) to (02), CB(2)744/15-16(01) to (02), the 2016 Policy Address booklet and the 2016 Policy Agenda booklet]

At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") and Under Secretary for Home Affairs ("USHA") highlighted the major initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau ("LWB") and the Home Affairs Bureau respectively, as set out in the 2016 Policy Address.

Review of Old Age Living Allowance

2. Mr TANG Ka-piu said that as stated in the 2016 Policy Agenda, the Administration would review the Old Age Living Allowance ("OALA") to ascertain, among other things, whether the asset limits should be relaxed, and explore the feasibility of extending OALA to Guangdong having regard to the operating experience gained from the implementation of the Guangdong Scheme. He sought information on the work plan for the aforesaid items.

3. SLW responded that the Administration was conducting a six-month public consultation on retirement protection ("the Public Consultation"). The zero pillar of the existing four-pillar retirement protection system had covered various social security programmes, which included OALA and the Guangdong Scheme. The Administration appealed to the community to actively participate in the Public Consultation to express their views on different aspects, including OALA, covered by the existing retirement protection system.

4. Considering that the Administration would delay its review of OALA if it waited for the outcome of the Public Consultation, Mr CHAN Chi-chuen urged the Administration to review OALA without further delay and provide a timetable in this regard.

5. SLW reiterated that OALA was one of the essential components of the zero pillar of the existing retirement protection system. At present, a total of 830 000 elderly persons, representing 73% of the elderly population, had benefited from various assistance programmes under the zero pillar (i.e. 430 000 OALA recipients, 220 000 Old Age Allowance recipients, 150 000 elderly persons on the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, and 30 000 elderly persons on Disability Allowance ("DA")). The daily expenditure of the social security system had reached \$110 million. The Administration therefore considered it appropriate to examine the implementation of OALA in the context of retirement protection. He added that with the completion of the Public Consultation on 21 June 2016, the Administration would analyse the views collected, and planned to set out the direction and way forward for retirement protection in the 2017 Policy Address, which would be announced in January 2017.

6. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the Administration should allocate more resources and take measures to address the needs of the underprivileged. Noting that the Administration had attached great importance to the Belt and Road Initiative, he queried how the underprivileged could benefit from the aforesaid initiative and relevant policies. He also urged the Administration to review OALA without further delay, and allocate sufficient resources to implement retirement protection.

7. SLW reiterated again that the review of OALA would be conducted, taking into account the outcome of the Public Consultation. He added that the Chief Executive ("CE") had announced in his 2015 Policy Address that the Administration had earmarked \$50 billion to demonstrate its determination and commitment in improving the retirement protection system.

Retirement protection

8. Mr TANG Ka-piu said that some stakeholders were of the view that the implementation of universal retirement protection could replace OALA. As such, he considered it unnecessary to focus discussion on OALA in the Public Consultation. He wondered if the Administration

intended to improve the retirement protection system by refining OALA instead of implementing universal retirement protection.

9. SLW responded that the Administration had reservation on the proposals relating to universal retirement protection, having regard to the sustainability of such proposals and their impact on public finance. That said, the Administration had no stance on the future development of retirement protection at this stage. Noting divergent views on the subject in the community, the Administration would continue adopting an open-minded attitude to gauge more public views during the Public Consultation.

10. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that it was a world trend to implement universal retirement protection, which was considered financially viable in Hong Kong. Given that the consultation document had set out the non-universal and universal retirement protection options, the Administration should keep an open mind on and stop publicly expressing reservations about the latter option with an aim to conduct a genuine consultation on retirement protection.

11. Mr Frederick FUNG said that CE had taken an affirmative attitude towards universal retirement protection when he ran for CE. The Commission on Poverty, however, had set out in the consultation document not only a simulated universal retirement protection option, but also a simulated "those with financial needs" option, which was considered another means-tested poverty alleviation measure. Noting that the Administration had repeatedly expressed reservations about the former option, he was of the view that the Administration had made use of the Public Consultation to negate universal retirement protection.

12. SLW responded that CE had stated in his manifesto that the Administration would study how to introduce short, medium and long-term measures to solve the problem of elderly poverty. On this basis, the Administration would continue listening to public views on how to improve the retirement protection system in Hong Kong during the Public Consultation.

