

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1975/99-00

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 10 April 2000 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Hon CHAN Yuen-han (Chairman)
Hon HO Sai-chu, SBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEE Kai-ming, SBS, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP

Members Absent : Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung

Public Officers Attending : Item II

Mr Robin GILL
Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 3

Item III

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

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

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Mrs Patricia CHU, JP
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

Mrs Rachel CARTLAND, JP
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security)

Item IV

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 Eliza LEUNG
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly)

Item V

Miss Diane WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare (Welfare) 2

Mr Vincent FUNG
Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare (Welfare) 1

Miss Ann LAU
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child Welfare)

Mr LI Kok-ming
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security)
Social Welfare Department

Mrs Susan CHONG SIN Sui-yu
Chief Social Security Officer (Family and Child Welfare)

Mr T S CHOW
Assistant Commissioner for Labour (Employment Services)

Mrs Janet TSANG
Senior Housing Manager
Housing Department

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Deputations by Invitation : Item III

Society for Community Organization

Ms FOK Tin-man
Community Organizer

Mr MUI Wai-keung
Community Organizer

Mr YEUNG Wing-lam
Resident

Mr LI Kwok-to
Resident

Mr YAU Shui-kong
Resident

Mr LO Yiu-ming
Resident

Committee on Social Security, Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr WONG Hung

Item V

Society for Community Organization

Mr HO Hei-wah
Director

Mr NG Wai-tung
Community Organizer

5 representatives of street sleepers

Committee on Social Security, Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr WONG Hung

Clerk in : Ms Doris CHAN

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Attendance Chief Assistant Secretary (2) 4

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

I. Confirmation of minutes of the meetings held on 13 September 1999, 8 November 1999, 6 December 1999, 10 January 2000 and 13 March 2000
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1583/99-00 to CB(2)1586/99-00 and CB(2)1618/99-00)

The minutes of the above meetings were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1612/99-00(01) - (02))

2. The Chairman sought the Administration's views on the suitable timing for discussion of the proposed lump sum funding system. Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 3 (DSHW3) said that the Administration was reviewing the feedback received from the sector and other members of the community on the proposal. He said that he was not in a position to confirm the date but would aim at the next meeting on 8 May 2000. He would advise the Panel if the date was earlier or later.

3. Dr YEUNG Sum informed the meeting that a few days ago he and Mr LAW Chi-
kwong, together with representatives of the Fighting for Social Welfare Alliance, had met the Secretary for Health and Welfare (SHW), who had confirmed that there was no timetable for implementation of the proposed funding system. Dr YEUNG said that he had also suggested to SHW that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) should write to the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) asking them to cease implementing pay cuts or staff layoff. The Chairman said that she had met SHW in the previous week and SHW had also confirmed at the meeting that the implementation date for the proposed funding system had yet to be finalized.

4. DSHW3 said that the Government would consider the effective implementation date in determining the final package of proposals. He added that the Director of Social Welfare had written to all NGOs at the end of March 2000 advising them that there was no need to take pre-emptive action since details of the final package had yet to be decided. In addition, he had pointed out that the Administration had made a commitment that sufficient funding would be provided to NGOs to meet their commitments to existing staff.

5. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan requested the Administration to make a commitment that the proposed lump sum funding system would not be implemented with retrospective effect

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from 1 April 2000. Mr LAW Chi-kwong considered that the Administration should report to the Panel the details of the finalized proposal before it applied for funding from the Finance Committee. DSHW3 agreed to provide the Administration's response as soon as possible.

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6. Members agreed that if the Administration was not ready to discuss the lump sum funding proposal on 8 May 2000, the meeting would discuss child care services and implementation of the Enhanced Productivity Programme in the welfare sector.

Clerk

7. The Chairman requested the Clerk to provide a list of outstanding issues to be followed up by the Panel for members' reference.

