

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)122/17-18
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 8 May 2017, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex

- Members present** : Hon SHIU Ka-chun (Chairman)
Hon KWONG Chun-yu (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon CHAN Hak-kan, BBS, JP
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP
Hon CHAN Chi-chuen
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, BBS, MH, JP
Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki
Hon KWOK Wai-keung
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH
Hon Andrew WAN Siu-kin
Hon CHU Hoi-dick
Dr Hon Junius HO Kwan-yiu, JP
Hon YUNG Hoi-yan
Dr Hon Pierre CHAN
Hon Nathan LAW Kwun-chung
Dr Hon LAU Siu-lai
- Members absent** : Hon Alvin YEUNG
Hon HUI Chi-fung

Member attending : Dr Hon Elizabeth QUAT, JP

[According to the Judgment of the Court of First Instance of the High Court on 14 July 2017, LEUNG Kwok-hung, Nathan LAW Kwun-chung, YIU Chung-yim and LAU Siu-lai have been disqualified from assuming the office of a member of the Legislative Council, and have vacated the same since 12 October 2016, and are not entitled to act as a member of the Legislative Council.]

Public Officers attending : Item III

Miss Leonia TAI, JP
Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr Kenneth CHENG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare
(Welfare) 1
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Ms Karyn CHAN
Principal Assistant Secretary (Civic Affairs) 2
Home Affairs Bureau

Mr FUNG Man-chung
Assistant Director (Family and Child Welfare)
Social Welfare Department

Ms Annisa MA Sau-ching
Chief Social Work Officer (Domestic Violence)
Social Welfare Department

Item IV

Mr Gordon CHONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare
(Welfare) 4
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr Vincent FUNG Hao-yin
Principal Assistant Secretary (Civic Affairs)1

Home Affairs Bureau

Miss Vega WONG, JP
Assistant Director (4)
Home Affairs Department

Ms Maria LAU
Assistant Director (Social Security)
Social Welfare Department

Mr Alfred LEE
Assistant Director (Strategic Planning)
Housing Department

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

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

Miss Alison HUI
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

Action

I. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

Members noted that no paper had been issued since the last meeting.

II. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1318/16-17(01) and (02)]

2. The Chairman said that the Administration had proposed to discuss "Mental health community support services" at the next meeting scheduled for 12 June 2017. As the Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy would meet with deputations and the Administration on "Community support services for mentally ill and ex-mentally ill persons" at its meeting on 29 May 2017, he suggested that the Panel should instead discuss "Review of effectiveness of Low-income Working Family Allowance Scheme" and "Management of projects financed by Lotteries

Action

Fund" at the next meeting. Members agreed.

(Post-meeting note: Members were informed vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1466/16-17 dated 22 May 2017 that as instructed by the Chairman, the discussion item "Management of projects financed by Lotteries Fund" had been replaced by "Transparency of salary and cash allowance for senior management of social welfare organizations".)

III. The proposed legislation to implement the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission Report on Child Custody and Access and relevant support measures

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1318/16-17(03) and (04)]

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)1 ("DS(W)1") briefed members on the outcome of the public consultation exercise conducted between November 2015 and March 2016 on the proposed legislation to implement the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission Report on Child Custody and Access ("the proposed legislation") and relevant support measures, as well as the current development.

Enhancing support services for divorced families

4. Dr Elizabeth QUAT said that being a master degree holder of Marriage and Family Therapy, she was required to handle divorce cases. She declared that she did not have any direct pecuniary interests in handling such cases. While supporting the parental responsibility model ("the Model"), she expressed concern that the proposed legislation might not be able to achieve its objectives. Given that currently there were inadequate support services for divorced families, implementing the proposed legislation hastily might backfire. Many divorced parents had disputes over matters such as maintenance and if they were required under the law to meet in relation to children matters, there might be more conflicts or family tragedies, which in turn would be harmful to the children. Before implementing the proposed legislation, the Administration should consider setting up one-stop service centres to provide counselling services and advice for parents on how to become good parents even after divorce. An intermediary body for assisting divorced parents in collecting maintenance payments should also be set up and cash advances should be provided for divorced parents who were unable to collect maintenance payments to help them tide over financial difficulties.

