

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1618/99-00

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 13 March 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 David CHU Yu-lin
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEE Kai-ming, SBS, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
- Members Absent** : Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung
- Member Attending** : Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
- Public Officers Attending** : Item III

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

Mr Stephen PANG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare (Special Duties)

Mr Andrew K P LEUNG, JP

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Director of Social Welfare

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

Mrs June SHERRY
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Subventions)

Item V

Mr Parrish NG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs

Mr Danny TSUI
Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs

Miss Ann HON
Assistant Director of Social Welfare
(Youth and Human Resources Management)

Mr H W CHEUNG
Chief Social Work Officer (Youth)

Deputations by : Item III
Invitation

The Fighting for Social Welfare Alliance

Mr CHEUNG Kwok-chu
Convenor

Mr WONG Tak-shun

Mr CHENG Ching-fat

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr TIK Chi-yuen
Chairperson of Agency Finance & Administration

Dr Joyce CHANG
Vice-chairperson of Agency Finance & Administration

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Mr NGAI Kong-yiu
Member of Agency Finance & Administration

Ms Kay KU
Member of Agency Finance & Administration

Ms Virginia CHAN
Member of Agency Finance & Administration

Hong Kong Social Workers Association

Dr Angelina YUEN
President

Mr CHUA Hoi-wai
Vice President

Mr Frederick LAI Wing-hoi
Board Member

Item V

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr Cliff CHOI Kim-wah
Division Officer

The Rural Community Services Alliance

Ms LAI Kwok-lin
Local Resident

Mr KUO Chun-chuen
Social Worker

Ms YEUNG Sau-ling
Local Resident

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

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

I. Confirmation of minutes of meeting on 14 February 2000
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1344/99-00)

The minutes of the meeting on 14 February 2000 were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Papers Nos. CB(2)1342/99-00(01) - (02))

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting to be held on 10 April 2000 at 10:45 am. -

- (a) Review of support services for street-sleepers; and
- (b) Carer support services.

3. Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 3 (DSHW3) proposed to discuss the report on competitive bidding of home care and meal services in May 2000. Members agreed.

III. Social Welfare Subvention Reform
(LC Papers Nos. CB(2)1342/99-00(03) - (05))

4. The Chairman welcomed the deputations to the meeting.

Fighting for Social Welfare Alliance

5. Mr CHEUNG Kwok-chu of the Alliance expressed grave concern about the effect of the lump sum funding proposal on the staffing structure of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). He pointed out that under the new system, NGOs were given the flexibility to determine their own staffing structure and remuneration. He was worried that if NGOs were unable to cope with financial difficulty under the new system, they would cut staff cost, or alternatively, charge for their services on a cost recovery basis. As a result, user fees would increase. The Alliance was concerned whether people who could not afford to pay would be denied access to services.

6. Mr CHEUNG further pointed out that the Service Performance Monitoring System (SPMS) was ineffective in measuring service quality. In fact, the Service Quality Standards (SQS) and the Funding and Service Agreement (FSA) had been implemented for only 11 months and had yet to be reviewed to ascertain its effectiveness. Furthermore,

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with the scrapping of all sorts of input control under the new subvention system, the Alliance was worried that there might be abuses in the use of resources by individual NGOs. Mr CHEUNG considered that the Administration should look at this in greater detail to ensure accountability of public funds.

7. Mr WONG Tak-shun of the Alliance criticized that the approach to calculating the lump sum grant was very inflexible which failed to take into account the different stages of maturity of the various NGOs. He considered that the proposal should be shelved until a review of effectiveness of FSA and SQS was completed. In fact, he noted that only the first phase of SQS had been introduced. He took the view that service quality could only be guaranteed by careful control of manpower input and staff quality, which must not be sacrificed in order to cut cost.