III. "Promoting Self-reliance" Strategy

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1342/99-00(06), CB(2)1612/99-00(03) and CB(2)1620/99-00(01))

8. Ms FOK Tin-man of the Society for Community Organization (SOCO) pointed out that the Active Employment Assistance (AEA) scheme and the new measure requiring unemployed CSSA recipients to perform community work could not help them to find employment or arouse their incentives to work. She said that as shown in the Administration's paper, only 900 (or 7%) of the 13 000 CSSA recipients joining the scheme had found jobs. Ms FOK said that as told by some of the participants of the AEA programme, there was little employment assistance such as job counselling provided to them under the programme. Instead, they had only been urged by the SWD staff to find jobs. She pointed out that 4 500 recipients had already withdrawn from the CSSA scheme after participating in the AEA programme or refusing to join the AEA programme. She suggested that the Administration should follow up the 4 500 ex-CSSA recipients and see whether they required any financial assistance.

9. Ms FOK considered that the new measure requiring unemployed CSSA recipients to perform community work was only a punitive measure taken against the recipients. She said that the community work performed by them such as rubbish collecting, grass cutting and so on could not really upgrade their work skills.

10. Mr WONG Hung of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) pointed out that the AEA programme performed more the function of supervising the participants to find work instead of providing any real support to them. Referring to the new policy of extending the AEA programme to cover all CSSA low earning cases, Mr WONG said that SWD should take note of fact that some of these cases involved recipients who were old and frail and were thus unable to work full-time. In addition, he urged SWD to devise a minimum wage rate for the full-time work identified for the recipients under the programme. He considered that the recipients should not be forced to accept very low-pay work. He also suggested that SWD should take measures to prevent employers from taking advantage of the programme to exploit the participants. In addition, he suggested

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SWD to provide an appeal mechanism to handle cases where the participants refused to accept a full-time work on health grounds or because the pay was too low.

11. Mr WONG also urged the Administration to review the existing amount of the disregarded earning and ensure that adequate support (such as child care services) was rendered to the CSSA families in order to enable the parents of these families to work.

12. Dr YEUNG Sum referred to the submission from SOCO mentioning that about 30% of the participants of the AEA programme had withdrawn from CSSA since the implementation of the AEA programme and asked for the reasons for their withdrawal. He also asked whether the Administration would consider providing retraining services to the unemployed CSSA recipients instead of requiring them to perform community work as the former was more useful in upgrading the work skills of the participants.

13. In response, Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security) (ADSW(SS)) said that it was a recipient's personal choice to withdraw from CSSA without telling their reasons. However, she said that SWD suspected that some people had actually got other employment all along but had never declared it to SWD. So when these people were now required to perform community work under the AEA scheme, that was very inconvenient to them and it might be better from their point of view to withdraw from CSSA altogether. She stressed that there were no unreasonable conditions ever imposed on the unemployed CSSA recipients under the AEA programme and the kinds of community work that they were required to perform had been carefully chosen for them. Based on a survey conducted with the participants, ADSW(SS) said that they had expressed very favourable reaction to the community work. They were satisfied with the arrangements and reported an increased feeling of higher self-esteem as a result of being able to make some contributions to the community. She said that SWD was exploring to include some enrichment elements to the community work with a view to enhancing the participants' skills in securing employment. She added that SWD in collaboration with NGOs would seek to provide more intensive assistance to unemployed CSSA recipients and encourage them to join more retraining programme.

14. Dr YEUNG considered that the goal of promoting self-reliance was worth pursuing but that the Administration should not be too harsh with the recipients. He suggested the Administration to commission a tertiary institution to look into the reasons accounting for the high dropout rate. ADSW(SS) responded that SWD was conducting a full evaluation of the "Support for Self-reliance" scheme including the AEA programme and its other components. She added that it was common in overseas experience that the implementation of this kind of scheme usually met a high dropout rate at the beginning. She said some social scientists had explained that this was due to the inertia that the participants had built up after they had long been living on a welfare scheme. Deputy Secretary for Health Welfare 2 (DSHW2) further pointed out that the survey suggested by Dr YEUNG might not be able to truly reflect the reasons behind the withdrawal cases because those who had undeclared employment probably would not report that they had withdrawn for this reason.