Action

5. DS(W)1 responded that among the views collected by the Administration, 34.5% supported the implementation of the proposed legislation at this stage and 20% supported the proposed legislation in principle but requested for additional support measures and resources before implementing the proposed legislation. In consultation with the Department of Justice and other relevant government bureaux and departments, the Labour and Welfare Bureau was in the progress of revising the proposed legislation with reference to the comments received during the public consultation exercise. The Social Welfare Department ("SWD") had also strengthened support services for separated/divorced/divorcing families. To facilitate the arrangement of children's contacts with non-residing parents, SWD strengthened the visitation services by launching a two-year Pilot Project on Children Contact Service ("the Pilot Project") in September 2016. The Hong Kong Family Welfare Society ("HKFWS"), to which the Pilot Project was commissioned, was required to take up cases and formulate service plans agreeable to both parents concerned upon receipt of referrals or self-approach by both or either parent(s). In addition, SWD had tailor-made a psycho-educational programme for separated/divorced/divorcing parents and provided training on co-parenting/parenting coordination for frontline social workers. The Integrated Family Service Centres/Integrated Services Centres ("IFSCs/ISCs") would continue to provide services to support separated/divorced/divorcing families.

6. Dr Elizabeth QUAT said that as services provided by IFSCs were not specifically for divorced families, IFSCs could not serve the same purpose as one-stop service centres for divorced families. Dr KWOK Ka-ki said that although the welfare sector had reiterated its concern that the existing services offered by IFSCs could not meet the service needs of divorced families, the Administration had done very little in enhancing the support for divorced families on matters such as custody and maintenance. Counseling services should not only be available for divorced couples but also for couples who had marriage problems and these services should be provided by experienced social workers. Given that many domestic violence cases and family tragedies were related to disputes about children custody, he worried that mandating divorced parents to adopt the Model might trigger more domestic violence cases. Since around one-third of the views collected by the Administration had objected the proposed legislation and there were insufficient support services for divorced families, the proposed legislation should not be implemented at this stage. He enquired when the Administration would provide the required support services for divorced families and the resources allocated to these services.

7. Assistant Director (Family and Child Welfare) ("AD(Family and Child Welfare)") responded that IFSCs/ISCs' services also covered marriage counseling services. In addition to IFSCs/ISCs, SWD's Family and Child Protective Services Units ("FCPSUs") provided specialized services for separated/divorced/divorcing families, particularly families having custody disputes referred by the courts. Six additional training programmes had been provided for frontline social workers to enrich their knowledge and understanding on parenting coordination as well as mediation services. DS(W)1 supplemented that the Administration would keep in view the implementation of the Pilot Project and continue to strengthen support services for separated/divorced/divorcing families irrespective of whether the proposed legislation would be implemented. The Administration would study the suggestion of providing more complementary support services to tie in with the proposed legislation.

8. In response to the enquiries of the Chairman and Dr KWOK Ka-ki, DS(W)1 said that a grant of about \$7.5 million was made from the Lotteries Fund to implement the Pilot Project. Dr KWOK Ka-ki regretted the small amount of funds allocated to the Pilot Project. The Chairman said that in the light of the high divorce rate in Hong Kong, such a small amount of funds for the Pilot Project were insufficient to meet the service needs of divorced families.

9. Mr POON Siu-ping said that the community had not reached a consensus on the proposed legislative regime as 34.5% of the views collected by the Administration objected the proposed legislation. He asked why the Administration still planned to introduce the proposed legislation to the Council in 2018 and how the Administration would respond to the dissenting views. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung opined that the proposed legislation was not supported by the majority of the community. The Administration should accede to the request for additional measures and resources for divorced families before implementing the proposed legislation. Mr LEUNG Che-cheung said that the Model was advantageous to children and should be implemented eventually. However, many divorced parents were facing problems in relation to housing, maintenance and relationship with their children, etc. The proposed legislation might worsen these problems and it would be costly for the Administration to remedy. Given that 34.5% of the views received by the Administration objected the proposed legislation, the Administration should first address the concern about inadequate support for divorced families prior to implementing the proposed legislation.

Action

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10. DS(W)1 responded that the Administration would study the views received during the public consultation exercise carefully and revise some provisions of the proposed legislation having regard to these views. The Administration would then consider internally whether to implement the proposed legislation. If the proposed legislation were to be implemented, it could be introduced to the Legislative Council in early 2018 at the earliest. The major dissenting views were about the practicality of the Model and inadequate support services for divorced families. SWD had strengthened support measures for separated/divorced/divorcing families and would continue to explore possible ways to enhance these measures regardless of whether the proposed legislation would be implemented. The Chairman said that the Administration should consider carefully the impact of implementation of the proposed legislation without support services on divorced families. At Ms YUNG Hoi-yan's request, DS(W)1 undertook to provide the number of written submissions received during the consultation period which supported and objected the proposed legislation, broken down by associations/groups and individuals.