8. Mr WONG said that the Alliance had the following suggestions -

- (a) Implementation of the lump sum funding proposal should be put on hold until SPMS was fully implemented and reviewed; and
- (b) The Alliance only supported that subvention for "Other Charges" was based on the lump sum allocation. Provisions for NGOs to meet their commitments to staff should be on an actual reimbursement basis.

Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)

9. Mr TIK Chi-yuen of HKCSS said that any changes to be made to the existing subvention system should serve the following purposes -

- (a) Flexibility of the subvention system would be enhanced and thus service quality would be improved; and
- (b) The level of funding should be adequate to enable NGOs to honour their employment contracts with staff.

10. Mr TIK informed members that HKCSS had conducted a survey on 50 subvented NGOs and found that the average Provident Fund (PF) employer's contribution as projected by the NGOs for the next 10 years would be far more than 6.8%. (Details of the projections were set out on page 4 of the submission from HKCSS.) Mr TIK admitted that the projected figures did not take into account the possible staff turnover and the fact that agencies might recruit new staff at entry point for new service units. However, he estimated that the wastage rate of the sector would be low in the next few years. He said that HKCSS supported 8.5% PF contributions, same as the PF provision for the education sector. As for the new service units, HKCSS considered that the Government should provide more than 5% PF subvention for their staff in order to recruit experienced staff to deliver quality service in the units.

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11. As regards the Tide-Over Grant, Mr TIK said that it should not be provided only for three years. He took the view that so long as NGOs could demonstrate that they had genuine need for additional funds to meet contractual obligations to serving staff for salary creep and PF contributions, sufficient funds should be made available to the NGOs. He also urged the Administration to announce details of the eligibility criteria for considering applications for the Grant.

12. Mr TIK criticized that the approach to calculating personal emoluments for new service units (which started operation after 1 January 2000) was unacceptable. He pointed out that since the lower entry pay would be effective only from 1 April 2000, he queried why the calculation of lump sum grant for the new service units should be on the basis of the new mid-point salary instead of the existing mid-point salary.

13. As all along provisions for strengthening the central administration of NGOs fell far short of their recognized needs, Mr TIK considered that the Government should make up for the past shortfall. Furthermore, in anticipation of new demands on the administrative and managerial requirements of NGOs generated by the new subvention system, additional funding should be allocated to NGOs to strengthen their central administration. He suggested that enhanced training should be provided for NGO managers.

14. In addition, HKCSS considered that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) should review its operation mode and management style to reduce its control on NGOs in order to ensure that the purpose of giving NGOs more flexibility in management would really be achieved under the new system. It should also provide detailed guidelines on the new subvention system to NGOs for their reference. As regards the consultation process, Mr TIK considered that all levels of staff representatives should be involved and the process should be conducted in a thorough manner.

Hong Kong Social Workers Association (HKSWA)

15. Dr Angelina YUEN of HKSWA said that the following principles should be upheld in the delivery of welfare services -

- (a) Service recipients' interests should be taken into account and no one should be denied access to welfare services because he/she was unable to pay;
- (b) Emphasis should be put on the quality and continuity of service; and
- (c) Appropriate conditions conducive to maintaining stability of staff should be put in place to facilitate them to have long-term career planning and pursue professional development.

16. Dr YUEN pointed out that there was much room for improvement with the SPMS. She said that since the lump sum grant and SPMS would be introduced as an integrated package, the lump sum grant should not be introduced until improvements were made to

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SPMS. For example, she said that the sector still found the proposed three to five-year medium term planning mechanism unclear and that the Administration should release details of the criteria for the Tide-Over Grant as early as possible.

17. Dr YUEN considered that the new subvention system would induce NGOs to hire staff on short-term contract basis. In fact, the proposed 6.8% PF contributions would make it impossible for NGOs to continue hiring experienced senior staff to provide services and in contrast, provisions for PF contributions for the Hospital Authority (HA) were at a flat rate of 15%. Mr CHUA Ho-wai of HKSWA added that in the future, provisions for PF contributions should be earmarked for the purpose to prevent them from being re-deployed for other uses.