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15. Mr LAW Chi-kwong said that at present the AEA scheme had imposed such a requirement on the participants that they had to accept any jobs regardless of the salaries and this had deterred people from joining the scheme. He suggested SWD to review the wording of the condition to protect the interests of the participants. ADSW(SS) replied that if recipients were earning a low salary, they could always be converted from the unemployed category to the low earning category. Then they would get their salaries topped up under the low earning category. She said that the purpose of the said condition was to prevent people from becoming too choosy about the jobs and she noted that the community as a whole had been quite supportive of the direction of the AEA scheme. She said that it was very important for the unemployed recipients to take the first step of re-joining the job market. To help the low earning CSSA recipients to upgrade their skills so that they could get a job with a better pay, a voluntary programme would be launched by SWD to provide assistance such as retraining to them. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan criticized the Administration for being ignorant of the job market situation and downward trend of salaries. He considered that the said condition would further bring the salary level of employees down.

16. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan pointed out that the package of measures under the "Promoting Self-reliance" strategy was very complicated as it involved five schemes to be implemented by SWD, the Labour Department, the Employees Retraining Board and NGOs. He considered that the proposed new measures should be streamlined and SWD should not be involved in the implementation to avoid playing a conflicting role. DSHW2 explained that under the strategy, participants were only required to contact the staff of the Social Security Field Unit (SSFU) who would take account of the individual circumstances of the participants and refer them to the appropriate schemes. He considered that the system would not create too much trouble to the participants.

Adm 17. Mr HO Sai-chu considered that the AEA scheme had been quite a success and asked for information on the retraining opportunities provided to the participants so far. In response, ADSW(SS) agreed to provide the details later. She estimated that several hundred unemployed recipients had been referred to the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) so far. She noted that on the whole the recipients were not very motivated towards the retraining courses provided by ERB especially for those who had been on CSSA for a long time. Therefore, SWD would invite NGOs to provide job attachment opportunities for employable CSSA recipients who had left the job market for a long time to help them acquire work skills and re-establish work habits.

18. Mr LEE Kai-ming considered that participants of the AEA programme should be spared from performing community work like rubbish collecting. Instead, it would be more meaningful for them to attend retraining programme to equip them with more useful work skills. ADSW(SS) explained that the purpose of the programme of community work was to re-establish work habits and the participants' motivation to work. In addition to the community work, there would be tailor-made programme to provide more assistance to the participants. Unemployed CSSA recipients who chose to participate in retraining

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programmes would be exempted from the community work requirement. DSHW2 clarified that actually most of the community work was not rubbish collecting. He said that after a full evaluation had been conducted on the "Support for Self-reliance" scheme, a report on the findings would be submitted to the Panel.

19. Ms FOK Tin-man of SOCO urged the Administration to consider providing subsidies to participants of the AEA programme to meet expenses such as travelling expenses incurred in the course of seeking work. Mr WONG Hung of HKCSS requested the Administration to provide the following information regarding the 900 CSSA recipients who had joined the AEA programme and found jobs -

- (a) a breakdown of their salaries; and
- (b) how many of them had subsequently quitted their jobs and how many had to rely on CSSA again.

Adm The Chairman asked the Administration to provide the requested information.

IV. Carer Support Services

(LC Paper No. CB(2)1612/99-00(04))

20. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly) (ADSW(E)) briefed members on the salient points of the Administration's paper, highlighting that two Carers' Support Centres had been set up since 1999 to provide information, training and emotional support to carers. Details of the services available at the centres were set out in paragraph 5 of the paper.

21. ADSW(E) said that there were basically three types of respite services, namely, residential respite service, day respite service and home respite service. She informed members that after reviewing the residential respite service, the Administration had decided to increase the number of casual vacancies up to about 160. In addition, steps had been taken to enhance publicity in promoting the use of the service and simplify the application procedures.

22. On day respite service, ADSW(E) said that as an initiative of the 1998 Policy Address, a three-year pilot project of the service had been launched in October 1999. 12 day care centres for the elderly participated in the project and up to the end of February 2000, 146 elderly people had used the service, 29% of whom were demented elderly people. Utilization rate of the service had increased to 80% in February 2000.