(Post-meeting note: The Administration's response was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1540/16-17(01) on 31 May 2017.)

11. Taking the view that both the Model and the existing concept of custody under the family law shared the best interests principle and parents should be well aware of their parental responsibilities, Ms YUNG Hoi-yan considered it unnecessary to make law to mandate the continuing responsibilities of divorced parents towards their children. She expressed concern that the proposed legislation might bring about more court cases, thereby imposing a burden on the Family Court. Support services for divorced families should be strengthened and resources for providing such services should be increased. As frontline social workers were required to accompany divorced parents during visitation, she asked whether the Administration would provide more support for frontline social workers such as improving the visitation arrangements and providing more venues for visitation.

12. DS(W)1 responded that the existing family law defined parent-child relationship in terms of the "rights and authority" that parents had over their children, whilst the Model attempted to introduce the concept of continuing parental responsibilities of both parents even after divorce/separation. The enhanced training on co-parenting/parenting coordination mentioned earlier was not meant solely for the Pilot Project

Action

but also for all frontline social workers of IFSCs/ISCs and FCPSUs to facilitate their handling of cases from separated/divorced/divorcing families.

Setting up parent-child contact centres in various districts

13. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that there was only one parent-child contact centre ("PCCC") under the Pilot Project which was far from adequate to meet the demand. The Administration should set up at least five PCCCs in various districts. Opining that PCCC's services were useful for divorced parents who could not reach consensus on visitation arrangements, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung shared Dr CHEUNG's view on the provision of more PCCCs. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that if divorced women who were victims of domestic violence had to meet their ex-spouses for matters relating to maintenance and visitation, it might pose a danger to these women. To assist these women, the Administration should seriously consider setting up a maintenance board and providing more PCCCs. The Deputy Chairman asked whether the Administration would provide subsidy for the PCCC under the Pilot Project so that it could expand its service capacity.

14. DS(W)1 responded that the current provision of social workers for the Pilot Project was based on the existing caseload. HKFWS would keep in view the service demand and allocate more resources to the Pilot Project if necessary. SWD would collect stakeholders' views on the Pilot Project and evaluate its effectiveness for mapping out the way forward (e.g. setting up more PCCCs if considered necessary) taking into account the availability of resources. In response to Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's enquiry about the scope of the evaluation of the Pilot Project, DS(W)1 said that the evaluation would cover service mode, manpower provision and effectiveness of the Pilot Project.

15. Ms YUNG Hoi-yan enquired about the number of users of and the staff provision for the PCCC under the Pilot Project as well as the effectiveness of the Pilot Project. The Chairman, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung and Mr POON Siu-ping sought information on the utilization rate of the PCCC concerned and the progress of the Pilot Project. AD(Family and Child Welfare) responded that the PCCC under the Pilot Project was expected to handle 135 cases a year. As at May 2017, 55 cases were being handled by the PCCC concerned and four social workers were currently deployed to that PCCC. HKFWS had approached lawyers, judges and welfare coordinating committees in various districts to promote the PCCC's services. SWD maintained close contact with HKFWS on the progress of the Pilot Project and would

Action

review the Pilot Project with a view to better addressing the needs of separated/divorced/divorcing parents and their children. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that there were around 400 divorce cases a year and according to HKFWS, the PCCC's services had already been fully booked. As such, the capacity of the PCCC under the Pilot Project could not cater for the service demand. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that a visit to the PCCC under the Pilot Project should be arranged to understand its operation.

(Post-meeting note: A visit to the PCCC under the Pilot Project was conducted on 27 June 2017.)

Setting up a maintenance board

16. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that in view of insufficient provision of support services for divorced families, the public had great reservation about the law reform on child custody and access. Countries such as Australia and England, which had replaced their child custody laws with laws putting the Model in place, had reservation about the Model. While supporting the underlying principle of the Model (i.e. the best interests of children should guide all proceedings concerning children ("the best interests principle")), he did not see how the best interests principle could be put into practice under the proposed legislation. Many divorced couples already had conflicts, some divorced couples had refused to pay maintenance to their ex-spouses and some divorced families had a history of domestic violence. Forcing these parents to make major decisions together for their children might create distress to the parties concerned. The Administration should first set up a maintenance board before proposing the law reform on child custody and access.