Questions raised by Members

18. Mr LAW Chi-kwong noted that the Financial Secretary had mentioned in his Budget Speech that lump-sum funding arrangement would be applied to all subvented NGOs. He requested the Administration to explain why the Administration's paper (the Chinese version) stated that the new subvention system was in the form of a one-off grant.

19. Mr LAW also pointed out that in the past the Administration had taken up most of the financial and human resources management for NGOs, which would have to handle it themselves in the future. However, provisions for strengthening the central administration of NGOs had all along been inadequate and as a result the existing provisions were based on the service level in 1994. He asked how the Administration would address the problem. In addition, he requested the Administration to confirm whether provisions for PF contributions would be reduced from 6.8% to 5% in the long run.

20. Before answering the questions of Mr LAW, Director of Social Welfare (DSW) made the following points in response to the deputations' concerns -

- (a) To enhance SPMS, SWD had put in place objective standards for service assessment in collaboration with NGOs over the past two years. He agreed that users should participate in the monitoring mechanism and this point would be stipulated in the relevant guidelines;
- (b) The new funding arrangement would not affect continuity of services. Subvention would continue to be provided subject to on-going need for the service and satisfactory performance of the service unit;
- (c) The Administration had no intention to cut welfare expenditure through the current proposal. On the contrary, it had earmarked additional funding of \$150 million for the implementation of the new funding arrangement over the next two years. Moreover, there would be about \$380 million for developing new welfare services funded by the Government in the next

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three years. In addition, all NGOs had been invited to apply for funding from the Lotteries Fund to finance their plans for service re-engineering;

- (d) For the purpose of funding, a 'snapshot' would be taken of all existing staff against a benchmark of each NGO on the basis of its recognized establishment as at 1 April 2000 including all vacancies in 2000-01. Therefore, the interests of existing staff were taken care of to a certain extent;
- (e) The proposed benchmark lump-sum grant was not unreasonable since the present sector-wide average PF employer's contribution was only about 6.3% to 6.5%. Moreover, the findings of the survey conducted by HKCSS had not taken into account the future wastage rate of the sector;
- (f) Details of the Tide-Over Grant would be further worked out in consultation with NGOs and announced as soon as possible;
- (g) NGOs could consider applying for the Lotteries Fund on initiatives that would strengthen the central administration of NGOs. Tailored training and support would be provided to individual NGOs to enhance their financial and human resources management; and
- (h) The lump sum funding proposal was proposed in response to criticisms that the existing system was rigid and administratively cumbersome. The new proposal had been under discussion for several years already and was not introduced to the sector all of a sudden.

21. DSW clarified that annual allocation of funding to subvented NGOs would continue and it would in no way be one-off. He pointed out that in order to address the sector's concerns that the lump sum grant might not be adequate for individual NGOs to meet their commitments to existing staff, the Tide-Over Grant would be made available to help those in need.

22. On the question of 5% PF for staff of new service units, DSW said that reference had to be made to the civil service practice. He added that as the consultation was on-going, this point could be further clarified.

23. DSHW3 added that the Government fully appreciated the need for NGOs to meet their contractual commitments to existing staff. For this reason, it had proposed the introduction of a Tide-Over Grant Scheme for NGOs to assist them to meet these commitments and to give NGOs sufficient time to adjust to the new subvention system. He said that after the three-year period, if some NGOs still had difficulty in meeting their commitments to existing staff, the Government was prepared to work with them and consider how it would continue to help. As regards funding for strengthening the central administration of NGOs, DSHW3 invited members to note that additional funding had

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already been provided for this last year. He said that the Administration recognized that the new funding arrangement would represent a fundamental change to NGOs. Thus, it was prepared to work with them to identify their training needs, particularly in terms of human resource and financial management. He added that specific training packages would be devised to help NGOs cope with the changes.

