

Legislative Council

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LegCo Panel on Home Affairs LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of joint meeting held on Monday, 12 July 1999 at 4:30 pm in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : LegCo Panel on Home Affairs

- * Hon CHOY So-yuk (Chairman)
- * Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
- Hon MA Fung-kwok
- Hon Ambrose CHEUNG Wing-sum, JP
- Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, JP
- Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
- Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, JP
- Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
- * Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

Hon CHAN Yuen-han (Chairman)
Hon HO Sai-chu, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon Ronald ARCULLI, JP

Members Absent : LegCo Panel on Home Affairs

Hon Albert HO Chun-yan (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Edward HO Sing-tin, SBS, JP
Hon LEE Wing-tat
Hon James TO Kun-sun

Hon Christine LOH
Hon Gary CHENG Kai-nam, JP
Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBS, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, SBS, JP

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

Hon LEE Kai-ming, SBS, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung

* Also a member of Panel on Welfare Services

Public Officers : Mr NG Hon-wah
Attending Acting Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs

Mr John WAN
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs

Miss Victoria TANG
Acting Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare

Mr Carlos LEUNG
Assistant Director of Social Welfare

Clerk in : Mrs Constance LI
Attendance Chief Assistant Secretary (2) 2

Staff in : Miss Flora TAI
Attendance Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 2

I. Election of Chairman

Miss CHOY So-yuk was elected Chairman of the joint meeting of the Panels on Home Affairs and Welfare Services.

II. Opening remark

2. The Chairman briefed members on the purpose of the joint meeting. She said that members of the Panel on Welfare Services had expressed much concern at a meeting on 14 June 1999 that the additional resources of about \$97 million required for implementation of the 'One school one social worker' proposal would be deployed from existing youth services. They therefore requested a joint meeting with the Panel on Home Affairs to discuss with the Administration the implications of the proposal on the provision of youth services. Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Chairman of the Panel on Welfare Services, supplemented that members of the Panel on Welfare Services were pleased that the Administration supported the 'One school one social worker' proposal, but had strong reservation about additional resources not being made available for its implementation.

III. Meeting with the Administration [LC Paper No. CB(2)2500/98-99]

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Acting Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs (Ag DS(HA)) briefed members on the paper provided by Home Affairs Bureau (HAB). He said that the Administration noted members' concern about the possible effects of the proposal on the provision of youth services. He informed members that HAB was co-ordinating the Fundamental Expenditure Review on Youth (FER), and that school social work service was a major spending programme to be considered in the wider context of the FER. The effect on existing youth services arising from the re-deployment of resources could only be ascertained when the FER on Youth was completed. Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (PAS(HA)) then briefed members on HAB's paper on the background and progress of the FER on Youth [Paper No. CB(2)2500/98-99(01)]. PAS(HA) said that FER was part and parcel of Government's Enhanced Productivity Programme (EPP) and the objective was to achieve value for money in the delivery of public services. He explained that the purpose of the FER was not cost-cutting but to develop proposals on how best to re-align resources to meet the policy objectives. The Commission on Youth was working closely with HAB on matters relating to the FER on Youth and on the public consultation process.

4. At the invitation of the Chairman, Acting Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare (Ag DS(HW)) also briefed members on the paper on the Review of the School Social Work Service [Paper No. CB(2)2500/98-99(02)]. She said that it was Government's intention to implement the proposal of providing one full-time school social worker post for each secondary school starting September 2000. She stressed that the proposal was strongly supported by both welfare and education sectors. As the overall direction of youth services was being examined under the FER on Youth, Government was still exploring the possible sources of funding for the proposal.

5. Miss Emily LAU said that she supported the proposal of providing one school social worker for each secondary school in view of the serious youth problems. However, she was concerned about the sources of funding and whether Government would be prepared to create the additional school worker posts irrespective of whether savings could be identified from existing resources.