17. The Deputy Chairman said that many divorced fathers had refused to pay maintenance to their ex-spouses but the Administration had not provided any assistance for these divorced mothers to collect maintenance payments. It also lacked a mechanism for recovery of maintenance in arrears. The Administration should put in place adequate support measures for divorced families and increase the resources for providing these services.

18. Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (Civic Affairs)2 ("PAS(CA)2") responded that the Administration was committed to enhancing the effectiveness of the system of collection of maintenance payments and enforcement of maintenance orders. The Administration

Action

had carefully examined the suggestion of setting up a maintenance board before and considered that a maintenance board would unlikely bring, to either the maintenance payees or taxpayers, any significant benefits over and above those which could be achieved by improving the existing system. In response to the Panel's requests at its meetings on 22 February and 13 June 2016, the Administration had provided members with information on the measures taken to improve the system of maintenance (LC Paper No. CB(2)807/16-17(01)). The Home Affairs Bureau would commission a study through the Family Council to examine various divorce-related issues including the collection of maintenance payments and enforcement of maintenance orders in Hong Kong with reference to maintenance systems of other jurisdictions. The study would also include collection of stakeholders' views and concerns through questionnaires, focus groups and/or interviews. The Administration would report the findings of the study to the Panel on Home Affairs when ready and consider the way forward taking into account the results of the study.

19. The Chairman said that according to a survey on maintenance conducted jointly by The Hong Kong Council of Social Service ("HKCSS") and Hong Kong Baptist University ("HKBU"), more than 80% of the respondents who were not paid maintenance did not take any action in recovering maintenance in arrears because the legal process was too complicated or their ex-spouses could not be located. Taking the view that the community had been calling for the establishment of a maintenance board for many years, the Chairman and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that it was unnecessary to conduct any study in this regard. They called on the Administration to set up a maintenance board swiftly.

20. PAS(CA)2 responded that the previous review on the maintenance system by the Administration was conducted in 1999-2000. Since the information and statistics related to maintenance currently available was rather limited and not comprehensive and there were new developments of maintenance systems in some other jurisdictions, the Administration had consulted the relevant sub-committee of the Family Council in March 2017 on conducting a study to better understand the current situation of the enforcement of maintenance orders in Hong Kong and selected jurisdictions among other things. It was expected that tender invitations for the study would be issued within 2017. Meanwhile, the Administration would keep in view the enforcement situation of maintenance orders. She further said that the Administration noted the recommendation made in the survey conducted by HKCSS and HKBU on enhancement of public education on matters relating to maintenance.

Action

Publicity and public education measures with respect to maintenance had been launched since 2001 and as at 2016-2017, the Administration had subsidised over 70 community participation programmes in relation to maintenance. The Administration would continue with the publicity and public education work. In response to Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's enquiry about whether the Administration had any intention to set up a maintenance board, PAS(CA)2 said that the Administration would need to collect and analyse relevant data before coming up with a conclusion.

21. Dr LAU Siu-lai said that around 90% of divorced mothers had not taken any actions to recover defaults on maintenance not because they did not have financial needs but because they could not afford the time to go through the complicated legal procedures. Some divorced mothers were assaulted by their ex-spouses during visitation and this had caused psychological distress to their children. Mandating divorced parents to have joint custody of their children without adequate support might create traumas to these families. Before implementing the proposed legislation, divorced parents should first be educated on parental responsibilities. Visitation arrangements should be improved and a maintenance board should be set up to assist divorced mothers in collecting maintenance payments so as to alleviate their financial burden.

22. In view of the doubts about whether replacing the concept of "ownership" by "parental responsibility" could make things better for divorced parents and their children, Mr KWOK Wai-keung opined that the Administration should first improve the existing arrangements for recovery of maintenance in arrears and visitation. He said that he had come across a case in which the court had awarded the father the right of access to the child although the father did not pay maintenance and had harassed his ex-spouse. The father's access to the child had caused a lot of distress to the mother and the child. He enquired about the assistance the Administration could offer to the mother and the child. The Chairman said that some divorced women who had been battered by their ex-spouses considered it a torture if they were required to contact their ex-spouse for maintenance payments. DS(W)1 responded that a statutory checklist of factors to assist the court in children proceedings in determining what would be in the best interests of the child was proposed in the draft Children Proceedings (Parental Responsibility) Bill. Following the enactment of the proposed legislation, a parent concerned could apply to the court for forbidding access of the other parent to the child. SWD would provide the required assistance for separated/divorced/divorcing families and women who were vulnerable to domestic violence.