24. On behalf of Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed strong dissatisfaction with the current proposal. He criticized the Government for being unscrupulous in forcing NGOs to be unscrupulous employers. He said that in proposing that the lump-sum grant would be reduced annually to reach the Benchmark in steps of 2% per annum starting from 2003/04, the Government was actually forcing NGOs to minimize cost by means of cutting staff remuneration and benefits. He objected to the proposed PF employer's contributions of 6.8%, which failed to meet actual needs as shown in the survey done by HKCSS.

25. Mr LEE was also dissatisfied that the lump sum grant for all new service units would include PF contribution of only 5%, which was the lowest employer's contribution rate required under the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Scheme. This also violated the principle advocated by MPF that employers should not take advantage of the Scheme and use it to replace a better retirement scheme already implemented for their staff. He also pointed out that the Administration was proposing 5% PF contribution on the wrong assumption that new services would be run by new staff without any need for experienced staff. He considered that since DSW had said that the final decision rested with the Government's policy on the PF scheme for the civil service, the current proposal should be shelved until the Government had come up with a decision.

26. In response, DSW clarified that the objective of the current proposal was not cost-cutting. In fact, two-thirds of NGOs would immediately get higher levels of funding than their existing levels on joining the new system and that was why the Administration had earmarked additional funding of \$150 million for implementation of the new system. He said that details of the Tide-Over Grant and what other assistance could be made available to help NGOs after the three years' period would be further worked out taking into account the sector's feedbacks.

27. Addressing Mr LEE's concerns about the 5% PF contribution, DSW said that an NGO, in deploying existing staff to run new service units, would still need to recruit new staff to fill the consequential vacancy. Thus, on balance, the lump sum funding allocated to the NGO should be adequate. DSHW3 invited members to note that for newly allocated service units, the lump sum grant would be calculated on the basis of mid-point salary even though NGOs might recruit new staff at entry point for the service.

28. DSW reiterated that 6.8% PF contribution was set having regard to the present sector-wide average PF employer's contribution. He pointed out that over the last 10 years, the average PF employer's contribution of the sector had never reached 6.8%. Moreover, the Tide-Over Grant would be available to NGOs to address any problems in the

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first three years arising from meeting contractual obligations to serving staff for salary creep and PF contributions. However, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that DSW was evading the question as to whether PF employer's contribution would be reduced from 6.8% to 5% in the long run. Mr LEUNG suggested that in order to ease the sector's concerns, the Administration should guarantee that staff remuneration and benefits would be maintained without changes under the new system. He pointed out that the lump-sum funding arrangement introduced to the education sector only applied to subvention for non-salary costs. Moreover, he appreciated that the Education Department (ED) had issued a lot of guidelines on the new funding system to schools before its implementation. However, DSW considered that it was not appropriate to make a direct comparison with the education sector which had higher sector-wide average PF employer's contribution due to lower staff turnover rate and its history of development. He pointed out that the current proposal actually allowed more flexibility for NGOs as compared with the new funding proposal introduced to schools by ED.

29. Mr LEUNG further asked why the new system should start on 1 April 2000 while the consultation period would last until 9 April 2000. DSW replied that after commencement of the new system, NGOs would still be given a two-year period to consider when to join it. In response to Mr LEUNG's further question on the future mechanisms to collect staff views, DSW said that NGOs would be required to ensure that there would always be adequate channels for staff to reflect their views on the new funding system to the NGO central administration. He said that appropriate guidelines would be issued to the management of NGO on this point.

30. In reply to Mr Fred LI Wah-ming's questions, DSW said that details of the Tide-Over Grant would be worked out soon and agreed that the vetting committee should include representatives from NGOs. However, he did not confirm whether or not NGOs could choose not to join the new system within the first two years of its operation. On behalf of Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions, the Chairman expressed objection to the new funding proposal. She asked whether the commencement date of the new system could be deferred and DSW replied in the negative. DSHW3 added that very extensive consultation had been undertaken with both the management and front-line staff and that the consultation was still on-going. During the consultation process, some NGOs had already indicated that they would like to join the new system within the first year of its operation. However, the Chairman warned the Administration that it must not push the proposal through before reaching agreements with the sector, or else it might not be able to get the required funding from LegCo to implement the new funding arrangement.