13. The Deputy Chairman said that in the face of the growing ageing and poverty population, the provision of either the means-tested OALA or a non-means-tested uniform monthly payment under universal retirement protection for eligible elderly persons would inevitably bring about financial pressure to the young generation. Stressing that most of the elderly persons were very happy about the implementation of the

Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities ("the Fare Concession Scheme"), she urged the Administration to seriously consider implementing universal retirement protection so that elderly persons could enjoy a secure retirement life, which was crucial to social stability.

14. Noting that five public forums would be conducted during the Public Consultation, Mr POON Siu-ping queried whether the independent consultant commissioned by LWB would focus its work on analysing the views collected at the foresaid forums. SLW responded that the independent consultant commissioned by LWB was responsible for collating, consolidating and analyzing all the public views on retirement protection received during the Public Consultation.

Low-income Working Family Allowance

15. Members were informed that the intake of the first round of applications for the Low-income Working Family Allowance ("LIFA") would be staggered in three phases, i.e. Phase I in May 2016 for families with four persons or more, Phase II in June 2016 for families with three persons, and Phase III in July 2016 for families with two persons. Mr POON Siu-ping asked if the Administration would consider accepting applications by families with two to three persons for LIFA in Phase I as well in case of a discouraging response to the LIFA Scheme.

16. Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered that the phased application arrangement was too complicated and confusing. He therefore called on the Administration to start accepting applications by all eligible families for LIFA on the same date.

17. SLW responded that the LIFA Scheme was expected to benefit 200 000 low-income working families, comprising a total of 700 000 people who included 170 000 eligible children or youths. In view of the large number of prospective benefiting households, it was necessary to stagger the intake of the first round of applications in phases. Phase I would commence on 3 May 2016 and application forms would be available from April 2016. The Administration would strive to disburse the allowance to the Phase I applicants not later than July 2016. In the first round of applications, the claim period for applicants of the three phases would start from November 2015, with Phase II and Phase III applications covering a claim period longer than six months. As publicity would be stepped up in the coming months, a positive response to the Scheme was expected. The Administration would consider enhancing the

arrangement for the subsequent rounds of application for LIFA, taking into account the experience gained and the principle of prudent use of public money.

Review of Disability Allowance

18. Mr WONG Kwok-hing noted that CE had stated in his manifesto that the Administration would allow persons with loss of one limb to apply for DA, and pledged in his 2016 Policy Address to implement recommendations which were put forward by the Inter-departmental Working Group on Review of DA ("LWBWG") after completing the review of the eligibility criteria for DA ("the DA Review"). He enquired about the estimated number of beneficiaries after implementing the aforesaid recommendations, and the timetable for allowing persons with loss of one limb to benefit from DA and the Fare Concession Scheme.

19. SLW responded that as recommended by LWBWG, the Administration would amend the Medical Assessment Form ("MAF") for DA to remove the reference to "100% loss of earning capacity" and the work-related assessment criterion. In addition, the use of rehabilitation and mechanical devices (except those totally implanted) by DA applicants would be disregarded in disability assessments, with an aim to help public medical officers maintain consistencies in the assessments. With the implementation of the LWBWG's recommendations, the Administration expected that more persons with loss of one lower limb would become eligible for DA and the Fare Concession Scheme in tandem. The Panel would be briefed on the outcome of the DA Review at its meeting on 15 February 2016. Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("PS(LW)") added that the Administration intended to issue to public medical officers the revised MAF and guideline on conducting disability assessments within 2016-2017, and the above would not involve any legislative process.

Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities

20. Mr Frankie YICK said that the population of elderly persons aged 65 or above was expected to increase from 1.11 million in 2015 to 1.17 million in 2016, representing a growth rate of 5%. The Administration, however, estimated that the reimbursement of revenue forgone to public transport operators under the Fare Concession Scheme would be increased by 20% to \$1,100 million in 2016-2017. He sought justifications for such estimate.

21. SLW advised that the Fare Concession Scheme was being extended to green minibuses in phases from March 2015. In the coming year, the number of beneficiaries of the Scheme was expected to increase in view of the future extension of the Scheme to the remaining 22 green minibus routes and the growing ageing population. Coupled with the expected fare rise, the Administration estimated that the reimbursement of revenue foregone under the Fare Concession Scheme would be increased from around \$900 million in 2015-2016 to \$1,100 million in 2016-2017.