Action

23. The Chairman asked whether there would be a cut in the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") payments if CSSA recipients had received maintenance payments. He was given to understand that these CSSA recipients had to produce proof to SWD that they had taken actions to recover defaults on maintenance and had to wait for six months before they could receive the deducted CSSA payments. AD(Child and Family Welfare) responded that maintenance was counted as income and the amount of CSSA payments for maintenance recipients would be deducted correspondingly. Maintenance payees who were unable to collect the maintenance should inform SWD's Social Security Field Unit ("SSFU"). The concerned SSFU would look into the cases and consider exercising discretion on a case-by-case basis. These maintenance payees could also approach the Legal Aid Department for assistance in recovering the maintenance, if necessary.

24. The Deputy Chairman suggested that the Panel should receive deputations' views on the proposed legislation and related support measures. Members agreed.

Motion

25. Dr Fernando CHEUNG moved the following motion:

"鑒於公眾對於香港子女管養權及探視權的法律改革在未有足夠的服務支援下很有保留，本委員會認為政府應先成立'贍養費管理局'，協助單親家庭尋求財政支援，加強預防離異及支援離異家庭，並及早在各區設立'探視中心'，在具體服務上推動父母責任。"

(Translation)

"Given that the public, in view of the insufficient provision of service support, has great reservation about the law reform on child custody and access in Hong Kong, this Panel considers that the Government should first set up a 'maintenance board', assist single-parent families to seek financial support, enhance the prevention of divorce and support divorced families, and set up expeditiously 'visitation centres' in various districts, so as to promote parental responsibilities through specific services."

26. The Chairman put the motion to vote. All members present voted for the motion. The Chairman declared that the motion was carried.

IV. Support services for singletons

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1318/16-17(05)]

27. At the invitation of the Chairman, Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)⁴ ("PAS(W)⁴") briefed members on the existing welfare, housing and other support services provided by the Administration for singletons.

Formulating policies on singletons

28. Dr KWOK Ka-ki said that many support services (e.g. Family Support Programme) which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)1318/16-17(05)) were not dedicated for singletons. Although the Hong Kong Housing Authority had introduced the Quota and Point System ("QPS") to rationalize and re-prioritize public rental housing ("PRH") allocation to non-elderly one-person applicants, the waiting time of singletons for PRH was very long. In his view, there were literally no policies targeted at singletons. PAS(W)⁴ responded that the various support services administered by SWD provided assistance to needy individuals and families, including singletons, having regard to their individual circumstances. Social workers would refer them to the support services according to their needs. Dr KWOK Ka-ki said that the integrated family services were unable to address the service needs of singletons. He expressed dissatisfaction about the content of the Administration's paper as it did not provide any information on the service needs of singletons.

29. The Chairman said that according to the relevant statistics, the number of singletons had increased from 367 653 in 2006 to 459 015 in 2016. In view of the substantial increase in the number of singletons, support services which were targeted at singletons should be provided. Given that singletons were not eligible for the Low-income Working Family Allowance ("LIFA"), Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Transport ("WITS") and many CCF's programmes and the Administration's support services were family-based, the Chairman, Dr LAU Siu-lai and Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung took the view that the Administration's existing policies were discriminating against singletons. Dr LAU Siu-lai said that the Administration had abolished the Community Care Fund ("CCF")'s One-off Living Subsidy Programme for the low-income households who were neither public housing tenants nor recipients of CSSA (hereunder referred to as the "N have-nots") and most CSSA recipients who were paying a rent exceeding the maximum rent allowance ("MRA") under the CSSA Scheme were singletons. Given that there were only a small number of PRH quotas for non-elderly

Action

singletons, they needed to wait for some 30 years before they were allocated a PRH unit. Some singletons who could not afford expensive rental of sub-divided units had become street sleepers. It was unlikely that the living standard of singletons could be improved unless they were provided with adequate support services. She urged the Administration to increase MRA for one-person households to the same level as that for a two-person household and re-launch the CCF's One-off Living Subsidy Programme for the "N have-nots".