6. Ag DS(HW) explained that in view of the Government's prevailing fiscal conditions, it was unlikely that additional resources would be available. It was the Administration's initial view that there might be scope in re-deploying resources from existing youth services. Miss LAU queried that Government had already made the conclusion that savings could be made available from existing resources even before the FER on Youth was completed. The Chairman also asked about Government's plan if no savings could be identified for implementation of the proposal. Ag DS(HA) replied that the FER on Youth was to achieve greater cost-effectiveness for existing resources by deploying them to priority areas which best meet the community's needs. While Government did not have plans for seeking additional resources for the proposal, Government would give due regard to the various priorities for youth services and the wide support for the proposal in making the recommendations for re-deployment of resources.

7. Mr LAW Chi-kwong noted with concern that the amount required for implementing the proposal would be about 7% of the \$1.4 billion currently allocated for youth services which included subsidies for school extra-curricular programmes and miscellaneous education services. Considering that departments and agencies were already required to deliver productivity gains amounting to 5% of their operating expenditure in three years under the EPP, Mr LAW said it would be an impossible mission to plough sufficient resources for implementation of the proposal without affecting existing youth services. Since the proposal was a new initiative, he considered that additional resources should be provided by the Government for implementation. He therefore sought clarification as to whether the resources required for the proposal was to be funded from new money or deployed from the 5% productivity gains to be achieved through EPP.

8. In response, PAS(HA) said that EPP was a different exercise to achieve productivity gains of Government as a whole. As youth services cut across several bureaux and departments, the responsible bureaux and departments were required under the FER on Youth to review their priorities and resources with a view to achieving greater cost-effectiveness. Ag DS(HW) added that the proposal might be implemented by phases and it was not possible to give a definite answer on the resources required at the present stage. Ag DS(HA) stressed that the Administration would consult relevant agencies and LegCo Panels if any change to the provision of existing youth services was to be introduced, and HAB would report the

Adm progress of the FER on Youth to the Panel.

9. Mr Ambrose CHEUNG was dissatisfied with the Administration's response which gave no commitment to the implementation of the proposal from September 2000 as it would depend on the availability of resources to be ploughed back from existing services. He was strongly of the view that the Administration should make available the additional resources required (i.e. \$97 million) if it genuinely supported the proposal. He suggested that the Administration could consider re-deploying from the \$5 billion Innovation and Technology Fund. Miss Emily LAU shared similar concern and sought confirmation as to whether the proposal would be implemented from September 2000. Ag DS(HA) replied that the Administration was unable to give a definite answer before the FER on Youth was completed. He reiterated that the FER aimed to develop proposals and priorities to get the most benefits for the community from the resources now allocated to youth services, and that the Administration would seriously take into consideration the support and views of the community in the process. To address Miss LAU's concern, Ag DS(HW) advised that Finance Bureau had already agreed to provide one full time school social worker post in the standard operating budget for each new secondary school starting September 2000. Nevertheless, the progress of implementation of the proposal in existing secondary schools would depend on the outcome of the FER. Mr HO Sai-chu stressed that the Administration should not seek to reduce existing youth services through the FER; instead it should put in new resources for new initiatives to address youth problems such as gangsters.

10. Mr Andrew WONG said that he did not object to the proposal but he preferred increasing the ratio of school teacher to students in addressing the youth problem in school. He remarked that the Administration should consider the recruitment problem and career prospects of these school social workers. He also asked whether the FER on Youth would evaluate the effectiveness of the proposal. In response, Assistant Director of Social Welfare said that the Working Group on the Review of School Social Work Service had considered the implementation arrangements. It was recommended that school social workers would continue to be employed by non-government organizations (NGOs) and assigned to secondary schools, while the Social Welfare Department and policy bureau would maintain policy and funding responsibility for the school social work service.

11. Mr TSANG Yok-sing expressed support for the proposal of providing one school worker for each secondary school. He considered the present deployment of school social workers from NGOs a good arrangement which was also welcomed by schools. He said that the turnover of school social workers was fairly low based on past experience, and that schools could also make use of other services of the NGOs when necessary. Mr TSANG added that he also supported providing more teachers to schools but social workers

played a different role from teachers. He therefore urged for early implementation of the proposal.

12. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:15 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

10 December 1999