22. Noting that Hong Kong senior and disabled citizens could travel on public transport free of charge in many places on the Mainland, Mr WONG Kwok-hing urged the Administration to provide full-fare concession for eligible persons, in particular elderly persons. SLW responded that the Administration would conduct a review of the Fare Concession Scheme after its full implementation and examine whether full-fare concession could be provided under the Scheme, taking into account, inter alia, the financial implications, the implementation and coverage of the Scheme.

23. In response to the recent incident of a green minibus driver abusing the Fare Concession Scheme, Mr POON Siu-ping asked if the Administration had taken any measures to avoid the recurrence of similar incidents.

24. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen was of the view that to tackle the abuse problem, the Administration should consider directly providing beneficiaries of the Fare Concession Scheme with a subsidy through electronic means, such as a dedicated smart card, instead of reimbursing public transport operators the difference between the revenue forgone under the Scheme.

25. SLW advised that the abuse case, which was an isolated case, was found during an inspection conducted by the Transport Department ("TD"). This implied that the existing supervision system for the Fare Concession Scheme was effective. That said, TD would reinforce the supervision system to avoid abuse of the Scheme. In addition, the Administration would review the Fare Concession Scheme after its full implementation, which would cover, inter alia, the means of providing fare concession for beneficiaries.

26. Mr Frankie YICK called on the Administration to take responsive measures to avoid abuse of fare concession before reviewing the Fare Concession Scheme. For instance, the Administration should consider

requiring the production of a Senior Citizen Card for procuring an Elder Octopus. SLW explained that having considered that some elderly persons did not apply for Senior Citizen Cards, the Administration decided not to require the production of a Senior Citizen Card for procuring an Elder Octopus so as to expedite the implementation of the Fare Concession Scheme. Mr YICK, however, was of the view that elderly persons should be responsible for obtaining Senior Citizen Cards in the first instance if they would like to benefit from the Fare Concession Scheme.

Residential care homes for persons with disabilities and the elderly

27. Mr Albert HO urged the Administration to shorten the waiting time for the subsidized residential care places for persons with severe disabilities. SLW responded that the Administration was aware of the long waiting time for hostels for severely and moderately mentally handicapped persons as well as severely physically handicapped persons. To address the shortage problem of residential care service ("RCS"), the Administration planned to provide a total of 25 000 residential and day care places for persons with disabilities and elderly persons in the coming years.

28. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung said that the Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong had time and again urged the Administration to increase the provision of residential care places for the elderly. Noting that nearly 10 000 vacant places were available in some private residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs"), he suggested that the Administration should consider allocating resources to upgrade the service quality of the private RCHEs concerned so as to alleviate the acute shortage problem of RCS. To avoid giving people an impression of using public funds to subsidize private RCHEs, the Administration should consider requiring the private RCHEs concerned to register as non-profit-making organizations. He further called on the Administration to set up a dedicated fund to enhance RCS for elderly persons.

29. SLW responded that starting from 2016-2017, the Administration would progressively convert 1 200 EA2 places under the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme to higher quality EA1 places so as to improve the overall quality of private RCHEs. In addition, a consultancy study to explore the feasibility of introducing a voucher scheme on RCS for the elderly was underway. In view of the public's discussion on the service quality of RCHEs, the consultant team engaged for the study had been asked to further examine how to strengthen the monitoring of RCHEs

under the proposed Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly ("the Pilot Scheme on RCS Voucher"). Pending the completion of the consultancy report, the Administration would consider launching the Pilot Scheme on RCS Voucher, which could have the benefit of providing additional incentives for RCHE operators to improve their service standard. Moreover, the Administration was planning to merge the Licensing Office of Residential Care Homes for the Elderly and Licensing Office of Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities with an aim to strengthen the monitoring of residential care homes and training for staff members of private RCHEs.

30. Noting that the Administration would take measures to strengthen the inspection and monitoring of RCHEs and residential care homes for persons with disabilities ("RCHDs"), Mr CHAN Chi-chuen asked the Administration to provide more information about these measures. For example, the number of staff members to be increased and the number of inspections to be carried out after merging the two licensing offices of RCHEs and RCHDs, and the operation of the dedicated inspectorate teams to be set up under the Social Welfare Department ("SWD").

