

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1344/99-00

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 14 February 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 LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon LAW Chi-kwong

Members Absent : Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon LEE Kai-ming, SBS, JP

Members Attending : Hon Michael HO Man-ka
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon CHOY So-yuk

Public Officers Attending : Item III
Mr Robin GILL
Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 3

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

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Mrs Patricia CHU
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

Mr CHEUNG Hing-wah
Chief Social Work Officer (Youth)
Social Welfare Department

Item IV

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

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

Mrs Marion LAI
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)

Mrs Rachael CARTLAND
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security)

Mr LI Kok-ming
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 1
Social Welfare Department

Mr KAM Wing-hung
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 4
Social Welfare Department

Item V

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

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

Dr CHAN Wai-man
Assistant Director of Health (Elderly Health Services)

Mrs Eliza LEUNG
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly)

Dr K M CHOY
Executive Manager (Professional Services) 1
Hospital Authority

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Dr K C YIP
Chief of Service (Psychiatry)/Kowloon Hospital

Attendance by : Item III
Invitation

The Fighting for Social Welfare Alliance

Mr CHEUNG Kwok-chu
Convenor

Miss TSANG Lin-hing
School social worker

Miss TANG Yin-ping
Youth worker

Miss CHAN Wai-yin
Volunteer

Item IV

The Social Security Assistants' Branch of the Hong Kong Chinese
Civil Servants' Association

Mr CHAN Chun-wah
Chairman

Mr TONG Chi
Vice-Chairman

Mr WONG Chi-tung
Executive member

Item V

The Hong Kong Alzheimer's Disease & Brain Failure Association

Mr Edwin YU
Chairman

Ms Milly YU
Vice Chairman

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Ms Grace FUNG
Member

Ms LIU Wai-yee
Member

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

Staff in Attendance : Miss Mary SO
Senior Assistant Secretary (2) 8

I. Confirmation of minutes of meeting held on 14 October 1999

LC Paper No. CB(2)1048/99-00

The minutes were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion

LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1041/99-00(01) and (02)

2. Members agreed to discuss the following items at the next regular meeting to be held on 13 March 2000 -

- (a) social welfare subvention reform;
- (b) review of support services for street sleepers; and
- (c) social welfare services for squatter areas in the New Territories.

III. Implementation of the policy of one school social worker for each school

LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1041/99-00(03) and (04)

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr CHEUNG Kwok-chu of the Fighting for Social Welfare Alliance (the Alliance) introduced the submission setting out the views of the Alliance on the implementation of the policy of one school social worker (SSW) for each secondary school.

4. Miss TSANG Lin-hing of the Alliance said that the Administration's proposal to create 152 additional SSW posts for the existing secondary schools from

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redeployment of resources from existing children and youth centres (CYCs) and study and reading rooms (SR Rooms) would cause disruption to the provision of school social work service. Notably, school social work operating agencies not able to provide full-time SSWs to the schools which they currently served from redeployment of resources would be forced to relinquish their services to other youth agencies which could. This situation was most unsatisfactory, having regard to the fact that an effective school social work service was built on the close liaison between the school administration, teachers, students and SSWs. Miss TSANG further said that as the school principals were not informed of the progress of the implementation of the redeployment exercise and had no say in the posting of SSWs to their schools, it was understandable that much apprehension had been building up in the education sector. Indeed, quite a number of school principals had indicated to the school social work operating agencies that they would not wish to have their SSWs replaced with new ones. To address such concerns, the Administration should keep the schools apprised of the development of the exercise and should consult the schools which would be affected by the exercise whether they were agreeable to have their SSWs replaced with new ones.

5. Miss TSANG pointed out that as school social work service and community-based services were integral parts of youth services, the needs of the students would not be better met if the policy of one SSW for each school was implemented at the expense of cutting back the resources of the CYCs. Miss TSANG further said that in view of the heavy workload, SSWs increasingly needed to enlist the CYCs in providing supporting services to students, so that they could focus on those students most at risk. If the services provided by the CYCs were reduced, SSWs would need to rely more on themselves to give guidance and counselling to students thereby further increasing their workload.

6. Miss CHAN Wai-yin of the Alliance credited the CYCs in contributing to her development into a confident and responsible person. She further said that unlike studying in the public libraries, students studying in the SR Rooms could seek help from the social workers there in coping with their school work and personal problems.

7. Miss TANG Yin-ping of the Alliance said that as the redeployment exercise would render some 400 staff redundant, it was imperative that the Administration should not attempt to conclude the implementational plan of the exercise in haste, and should take as much time as needed to consult all concerned parties in coming up with a carefully thought out plan.

8. Dr YEUNG Sum and Mr Fred LI enquired whether the Administration could give an assurance that no staff would be laid off as a result of the redeployment exercise, and, if no, how the problem of staff redundancy would be dealt with.