30. PAS(W)4 responded that different measures were provided to meet the needs of different needy groups. The LIFA Scheme was introduced with a view to relieving the financial burden of the low-income working families not receiving CSSA and to encourage self-reliance of these families through employment. To alleviate intergenerational poverty, a Child Allowance would be provided for each eligible child in a LIFA family. The implementation of the Statutory Minimum Wage provided employees with wage protection and singletons who worked full-time would also benefit. Since 2013, the WITS Scheme had been revised to cover eligible singletons.

Increasing the supply of singleton hostel places

31. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that singletons, especially male singletons, received the least support from the Administration. Many singletons' housing needs had not been met as the waiting time for PRH was very long and many singleton CSSA recipients were paying a rent exceeding MRA. There remained only two singleton hostels (the Sunrise House in Sham Shui Po and the High Street House in Sai Ying Pun) under the Home Affairs Department ("HAD")'s Singleton Hostel Programme ("SHP"). These hostels provided 580 places which were far from adequate to meet the demand and there was a long waiting list for these places. He enquired whether HAD would consider acceding to some concern groups' request for constructing more urban hostels for singletons. Noting that there were once altogether 28 singleton hostels under SHP but only Sunrise House and High Street House were still in operation, the Chairman and Mr Nathan LAW enquired about the status and existing usage of the other 26 singleton hostels under SHP.

32. Assistant Director(4)(HAD)("AD(4)(HAD)") responded that SHP under HAD was a designated project to tie in with the introduction of the licensing regime under the Bedspace Apartments Ordinance (Cap. 447) ("the Ordinance") implemented in 1994. The objective of SHP was to provide short-term accommodation for those bedspace lodgers affected by the implementation of the Ordinance, so that they could arrange for

Action

long-term accommodation during the transitional period. There were once 28 singleton hostels under SHP among which 26 were managed by the Agency for Volunteer Service, while the Sunrise House and High Street House were managed by NGOs. As the number of lodgers affected by the Ordinance had significantly declined over the years, the 26 singleton hostels managed by the Agency for Volunteer Service were phased out by 2009 and all the 26 premises were returned to their owners. The average occupancy rate of Sunrise House and High Street House was around 85% and the number of bedspaces available under SHP were adequate to meet the demand from lodgers affected by the Ordinance.

33. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that while only several thousand of lodgers were affected by the Ordinance, there were several hundred thousands of singletons in need of housing assistance. Besides, there were some 80 000 families living in sub-divided units and the average waiting time for Sunrise House and High Street House was around one year. He queried HAD's statement that the existing supply of singleton hostel places could fully meet the service needs.

(Post-meeting note: HAD had advised that according to the information provided by Sunrise House in May 2017, the average waiting time for admission of male and female applicants was one to two months and 11 to 12 months respectively. For High Street House, the average waiting time was 74 days.)

34. The Chairman said that while the number of lodgers of bedspace apartments had declined, the number of singletons living in sub-divided units had increased substantially. Hence, there was a growing need for singleton hostels. He further said that as Sunrise House and High Street House served people aged from 18 to 59 years old who were living alone in small private housing (living area of less than 5.5 square meters), street sleepers were not eligible for the Programme. Dr Fernando CHEUNG, Mr CHAN Chi-chuen and Mr Nathan LAW said that the housing needs of singletons living in sub-divided units still needed to be addressed although the number of bedspace apartments had diminished. Instead of sticking to the original objective of the Programme, the Administration should formulate new policies to address the housing needs of singletons living in sub-divided units and increase the provision of singleton hostel places. Dr LAU Siu-lai said that the Administration should review its housing policies and singleton hostel policies. The supply, area and accommodation period of singleton hostel places should be increased. AD(4)(HAD) responded that SHP was not intended to provide long-term accommodation to singletons. The eligibility criteria for admission into Sunrise House and High Street House had been relaxed to cover

Action

compassionate cases referred by SWD and NGOs. As Sunrise House and High Street House could fully meet the service needs, HAD had no plan to expand the Programme. The Chairman opined that the utilization rate of both Sunrise House and High Street House was in effect 100%, taking into account the turnover of occupants.