31. SLW responded that the 2016 Policy Address had broadly set out the policy direction, and more information about the proposed policies would be provided after the announcement of the Budget for 2016-2017. Director of Social Welfare ("DSW") gave a brief account of the measures to be taken by the Administration for strengthening the inspection and monitoring of RCHEs and RCHDs as set out in paragraph 11 of the LWB's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)624/15-16(01)). She added that the Administration was also reviewing the licensing and sanction systems for monitoring residential care homes.

32. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung was concerned about the problem of manpower shortage in residential care homes. SLW responded that to address the acute shortage of frontline care workers, the Administration had earmarked approximately \$147 million to implement the Navigation Scheme for Young Persons in Care Services. The Scheme would provide a total of 1 000 training places for young persons who were interested in working in care services in the welfare sector, so that they could develop their skills for further career development.

Supporting ageing in place for elderly persons

33. Noting that the long waiting time for RCHEs was a long-standing problem, Mr Albert HO asked if the Administration would set a

benchmark to improve the provision of community care services ("CCS") for elderly persons. SLW responded that according to a study conducted by the University of Hong Kong, there were many premature admissions to RCHEs due to the inadequate provision of CCS for elderly persons. To address the problem, the Administration would continue strengthening the provision of CCS by increasing places of day care centres/units for the elderly. A total of 1 666 additional places of the Enhanced Home and Community Care Services had already commenced service from mid-2015. Moreover, the Administration would strive to increase the supply of RCS and improve the service quality of private RCHEs.

34. Regarding the proposed pilot scheme on providing training for foreign domestic helpers to enhance their knowledge and skill in taking care of elderly persons, Mr POON Siu-ping asked whether the Administration would impose a condition requiring participating domestic helpers to provide elderly care services in Hong Kong for a certain period of time after the completion of the training. SLW responded that the aforesaid pilot scheme was at a preliminary conceptual stage. He said that Mr POON's suggestion would be considered, and other suggestions on the implementation details of the pilot scheme were welcomed.

35. Mr TANG Ka-piu said that there was a great demand for care and support services for demented persons. He sought information about the duration and coverage of the proposed pilot scheme on providing dementia care services under the Community Care Fund. DSW advised that the implementation of the pilot scheme would be based on a medical-social collaboration model to provide dementia care services for elderly persons with mild or mild to moderate dementia in the community through the District Elderly Community Centres. The Administration intended to launch the pilot scheme in this financial year.

Child care services and after-school support

36. Mr Albert HO said that in the face of inadequate provision of child care services, many mothers were not able to go to work as they had to take care of their children. SLW responded that from 2015-2016 onwards, the Administration would increase in phases the provision of about 5 000 extended hours service ("EHS") places at aided standalone child care centres and kindergarten-cum-child care centres in districts with high demand, among which about 1 200 places had been provided starting from September 2015. Moreover, the after-school care service for children aged between six to 12 were available in different districts all

year round except during the 12 days of statutory holiday to strengthen the support for working parents. The Administration would continue enhancing child care services to unleash women labour force.

37. The Chairman said that some child care centres had reflected that the amount of subvention was inadequate for them to hire sufficient manpower to tie in with the provision of the about 1 200 EHS places. DSW responded that the aided standalone child care centres and kindergarten-cum-child care centres concerned had agreed with the amount of subvention for the provision of the about 1 200 EHS places, which had already been in operation since September 2015. That said, the Administration would continue to closely liaise with the aforesaid centres to keep in view the service utilization and the manpower supply in different districts, and review the amount of subvention at an appropriate time.

38. In response to the Chairman's question about the details of the Pilot Project on Child Care Training for Grandparents, SLW responded that the aforesaid Pilot Project aimed at enhancing child care to release women labour force and reinforcing family support between generations. Under the Pilot Project, a total of 540 training places would be provided across the territory, and the training programme provided would be devised according to the Employees Retraining Board's training courses on infant/child care. Subject to the outcome of the Pilot Project, the Administration would consider providing more training places in future.