31. Mr LEE Kai-ming commented that the proposal would pre-empt the outcome of the review of civil service pension system. He also anticipated that once the current proposal was implemented, the PF employer's contribution under any future PF scheme to be introduced for the civil service would not be higher than 5%. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said he was opposed to the proposal due to the following reasons -

- (a) The current proposal should be on par with the new funding arrangement

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introduced to the education sector;

- (b) The review of the civil service pension system had yet to be completed and the Government's policy on PF scheme for the civil service had yet to be worked out;
- (c) It was not a mature stage to introduce the proposal since SPMS had not even been fully implemented or reviewed yet; and
- (d) The consultation conducted by the Administration on the proposal was not a genuine consultation and it had not really sought the views of staff.

32. Mr LEE proposed the following motion -

"That this Panel urges the Government to restrict the scope of implementation of the lump sum funding package to "Other Charges" first, in order to ensure that the personal emoluments and benefits will remain unchanged and to allow NGOs flexibility in the use of resources. The package should be further discussed only after SPMS has been fully implemented and reviewed."

33. The Chairman put the motion to vote. The following members supported the motion: Miss Cyd HO Sau-lan, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, Mr Fred LI Wah-ming, Mr LAW Chi-kwong and the Chairman.

34. Mr HO Sai-chu considered that the new subvention system had actually been discussed for many years and he believed that it would bring about improvements to the sector. He took the view that it would be technically difficult to restrict the scope of implementation of the lump sum funding package to "Other Charges" only and he agreed with the Administration that a direct comparison could not be drawn between the welfare sector and the education sector.

35. Taking into account Mr HO Sai-chu's views, Mr LAW Chi-kwong proposed the following motion -

"That this Panel urges the Administration to provide sufficient resources to NGOs to enable them to maintain the current remuneration and benefit packages for existing staff."

The Chairman put the motion to vote. The following members supported the motion: Mr HO Sau-chu, Mr David CHU Yu-lin, Mr LEE Kai-ming, Mr Fred LI Wah-ming and Mr LAW Chi-kwong.

36. The Chairman proposed the following motion -

"That this Panel urges the Administration to defer implementation of the new

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funding proposal until it has the support of the welfare sector."

The Chairman put the motion to vote. The following members supported the motion: Miss Cyd HO Sau-lan, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, Mr Fred LI Wah-ming, Mr LAW Chi-kwong and the Chairman.

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37. The Chairman said that since the three proposed motions carried the same votes, they should be regarded as the unanimous views of the Panel instead of motions passed by the Panel. She requested the Administration to take into account these views and address the sector's concerns about the proposal in working out the details.

IV. Briefing on "promoting self-reliance" scheme
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1342/99-00(06))

38. Due to shortage of time, members agreed to defer discussion of this item to the next meeting.

V. Social welfare services for squatter areas in the New Territories
(LC Papers Nos. CB(2)1342/99-00(07) - (09))

39. The Chairman welcomed representatives of the deputations to the meeting.

Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)

40. Mr CHOI Kim-wah of HKCSS considered that over the years there had not been much improvement made to the provision of community and welfare services to the squatter areas in the New Territories (NT). He noted that a visit had recently been made to these squatter areas by Government officers together with some LegCo Members, who all recognized that there were problems of concern to the residents there and that these problems should be referred to the relevant Government departments for follow-up action to improve the situation. Mr CHOI further pointed out that many social services organizations were willing to do more and improvement could actually be made by extending the services being provided by the existing NLCDP teams to the areas. He criticized the Administration for being too bureaucratic and rigid in handling this matter without considering the plights of the residents and the fact that existing service teams actually had spare capacity to meet the service needs. He then referred to the proposals and justifications for the proposals as set out in the HKCSS submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)1342/99-00(08)).

