

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)732/99-00

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 10 May 1999 at 11:20 am
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building**

Members Present : Hon CHAN Yuen-han (Chairman)
Hon HO Sai-chu, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEE Kai-ming, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP

Members Absent : Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon Ronald ARCULLI, JP

Public Officers Attending : Item II - Progress of Year 2000 (Y2K) compliance
exercise in social welfare organizations

Mr Robin GILL, JP
Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 3

Mrs Marion LAI, JP
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)

Mr K J BRADLEY
Assistant director of Social Welfare (Finance)

Item III - Honoraria and allowances for Guardianship Board members and witnesses

Mr Robin GILL, JP
Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 3

Mr CHOI Chi-wa, Augustine
Commissioner for Rehabilitation, Health and Welfare Bureau

Miss Ophelia CHAN
Assistant Director of Social Welfare
(Rehabilitation & Medcial Social Services)

Item IV - Contracting out the meal service of Community Care Services

Mr HO Wing-him, JP
Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 2

Mr Laurie LO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare (Welfare) 1

Mrs Patricia CHU
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

Mrs Eliza LEUNG
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly)

Mrs June SHERRY
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Subventions)

Attendance by : invitation Item II - Progress of Year 2000 (Y2K) compliance exercise in social welfare organizations

Ms Kay KU
Assistant Director (Development),
Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr John FUNG
Research and Development Officer,
Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Clerk in Attendance : Ms Doris CHAN
Chief Assistant Secretary (2) 4

Staff in Attendance : Ms Joanne MAK
Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 4

Action

I. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1879/98-99(01))

The Chairman said that as the preceding special meeting of the House Committee had overrun for about 35 minutes, there was not enough time for this meeting to discuss all the agenda items. She proposed deferring discussion of the items on "Community Rehabilitation Network" and "Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) - review of the requirements of disregarded earnings" to the next meeting.

CSSA - review of the requirements of disregarded earnings

2. In response to the Chairman's question, Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration) (DDSW(A)) said that when the subject was last discussed at the meeting on 12 April 1999, it was agreed that the Administration should make a report on the outcome of the review in September 1999. The Administration therefore had not provided any paper on the subject for this meeting.

Items for discussion at the next meeting

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting to be held on 14 June 1999 -

- (a) Community Rehabilitation Network;
- (b) Review of School Social Work Service;
- (c) CSSA - annual inflation adjustment of standard payment rates;
and
- (d) CSSA - review of requirements of disregarded earnings.

4. At the request of the Chairman who was indisposed, Mr HO Sai-chu, Deputy Chairman, took the chair for the rest of the meeting.

Action

II. Progress of Year 2000 (Y2K) compliance exercise in social welfare organizations

(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1879/98-99(02))

5. At the Chairman's invitation, Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 3 (DS(HW)3) highlighted the salient points of the Administration's paper. He said that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were making satisfactory and steady progress in undertaking the Y2K compliance work. As far as SWD was concerned, most of the mission-critical systems, including the Social Security Payment System, had been rectified. Publicity to enhance understanding of the Y2K problem and disseminate advice on where to seek assistance would be on-going during the rollover period. He said that the Administration would increasingly focus on devising contingency plans and remind NGOs of the need to make sure that they were prepared for all eventualities.

6. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan referred to paragraph 15 of the paper and asked for elaborations of how "SWD's existing contingency plan for emergency relief in large-scale disasters would be extended to cover the Y2K problem and to interface with the territory-wide contingency plan of the Information Technology and Broadcast Bureau (ITBB)". Assistant director of Social Welfare (Finance) (AD(F)) explained that ITBB in conjunction with various departments were involved in the contingency planning for territory-wide situation. He said that SWD had to ensure that its departmental Y2K contingency plans were adequate to cope with any Y2K-related problems and would interface with territory-wide contingency plans of ITBB. For example, in its emergency relief plan, it included ensuring the "Kowloon Kitchen", which provided meals, could really cope in a Y2K situation.