Supporting children with special needs

39. Agreeing that early identification of children with special needs was important, Mr Albert HO sought information on the Administration's intervention services for such children. SLW responded that "early identification, timely intervention" had all along been the Administration's policy direction in providing services and support for children with special needs. In November 2015, the Administration launched the two-year Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services to provide timely support for 2 925 children with special needs who were studying in kindergartens or kindergarten-cum-child care centres as well as their parents and teachers. The Lotteries Fund had allocated over \$420 million for the implementation of the Pilot Scheme. As a breakthrough, the Administration had already earmarked \$470 million as recurrent spending for regularizing the Scheme after the two-year pilot period with an aim to gradually increase the provision of pre-school rehabilitation places to 7 000. The Administration targeted to

achieve "zero-waiting" for pre-school rehabilitation services so as to facilitate the integration of children with special needs into the mainstream education.

40. Dr Fernando CHEUNG commended that the Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-School Rehabilitation Services could address the needs of children with special needs. He, however, noted with concern that the aforesaid Pilot Scheme would provide each participating child with around 60 training hours, among which 10 hours had to be spent on attending early education and training centres ("EETCs") equipped with the necessary facilities and therapy and training services. Given that some children with special needs did not require the services provided by EETCs, the Administration should allow more flexibility in the use of the training hours. PS(LW) advised that in response to the demand for the EETC services, the Administration had requested the non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") participating in the Pilot Scheme to arrange for their service users to attend EETCs, in addition to receiving on-site rehabilitation services. However, service users would have the flexibility in obtaining various services under the Pilot Scheme to address their special needs.

41. Mr Albert HO said that many middle-class parents of children with special needs were interested in the Administration's proposal of examining the feasibility of setting up a public trust. He sought more information on the aforesaid proposal. PS(LW) advised that the Administration would examine the feasibility of setting up a public trust with an aim to address some parents' concern about the care arrangements for their children with special needs after they passed away. A working group with LWB, SWD and the Department of Justice would be set up to take forward the issue. Other stakeholders including NGOs concerned, parent groups and academics would be engaged in the process. The Administration might also study overseas practices in relation to the provision of public trusts.

42. Dr Fernando CHEUNG declared that if the Administration decided to set up a public trust, he might be one of the beneficiaries of the new measure. He urged the Administration to establish a framework for setting up a public trust in the current term with a view to facilitating the necessary legislative amendments.

Prevention of youth suicide

43. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed grave concern that in the past six

months, there were over 20 student suicide incidents, which caused the death of 15 students. Given that the report findings of the Child Fatality Review Panel which covered child death cases occurred in the period concerned were expected to lag behind by four years, he called on the Administration to consider commissioning a professional organization, such as the Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention ("CSRP") of the University of Hong Kong, to conduct a study on the suicide cases, and make recommendations to address the problem.

44. SLW responded that the Administration was concerned about the problem of student suicide which was a complicated issue. To address the problem, it was crucial for school social workers to early identify suicidal symptoms of students and render timely assistance to them. Support services were also provided for young people by the Integrated Family Service Centres and the Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres. Noting that CSRP had conducted many analyses on the profile of suicide cases in Hong Kong, the Administration would continue to closely liaise with and consider the recommendations made by CSRP to further enhance the support for young people.

Social enterprises

45. Considering that the commercial sector was not interested in providing support for social enterprises ("SEs"), Mr Albert HO asked about the number of SEs which were funded by the Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme ("the ESR Programme") and had been in operation for five or more years.

46. USHA responded that under the ESR Programme which was launched in 2006, around 80% of SEs were in operation after completion of the funding period, and about 60% of SEs were able to break even or even make a profit. The aforesaid figures were considered encouraging given that in Hong Kong and other countries, only 30% to 40% of small and medium enterprises could sustain their business. In recent years, the commercial sector had provided increasing support for SEs. For example, some private companies had invested in SE businesses, supported caring consumption, offered rental concession to SEs and promoted services of SEs to their customers. The Administration would continue supporting cross-sectoral collaboration to facilitate the development of SEs, thereby promoting the culture of "Business for Good" and a caring community.

47. Mr Albert HO asked if the Administration would allow an applicant organization, who had failed to run an ESR-funded project, to submit

another SE project proposal to apply for funding again under the ESR Programme. USHA responded that the ESR Advisory Committee would assess applications for the ESR Programme on an individual basis.