The Rural Community Services Alliance

41. Ms YEUNG Sau-ling said that she had been living in the squatter areas since birth and outlined the problems faced by the areas. She pointed out that over the past 40 years

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she had not seen much improvement made to the areas, which continued to be plagued by landslides, floods, lack of clean water supply and inadequate street lighting. Moreover, with more and more new arrivals settling down in the squatter areas, communication and other problems had arisen in the areas. She said that she had never seen a Government official paying visits to the residents there to understand their needs. Since several redevelopment plans had been announced for NT North, she considered that there was now even a greater need for permanent support teams to be stationed in the squatter areas to help residents cope with the problems associated with clearance programmes.

42. Mr KUO Chun-chuen of the Alliance referred to its submission and added that there were about 210,000 residents in the NT squatter areas who would certainly be affected by the redevelopment plans to be launched. He considered that since the Administration's policy was that NLCDP services would be provided to public housing estates undergoing redevelopment, the residents in question should also receive the services. He stressed that services being provided by the existing outreach teams to these residents were inadequate and suggested that permanent service teams should be established in the villages to provide integrated welfare services for the residents.

43. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan recalled that during the visit to selected squatter areas on 16 December 1999, Mr TSUI Kwan-ping, Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs (DSHA), who was also present noted that some residents drank and used dirty stream water due to the lack of tap water. Mr LEE asked whether improvement had since been made and whether the Administration would consider establishing dedicated teams to provide integrated welfare services for the squatter areas.

44. In response, Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (PAS(HA)) said that the Administration had devoted considerable resources to improve the environment of rural areas over the years and pledged that it would continue in its efforts to make the necessary improvement. He pointed out the full implementation of the District Administration Scheme had actually brought much improvement to the environment of rural areas. Taking North District as an example, PAS(HA) said that, in order to improve the living environment and alleviate environmental problems such as flooding in the district, projects amounting to a total value of over \$4 million had been implemented in 1999/2000, including projects to improve drainage channels, footpaths and van tracks. In 2000/01, \$4 million had been earmarked to carry out some 21 projects to further improve the living environment of the squatter areas in North District. As regards the specific case referred to by Mr LEE, PAS(HA) undertook to provide details of the follow-up action to the Panel later.

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(Post-meeting note : Staff from the Water Supplies Department (WSD) and the District Officer (North District) paid a site visit on 29 March 2000 to several households near to Kai Len Village (雞嶺村) in North District which drew water from nearby streams for consumption. During the visit, the residents concerned were informed of the presence of a water main along a footpath within 50 metres away from where they lived. The residents were also advised to apply from WSD

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for portable water supply.)

45. PAS(HA) pointed out that following the visit, Mr TSUI Kwan-ping, DSHA, had suggested forming volunteer teams to provide services to residents in the squatter areas and subsequently the idea had been put into practice. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Youth/Human Resources Management) (ADSW(Y/HRM)) supplemented that a Rural Area Mobile Service Team in North District had been set up. It had built up a support network and provided integrated services for the vulnerable groups in the squatter areas in North District. There were also Support Teams for the Elderly providing outreaching services for their target clients in the area. She highlighted that close liaison was established between the service teams and the village representatives and any requests for improvement work to the environment could thus be conveyed to the service teams, which would relay the requests to the concerned departments for follow-up action.

46. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan took the view that the squatter areas in North District needed a NLCDP team more than the Rural Area Mobile Service Team. He considered that the Administration, instead of using resources to set up the mobile team, should have used the resources for creating a NLCDP team to service the area. In reply, ADSW(Y/HRM) explained that the mobile team was implemented by SWD in conjunction with NGOs. No additional resources from SWD were involved.

47. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that the Rural Area Mobile Service Team was inadequate since it was not stationed in the squatter areas at all time. He considered that it would serve the residents much better if there were a NLCDP team for the area. He asked whether the Administration would review the decision of ExCo made in 1995 that NLCDP service would not be extended to rural areas. PAS(HA) replied that the Administration's paper had already fully explained the decision of ExCo. He invited members to note that at the end of 1997, a review had been conducted by the Audit Commission to examine the management of NLCDP services. One of the recommendations of the review was that the Government should review whether there remained sufficient justifications for those projects with a service population below 3,000 and projects with no scheduled clearance/redevelopment to continue. PAS(HA) explained that it was therefore difficult for the Administration to accede to requests for provision of NLCDP service to squatter areas with no scheduled clearance taking into account the Audit Commission's recommendations on the utilization of NLCDP resources.

48. Mr Fred LI Wah-ming pointed out that since the the Rural Area Mobile Service Team was only made up of volunteers, its service must be very limited as the volunteers could only pay visits to the squatter areas on an irregular basis. He considered that the team could only play a supportive role whereas NLCDP teams should be relied on as the main service providers. He suggested to provide some community development service teams to the squatter areas in NT regardless whether they were pending redevelopment or not.

49. PAS(HA) replied that the Administration did not consider that the problems

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pertaining to the squatter areas could be solved simply by providing NLCDP teams. It was rather of the view that, depending on their nature, these problems could be followed up and resolved by the relevant Government departments. In addition, various services were being provided by outreaching teams to residents to help them resolve their problems, including those associated with redevelopment.

50. Miss Cyd HO Sau-lan considered that it was inadequate just to provide a volunteer team to the squatter areas. In view of the fact that there were more and more new arrivals settling down in the squatter areas, she supported that additional supportive service should be provided there to cope with new problems arisen. In response to Miss HO's question, ADSW(Y/HRM) said that the Support Teams had contacted some 600 elderly people in the squatter area in Tai Po, some 400 elderly people in North District and some 900 elderly people in Tuen Mun. She stressed that the service units of SWD and NGOs adopted a proactive approach to meet the service needs of the elderly. For example, family caseworkers and medical social workers paid home visits to elderly people in remote areas. At Miss HO's request, ADSW(Y/HRM) agreed to further provide a breakdown of the number of cases by client categories to the Panel. To follow up on the issue, Miss HO said that she would draw up and forward a list of questions to the Secretariat for onward transmission to the Administration to seek additional information.

Adm
Miss Cyd
HO Sau-lan

51. Mr LEE Kai-ming pointed out that most of the squatter areas with no village representatives, especially areas settled by new arrivals, were very poor and even in sub-human conditions. He asked whether the Administration had ever taken the initiative to look at their conditions and bid for resources to bring about improvement. PAS(HA) replied that any requests for community facilities by the residents could be conveyed to the district office of SWD or the Home Affairs Department (HAD) for follow-up action. However, the Chairman pointed out that the crux of the problem lay with the fact that these residents did not know where to make such requests. In response, ADSW(Y/HRM) pointed out that both HAD and SWD officers and many volunteers, with some working on a full-time basis, paid visits to these remote areas which had no village representatives. To monitor their progress of work, SWD had conducted meetings at an interval of two months to coordinate the required follow-up action.

52. Concluding the discussion, the Chairman said that since there were many problems pertaining to the conditions of the squatter areas in NT, and that there were still many points of disagreement between members and the Administration over this issue, she suggested and members agreed to set up a Subcommittee to follow up the matter with the Administration. The Chairman invited the deputations present at the meeting to provide further information on the problems faced by the residents for members' reference before the first meeting of the Subcommittee.

(Post-meeting note : the first meeting of the Subcommittee on Welfare Services for Squatter Areas in NT would be held on 13 April 2000.)

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53. The meeting ended at 1:05 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

7 April 2000