23. ADSW(E) said that home respite service was also available under home help and home care service. In 1999 the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust had allocated \$10 million for the development of multi-disciplinary training materials for both formal and informal carers of the elderly. She highlighted that apart from the two Carers' Support Centres, carers' support service was currently provided by a number of multi-service

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centres for the elderly and day care centres for the elderly. The Administration had also commissioned the University of Hong Kong to review the provision of day care service with a view to improving the interface among various types of care and support services for the elderly and enhancing the support services for carers.

24. Dr YEUNG Sum requested the Administration to take account of the rapid ageing rate of the Hong Kong population and plan ahead the provision of more day care centres for the elderly. As he noted that the two Carers' Support Centres were in Sham Shui Po and Chai Wan, he asked whether outreach service was provided by the staff of the centres. ADSW(E) replied that the two centres served as resource bases for other elderly service units and mobile services were rendered by the staff of the centres to other service units where necessary. She said that for example, the centre operated by Caritas-Hong Kong in Sham Shui Po also provided services to meet the needs in the areas of Kowloon West and the New Territories.

Adm 25. Mr LAW Chi-kwong asked whether the fees charged for the use of residential respite service would be adjusted to cover the administrative cost. ADSW(E) said that at present residential respite service provided by residential care homes for the elderly was charged \$50 each day and residential respite service provided by care and attention homes was charged \$60 each day. She said that there was no plan at the moment to increase the relevant fees. Mr LAW asked whether the Administration would consider to provide day care respite service at residential homes. ADSW(E) said that she would give thought to the suggestion.

Adm 26. Mr LEE Kai-ming said that since the utilization rate of the respite service provided by the 12 day care centres for the elderly had already reached 80%, he asked what the Administration would do to cope with further growth in the utilization rate. ADSW(E) replied that there were actually 30-plus existing day care centres for the elderly and only 12 of them had participated in the pilot project of day respite service for the elderly. She informed members that evaluation studies would be conducted on the pilot project which would be completed in 2001. She said that if the pilot project was found successful, it would be expanded to provide more placements. At the Chairman's request, ADSW(E) agreed to provide the findings of the studies to the Panel when they were available.

V. Review of support services for street sleepers
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1612/99-00(05) and (06))

27. Mr HO Hei-wah of SOCO said he noted that over the past few months, efforts had been made by SWD to help some 50 street sleepers to find accommodation. Referring to the Administration's paper, Mr HO considered that the Administration should improve its survey method so that it could gauge more accurate information on street sleepers.

28. One of the street sleeper representatives said that the amount of disregarded earning which was only \$1805 per month, or \$61.7 per day, was inadequate and should be

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increased. As he was required to participate in the "Support for self-reliance" scheme to find work, he had to spend extra money on buying newspapers, eating out and travelling. He pointed out that the disregarded earning was inadequate to cover these extra expenses incurred.

29. The other representatives of street sleepers attending the meeting said that their applications for admission to temporary hostels had been rejected because of the age restriction. They considered that the policy neglected street sleepers of younger age groups and with genuine needs. They also suggested that the temporary shelters should provide at least some basic facilities such as a telephone, microwave oven and so on. They considered that these shelters should not be closed from 9 am to 6 pm everyday as this would make it very difficult for people to contact them for attending interviews.

30. The representatives also called for SWD to reinstate the provision of special grants to meet payments for rental deposits. One of the representatives said that after he had applied for CSSA and in the first few months thereafter, he was penniless and was not given any emergency grant by SWD. As a result, he had to walk all the way from Yau Ma Tei to Sham Shui Po everyday to obtain free meal service.

31. Mr WONG Hung of HKCSS expressed doubt about the accuracy of the survey conducted by the Administration as he had learnt from some social workers involved in the survey that it was carried out from late evening to around 11 pm only on 14 January 2000. As the survey did not cover the small hours of 15 January 2000, Mr WONG considered that many street sleepers had not been reached during the survey. Moreover, he noted that the survey was conducted based on the central registration list held by SWD and failed to identify street sleepers who had not yet been included on the list.