48. Mr Frederick FUNG was of the view that the Administration should implement measures to promote the development of SEs by creating a supportive business environment, e.g. setting aside a certain number of government's service contracts for bidding by SEs only, and encouraging the commercial sector to outsource more services to SEs. USHA responded that it was inappropriate for the Administration to set aside a certain number of government's service contracts for bidding by SEs only as it would give rise to the concern about unfair competition with the business sector. That said, the Administration would continue enhancing the public recognition of and support for SEs, and appealing to the commercial sector as well as government bureaux/departments to support caring consumption and cross-sectoral collaboration to enable sustainable growth of SEs.

Measures to help the disadvantaged cope with very cold weather

49. The Deputy Chairman called on the Administration to consider establishing a mechanism to help the disadvantaged who were not able to take care of themselves cope with very cold weather. She was of the view that single elderly persons should be informed of the forecast of very cold weather as early as possible. In addition, the Administration should consider providing residential care homes with guideline which set out measures to be taken when the temperature fell below a specific level, and requesting subvented homes to install heaters to protect their residents against very cold weather.

50. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed grave concern about the needs of street sleepers and residents of residential care homes as well as single elderly persons in extremely cold weather. Considering that the formulation of guidelines would take time, he urged the Administration to remind residential care homes to be cautious of cold weather, and carry out inspections to those homes as soon as possible to ensure that adequate care was provided for their residents in cold days.

51. SLW advised that in response to the cold spell, SWD had requested all the 241 District Elderly Community Centres and Neighbourhood Elderly Centres as well as the NGOs servicing the disadvantaged to provide appropriate support for the needy. With available resources from donation, warm clothing and food (e.g. cup noodles, biscuits, etc.) would

be available for distribution to the needy. Besides, SWD had appealed to the social worker teams, volunteer teams and community groups to give extra care to the disadvantaged, especially single elderly persons. At the same time, the Integrated Services Teams for Street Sleepers which were subvented by SWD had provided blankets, warm clothing and other relevant materials for street sleepers and encouraged them to move into temporary cold shelters. In addition, SWD would remind residential care homes to take necessary measures to enhance the care for their residents in cold weather. Agreeing that a mechanism should be set up for reminding the public to be cautious of very cold weather, he said that the Administration would capitalize on the experience in dealing with issues arising from extremely cold weather and comprehensively review the related measures.

52. In response to Mr CHAN Chi-chuen's question on whether the Administration had provided RCHEs with guidelines on measures to be taken under very cold weather, DSW responded that the Administration would continue monitoring the operation of RCHEs and issuing guidelines and circulars to them if necessary. Under the existing Code of Practice for Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons), all RCHEs were required to provide a safe environment and services at a reasonable level for their residents. As the aforesaid Code of Practice was under review, the Administration would consider reviewing the related guidelines to enhance the care for the elderly residents in extremely cold weather.

53. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that some temporary cold shelters requested for advance booking of services. In addition, all shelters did not provide hot soup but only one hot meal each day for each service user. He strongly urged the Administration to strengthen the services of the temporary cold shelters, such as providing sufficient hot meals and warm clothing, as well as hot drinks during the opening hours. The Chairman was of the view that the shelters should ensure continuous supply of hot water if no hot soup could be provided.

54. USHA advised that all the 17 temporary cold shelters under the Home Affairs Department ("HAD") would be open when the cold weather warning was in force, and all shelters would provide hot meals (including hot soup) and hot water as well as other food items such as cup noodles and biscuits to every shelter user during the opening hours. While the utilization rate of shelters in different districts varied, this would not affect the level of provision. She undertook to relay Dr CHEUNG's views to HAD for consideration.

55. Whilst appreciating the Administration's efforts in improving welfare services in the past few years, Mr TANG Ka-piu expressed grave concern about the recent cleansing operations conducted in cold weather which had wetted the beddings of some street sleepers. He called on the Administration to be more considerate about the needs of street sleepers and immediately suspend the cleansing operations in cold weather at places where street sleepers were staying. SLW undertook to liaise with the bureaux and departments concerned to follow up the issue as soon as practicable.

56. Noting that there was an elderly couple who lacked warm items, Mr LEUNG Che-cheung asked if SWD could provide them with timely support. SLW responded that persons in need could call SWD's hotline at 2343 2255 or the relevant District Offices for assistance. He added that SWD's officers had already liaised with the elderly couple concerned, and would visit them in that afternoon to provide warm items.

II. Any other business

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
13 May 2016