35. Mr CHAN Chi-chuen said that in the light of a growing number of singletons in society because more and more people chose not to get married or were divorced, the Administration should address the problem of lacking support for singletons. The Chief Executive had announced the implementation of the Youth Hostel Scheme ("YHS") in his 2011 Policy Address but none of the six projects under YHS had commenced operation. He suggested that the Administration should consider relaxing the age requirements for YHS and allow singletons to apply for hostels under YHS. Principal Assistant Secretary (Civic Affairs)¹ responded that YHS was a youth development initiative and target tenants of YHS were not confined to single youth. Two-person households meeting the eligible criteria could also apply for YHS. YHS started with two projects on a pilot basis and currently there were six YHS projects. One of these projects was under construction, the other one was at its design stage and the rest of the projects were under planning. It was expected that an 80-place youth hostel under YHS would commence operation in end-2018.

Setting target time for provision of suitable housing for singletons

36. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that QPS was of little help in solving the housing problems of singletons. Many singletons were homeless and in dire straits. He enquired whether the Administration would conduct a comprehensive review of the existing policies and improve its support for singletons. PAS(W)⁴ responded that it was a standing practice of the Administration to keep in view the implementation of existing services and consider enhancements as necessary. While the Administration did not have any plan at this stage to review the support services for singletons, the Administration would continue to monitor the situation as appropriate.

37. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung said that as older QPS applicants had priority over younger QPS applicants in PRH allocation, the waiting time of the latter would be prolonged whenever new QPS applicants who were relatively aged were added to the waiting list for PRH. As such, QPS applicants were unable to have an idea of how long they had to wait for PRH. To address this long-standing problem, he suggested that two

Action

waiting lists for QPS applicants should be prepared, one for older QPS applicants and the other for younger QPS applicants.

38. In response to the Chairman's enquiry about the average waiting time for PRH of non-elderly singletons, Assistant Director (Strategic Planning) ("AD(SP)") said that the average waiting time for elderly one-person applicants was around 2.6 years. Given limited PRH resources, priority was accorded to family applicants and elderly one-person applicants, with the target of providing the first flat offer at around three years on average. On the other hand, there was no target waiting time for non-elderly one-person applicants under QPS, and the Housing Department ("HD") did not have information on the average waiting time of QPS applicants. The waiting time of a non-elderly one-person applicant would depend on his/her points under QPS, which took into account the applicant's age and waiting time, as well as whether the applicant was already a PRH resident.

39. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that currently, there were around 2 000 street sleepers and some 400 000 singletons and the existing number of singleton hostel places were insufficient to meet their demand. The Administration should formulate policies to provide suitable housing for singletons and set a target time for such provision. The Administration should also convert vacant school premises, idle government facilities or government premises which were used for storage under short-term tenancies into PRH. AD(SP) responded that as set out in the Long Term Housing Strategy, one of the major strategic directions was to build more PRH units. The supply target for public housing for the ten-year period from 2016-2017 to 2025-2026 was 280 000 units. In addition to PRH, subsidized sale flats were also available for application by eligible singletons. The Education Bureau and the Lands Department had an established mechanism for studying the use of vacant school premises and HD was involved in the study. In fact, several of vacant school sites had already been used for PRH development. HD would continue to make use of such sites for constructing PRH where feasible.

Receiving deputations' views on support services for singletons

40. The Chairman sought members' views on Dr Fernando CHEUNG's suggestion of inviting deputations to give views on support services for

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singletons at a Panel meeting. While agreeing that support services for singletons should be enhanced, Dr Junius HO said that there was no pressing need for the Panel to discuss the subject matter. He considered that the Panel should accord priority to discussing other more urgent issues. The Chairman put Dr CHEUNG's suggestion to vote. The majority members present voted for the suggestion. The Chairman said that a special meeting to receive deputations' view on support services for singletons would be arranged.

V. Any other business

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1341/16-17(01)]

Multistakeholder Forum on "Investing in Healthy and Active Aging for Sustainable Growth" and Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development Standing Committee Meeting on Active Ageing

41. The Chairman said that Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development ("AFPPD") had invited nominations of three Legislative Council Members to participate in the Multistakeholder Forum on "Investing in Healthy and Active Aging for Sustainable Growth" and AFPPD Standing Committee Meeting on Active Ageing to be held in Vietnam from 15 to 17 August 2017 in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. He proposed that the Panel should accept AFPPD's invitation and open the invitation to all other Legislative Council Members. He also proposed that if more than three Members had indicated their interest in doing so, he would conduct a ballot for determining the three Members to be nominated. Members agreed to the Chairman's proposals.

42. The meeting ended at 12:57 pm.