7. Miss Kay KU of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) said that the first phase of the SWD/HKSCC Y2K Joint Initiative had already been completed. The second phase which was concerned with the actual rectification work had already started in December 1998 involving -

- (a) Upgrading of some hardware/software for the computer systems which would be done when funding was obtained for all NGOs before June 1999;
- (b) Funding had been applied from SWD for rectification of the membership data systems of 23 centres for the elderly;
- (c) Suppliers had confirmed that 41 out of 61 service hotlines were Y2K compliant. HKCSS and SWD would follow up on the remaining hotlines;

Action

- (d) Workshops attended by representatives from 83 NGOs had been held to enhance awareness of the need for drawing up contingency plans; and
- (e) NGOs which provided residential services had been advised to stock up food, candles and other sundries to cope with any emergency needs arising from Y2K-related problems. Reference would be made to the guidelines issued by ITBB in drawing up contingency plans.

8. Mr LEE Kai-ming referred to paragraph 13 of the paper and asked what were included in the 3% of mission-critical systems which were still non-compliant. He also asked if it was possible to ensure that they could be made compliant well before the end of 1999 to allow adequate time for trial tests and further rectification work if necessary. AD(F) replied that the systems in question were primarily the financial systems of NGOs which were non-compliant because of some minor slippages. He assured members that SWD would be closely monitoring the situation and would try to achieve full compliance well before December 1999 by utilizing commercial packages. He added that SWD would draw the attention of NGOs to the guidelines on contingency planning issued by the Government and the Hong Kong Productivity Council.

9. Members had no further questions on the Y2K issue.

III. Honoraria and allowances for Guardianship Board members and witnesses

(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1879/98-99(03))

10. DS(HW)3 informed members that after review, the Administration maintained that the existing rates of honoraria and allowances payable to the Guardianship Board members and witnesses were appropriate. It would, however, keep the rates under regular review based on the operational experience of the Guardianship Board and the rates adopted by the Mental Health Review Tribunal.

11. Mr LAW Chi-kwong referred to page 2 of the Administration's paper and questioned how to define "professional/expert witnesses" and "non-professional witnesses". Commissioner for Rehabilitation (C for R) explained that whether or not a witness belonged to the "professional/expert" or the "non-professional" category would be determined by the Court when a case was heard. DS(HW)3 supplemented that the basic rationale behind the payment of these allowances was to ensure that nobody would suffer a major financial loss

Action

because he/she was involved in public service.

12. Mr LEE Kai-ming asked if there had ever been any witnesses who refused to turn up to give evidence because they considered that the existing rates of allowances were too low. C for R pointed out that the chairman of the Guardianship Board was only appointed on 1 February 1999. So far the Board had received only one application which was being processed and the case might not involve summoning any witnesses. Therefore, there was no information to show whether or not the existing rates of allowances were too low. However, he pointed out that the current rates of allowances payable to witnesses followed those of the Mental Health Review Tribunal. According to the secretariat of the Review Tribunal, it had not come across any cases in which the witnesses concerned had declined to attend the proceedings because they were dissatisfied with the rates of their allowances.

Adm

13. DS(HW)3 said that depending on the workload of the Guardianship Board, the Administration would further decide on the appropriate time for it to provide a further report to the Panel. He said that he would be happy to come back around this time next year to provide further details. C for R added that should there be need for adjustments to the rates of honoraria and allowances, approval for additional funding would have to be sought from the Finance Committee.

IV. Contracting out the meal service of community care services
(LC Paper No. CB(2) 1879/98-99(05))

14. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services) (DD(S)) referred to the Administration's paper and briefed members on the proposed contracting out arrangements of meal service of community care services. She explained that the resources thus saved would be deployed to strengthen and upgrade the domiciliary care service so as to assist elderly people to live at home for as long as possible. A dedicated contract management unit would be set up by SWD to manage the tendering procedures and monitor the performance of the contractors. DD(S) informed members that the tendering exercise would take place in June/July 1999 and the successful contractors would start providing meal service in the third quarter of 1999/2000. She said that the Administration had conducted briefing sessions for the welfare sector to collect their views on the proposed arrangements and their responses were positive.

15. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan asked whether the number of cases served by each of the existing 133 home help teams would be reduced to 65, which had been the originally planned capacity, after implementation of the contracting out arrangements. In addition, he asked for details of the improvement plan to strengthen and upgrade the domiciliary care service by deploying the resources saved from contracting out the meal service. DD(S) explained that the existing

Action

133 home help teams had each managed to serve about 100 cases now mainly by deferring the provision of less urgent domiciliary care services and giving priority to requests for meal service. It was planned that if the meal service was contracted out and provided by less expensive workers, the better paid and better trained home helpers could focus on providing higher value-added domiciliary care services to clients in need. Hence, there were plans to improve the training of home helpers in a bid to upgrade domiciliary care services. Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 2 (DS(HW)2) added that elderly people's needs for home care were quite personal. Therefore, home care services should be tailor-made to suit the needs of individual elderly clients. For example, some elderly people actually had greater need for the services provided by day care centres for the elderly (D/Es) (such as physiotherapy service) rather than the services rendered by home help teams. As the demands for care and assistance of individual cases were quite different, DS(HW)2 said that in the future the capacity of the home help teams would no longer be rigidly set at 65 cases for each team. Mr LEE further asked if there were plans to integrate home help and day care services. DS(HW)2 replied that the Administration had no such plans at the moment but it would explore the option. He agreed to provide details to the Panel when they were available.

Adm

16. Dr YEUNG Sum referred to the submission from the Personal Care Workers and Home Helpers Association (LC Paper No. CB(2) 1758/98-99 (01)) expressing concerns about the impact on their workload if home help and day care services were integrated and requested the Administration to respond. DS(HW)2 explained that so far no such integration had been proposed by the Administration. However, he pointed out that the present arrangements were far from being satisfactory as elderly people on the home service scheme were required either to choose receiving services from home help teams or from D/Es. He considered that the arrangements neither worked to the best interest of the elderly nor utilized the available resources in the best way. He considered that these elderly people should be given alternative options, such as that they could choose to receive combined services from home help teams and D/Es.

17. Dr YEUNG Sum commented that no one should be put out of work as a result of the implementation of the contracting out arrangements. He suggested the Administration to provide training on personal care to staff members who were previously responsible for meal delivery and assist them to join those domiciliary care teams. Dr YEUNG also suggested that a working group comprising social workers and representatives from the users of home help service be set up to monitor the implementation of the new arrangements and follow up on any problems. DD(S) agreed to consider the suggestions but she pointed out that quality control mechanisms would be put in place to collect feedback from the users and to ensure that the performance of the contracted service met the required standards. She added that as the contracting out scheme would not affect the existing home help teams, there would not be serving staff made redundant as a

Adm

Action

result of the new arrangements.

18. Dr YEUNG Sum pointed out that at present home helpers in delivering meals also paid attention to the health conditions of the elderly clients and if necessary informed the social workers concerned to follow up. He asked what interfacing arrangements would be made between the meal providers and domiciliary care teams in the future. In response, Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly) (AD(E)) explained that the meal providers and domiciliary care teams in a service area might come from the same NGO. If not, SWD would ensure that the domiciliary care teams would coordinate very well with the meal providers and any comments from the users and meal providers to the teams must also be provided to SWD as well. She said that the tender specifications would stipulate that a meal provider must pay attention to his client's conditions and he must not just deliver the meal without knowing whether the client was able to take it or not. In addition, there would be a monitoring mechanism in place to ensure that the performance of the meal providers met the requirements stipulated in the tender specifications.

19. Mr LAW Chi-kwong pointed out that these cost items were included in calculating the total cost for meal service: the costs required for evaluation of service demands, for management of cases, for food ingredients and other expenses incurred on preparation and delivery of meals. However, as the evaluation of the service demands and management of cases would be taken up by the domiciliary care teams, he questioned how much would have to be deducted from the budget on meal services and re-allocated to the domiciliary care teams. AD(E) replied that the Administration had initially planned that the additional resources required by the domiciliary care teams would be absorbed by the budget on home care services. She stressed that under the new arrangements, the resources allocated for home help services would not be reduced.

20. Mr LAW Chi-kwong also commented that the contracting out arrangements were against the trend of providing integrated welfare services. To ensure that there would be good coordination between the meal providers and domiciliary care teams, he suggested that the meal providers be required to make phone calls to the relevant domiciliary care team each day to report the conditions of their clients. Mr LAW also asked whether the meal providers in the future would maintain the meal-feeding service which was provided by existing home help teams.