32. Mr WONG said that many street sleepers had still been told by the SSFU staff that the special grants for rental deposit were no longer available and he requested the Administration to clarify this point. Mr WONG said that it was unacceptable for the Administration to have put down in the paper that based on the survey, 31% of the street sleepers had indicated that "street sleeping was their personal choice." He considered that the Administration should explore the various reasons for street sleeping and provide assistance to meet the specific needs of street sleepers. In addition, he requested the Administration to address the problem of heavy workload of NGOs in their handling of street sleeper cases and devise effective measures to improve the situation.

33. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that as shown by the Administration's survey, 40% of the respondents (or some 200) were below the age of 40. Although he noted that SWD had reached agreement with all NGOs to exercise flexibility in admitting street sleepers of younger age groups to the urban hostels, he noted that over the past four months there were only 19 street sleepers aged below 55 admitted to the hostels. He considered that the figure had shown that the arrangement was inadequate to address actual demands and urged the Administration to review the policy of the age restriction so that more street sleepers of younger age groups could be admitted to the hostels. Principal Assistant

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Adm

Secretary for Health and Welfare (Welfare) 2 (PAS(W)2) said that SWD had reached agreement with all NGOs operating hostels to exercise flexibility in admitting street sleepers of younger age with genuine need. Nevertheless, she agreed that the Administration should discuss with these NGOs the possible relaxation of the age limit, in the light of the utilization rate of the facilities and the demand from street sleepers of a younger age. She would keep the Panel posted of developments.

34. Addressing Dr YEUNG Sum's concerns about the Administration's policy on the provision of discretionary grant to street sleepers to meet the payment of rental deposit, PAS(W)2 said that the outreach team of SWD had clearly explained the policy to every street sleeper visited by them. Clear guidelines on the policy had also been issued to the SSFU staff.

35. Mr LAW Chi-kwong considered that as shown in the Administration's paper, the Administration had not conducted any full review of its policy on street sleepers. He agreed with HKCSS that the Administration should address the specific needs of street sleepers, such as their need for housing and employment assistance, and provide appropriate services for them. He also noted that some street sleepers admitted to the temporary shelters had eventually become long-term residents there and he requested the Administration to review the provision of facilities at these shelters to make sure that the needs of the residents were met.

Adm

36. In response, PAS(W)2 said that in general, Government's policy was to help street sleepers deal with their problems. The Administration did not intend that these temporary shelters should be used to solve the long term accommodation problem of street sleepers. She explained that the accommodation problem of street sleepers had to be solved by the joint efforts of various bureaux, departments and non-governmental agencies. Members agreed that the problem was a multi-disciplinary one and requested the Administration to follow it up and provide its work plan for tackling the problem. PAS(W)2 agreed to provide the relevant details later.

37. Referring to paragraph 20 of the Administration's paper, Miss Cyd HO Sau-lan queried the basis on which the Administration had concluded that "the low level of motivation of street sleepers to work was the greatest obstacle in finding jobs". She also requested the Administration to provide more details on the employment situation of street sleepers. Assistant Commissioner for Labour (Employment Services) said that the success rate of street sleepers in looking for jobs depended on the job market situation as well as their motivation to work. He agreed with Miss HO that some street sleepers actually required rehabilitation services to help them re-join the labour market. He agreed with PAS(W)2 that it was necessary for various departments to collaborate to solve the problems of street sleepers.

38. The Chairman considered that the Administration should review its policy on street sleepers in the light of the new characteristics of their problems. For example, as already pointed out by the deputations, the Administration should take note of the fact that there

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were now more street sleepers of a younger age and the associated problems. She said that during the visit to the temporary shelters/hostels in last December, members had noted that the conditions there were urgently in need of improvement. She requested the Health and Welfare Bureau to collaborate with other policy bureaux concerned/NGOs to devise an action plan for improving the situation and providing better services to meet the specific needs of street sleepers. PAS(W)2 agreed to follow up by informing the Panel in writing in May of the discussion with NGOs about the possible relaxation of the age limit and in due course, progress on addressing the street sleeping problem.

Adm

39. The meeting ended at 1:05 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat
12 May 2000