21. AD(E) replied that actually it was quite common in foreign countries for meal services and domiciliary care services to be separately provided by different service teams. She said that there were several ways for SWD to establish good coordination between the meal providers and domiciliary care teams under the new arrangements. For example, a NGO which had bid for domiciliary care services for a service area could team up with another organization to undertake meal service for the same area. Alternatively, a NGO could bid for both meal

Action

Adm

service and domiciliary care services for the same service area. AD(E) further informed members that the consultancy study commissioned by SWD on the contracting out scheme had also made recommendations on how to achieve effective coordination and liaison between the two teams and the relevant report was being studied by SWD. She also agreed to consider Mr LAW's suggestion of including in the working procedures that the two teams had to establish good coordination by, for example, making phone calls to each other everyday.

22. As regards the provision of meal-feeding service, DD(S) said that only a small percentage (7%) of cases required the service at present. She explained that these clients in general needed more domiciliary care than the others and the meal-feeding service required by them would also be provided by domiciliary care teams. In fact, she considered that it would be more appropriate for meal-feeding service to be provided by domiciliary care teams. She assured members that the Administration would ensure that there was good coordination between the meal providers and domiciliary care teams to operate satisfactory meal service, including meal-feeding service wherever necessary. In this connection, Dr YEUNG Sum suggested to include in the tender specifications that meal providers should provide meal-feeding service as well.

23. Mr LAW Chi-kwong considered that meal service and domiciliary care should be provided by the same NGO not just because better coordination would be achieved, but also because the NGO concerned would have greater flexibility to cope with extra cases. He pointed out that, like the existing home help teams which had managed to handle more cases by deferring less urgent domiciliary care services and giving priority to demands for meal service, a NGO operating both services could make similar adjustments so that it could handle more cases. He added that the flexibility would be further reduced if the contracts signed with the meal providers rigidly stipulated the number of cases handled by them. He also suggested approaching the neighbours of those clients who required meal-feeding service and to explore if it was possible to hire them to provide meal-feeding service for these clients.

24. AD(E) acknowledged that there were certainly merits for the same NGO to run the meal service and domiciliary care services required for the same service area. She agreed that SWD should encourage those NGOs with good track records of service provision to bid for both kinds of services. She added that the existing 133 home help teams could be a buffer and help absorb excessive demands for meal services. In addition, the contractors providing meal service would be required as a condition of the contract to handle some extra cases where necessary. In response to the Chairman's question, AD(E) said that SWD would not exclude any organizations, NGOs or private companies from bidding for meal service. She pointed out that all applicants would be required to elaborate how they would ensure the quality of their meal service and maintain good communication with their clients.

Action

25. In response to Mr LEE Kai-ming's questions, AD(E) said that the existing services provided by home help teams, such as personal care, home cleaning, laundry, shopping and escort service for the elderly, would all be maintained by the domiciliary care teams. In addition, it was under consideration that they might be required to perform simple medical dressing, administration of medical and application of external medication for clients as well. She said that after drawing up the scope of services to be provided by the domiciliary care teams, the Administration would be able to decide on the appropriate training to be provided for the teams.

26. In response to Mr LEE Kai-ming's further question on the schedule of work, DS(HW)2 said that SWD would conduct a review on the effectiveness of the contracting out arrangements probably by June next year. He said that in the interim, the Administration would not put up any other proposals to reform the existing mode of service in respect of home care services provided by home help teams.

27. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan sought clarifications as to whether SWD or the Elderly Commission had commissioned any study on the feasibility of combining home care and day care services. DS(HW)2 replied that SWD had only commissioned the University of Hong Kong to conduct a consultancy study on the review of care services for the elderly living in the community in March last year. The study had only made recommendations on how to improve home care services but not on any integration of home help and day care services. Mr LEE further asked if there were plans to shorten the waiting time for home help service in Kwun Tong and Wong Tai Sin which was now on average ten months. AD(E) said that the average waiting time for home help service in some districts was a bit long and the Administration would explore ways to shorten it. However, she assured members that the Administration would ensure that demands for meal service would be adequately met regardless of resources constraints.

28. In concluding the discussion, the Chairman highlighted members' concern about the effect on the service quality as a result of implementing the contracting out arrangements and requested the Administration to further report to the Panel after review next year. Dr YEUNG Sum suggested that the Panel could wait until then to further discuss whether or not it was supportive of the arrangements.

Adm

29. The meeting ended at 12:45 pm.

Action

Legislative Council Secretariat
29 December 1999