9. Before responding to the question raised by Dr YEUNG and Mr LI, Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 3 (DSHW(3)) said that the redeployment of resources from CYCs and SR Rooms for the creation of 152 additional SSW posts was

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consistent with the Administration's approach of targetting resources at services most in need by the community. He pointed out that both the welfare and education sectors had been asking Government to extend this service for sometime and both had been fully apprised of the need to redeploy resources within the youth services for the implementation of one SSW for each secondary school policy. DSHW(3) said that the total amount of resources spent on youth welfare services currently stood at \$1.3 billion a year, and thus would not be reduced as a result of the redeployment exercise.

10. To minimize the possibility of staff redundancy, DSHW(3) said that extensive consultations were currently being conducted by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) and all 49 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the provision of youth welfare services. DSHW(3) added that many issues still needed to be sorted out with all parties concerned and therefore no assurance that there would definitely be no staff redundancy could be given at this stage. However, all parties involved would work to minimize the problem.

11. Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services) (DDSW(S)) supplemented that the NGOs had been advised that they should try to absorb the staff being affected to fill vacancies within the agencies as far as possible. The SWD's plan to form 21 additional integrated teams (ITs) should help the agencies' endeavour in this regard. Moreover, as there was currently a 2% vacancy rate in the whole welfare sector and that \$380 million had already secured to provide new services in the coming three years, it was envisaged that large scale staff redundancy should not arise. DDSW(S) informed members that although the target was to create 76 new SSW posts by September 2000 with the remaining 76 by September 2001, it looked very likely that the first year target would be surpassed.

12. Responding to the concern raised by the Alliance concerning the transferring of schools from one operating agency to another mentioned by the Alliance in paragraph 4 above, DDSW(S) said that such arrangement was nothing new and had been routinely carried out when funding for the creation of new SSW posts became available. She assured members that schools affected would be informed well in advance to make the necessary arrangement, with a view to ensuring smooth transition in the provision of school social work service to students.

13. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that as the policy of one SSW post for each secondary school would be implemented at the expense of the resources for existing CYCs and SR Rooms, he expressed concern that such arrangement would discourage the education sector from proposing new and/or improved services in future.

14. Mr LAW Chi-kwong disagreed with the Administration's view that the impact of the redeployment exercise on the existing staff would be minimal. In his view, as the \$380 million secured by the SWD to provide new services would not be available in the short term and at the same time, he could not see how the NGOs involved in youth services would not need to lay off some of their junior staff in order to come up

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with the resources to create a SSW post ranked at Assistant Social Work Officer (ASWO). Moreover, even if the staff being laid off could find jobs with another NGOs, their salaries would be 30-40% less than what they were earning now. To prevent such from happening as far as possible, Mr LAW was of the view that the Administration should not set a deadline that the implementation of the policy of one SSW for each secondary school must be completed in two years' time. Also, as the term "registered social worker" contained in the Funding and Service Agreement did not specify that the person concerned had to be a social work degree-holder, consideration could be given to allowing 50% of the duties of a SSW to be taken up by a social worker ranked at ASWO, with the remaining half of the duties taken up by a social worker ranked at Social Work Assistant as an interim measure.

15. DSHW(3) replied that the Administration would consider Mr LAW's suggestions. He reiterated that the provision of one full-time SSW for each secondary school was made having taken into account the views of the education and welfare sectors that the school was the most appropriate avenue to identify the welfare needs of young people and to provide preventive and remedial services as part of the nine-year compulsory education system. DSHW(3) said that the SWD shared members' concerns about staff redundancy, and that was why it had been maintaining a close dialogue with the HKCSS and the NGOs to ensure that the possibility of staff redundancy arising from the redeployment exercise was minimized. DSHW(3) also said that SWD was pursuing the idea of setting up a clearing house to match staff with vacant posts in the welfare sector. The clearing house, if set up, would help to ameliorate the potential problem of staff redundancy.

16. DDSW(S) supplemented that there was no question that the NGOs had been forced to pledge a certain number of SSWs, regardless of whether they could absorb staff being affected by the redeployment exercise within their agencies, in order to meet the target of creating 152 additional SSW posts in two years' time. If necessary, the completion date could be extended. DDSW(S) further said that the SWD intended to brief members again on the progress of the redeployment exercise in May 2000.

17. Miss CHOY So-yuk said that in view of the growing number of newly arrived children (NAC), she enquired whether any assessment had been made on the impact of these children on the workload of SSW. Miss CHOY also enquired about the measures which had been adopted to prevent discrimination against the NAC.

18. DDSW(S) replied that the Administration attached great importance to helping the NAC to integrate in their new environment and various programmes had been implemented in this regard. She further said that it was difficult to say how the NAC had impacted on the workload of the SSW, as the SSW worked in tandem with the school administration, teachers and guidance teachers in providing guidance and counselling to the NAC. DDSW(S) nevertheless undertook to convey Miss CHOY's concern to the Steering Committee of the SSW.

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19. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed disappointment that the implementation of the policy of one SSW for each secondary school would be met by redeploying resources from existing CYCs and SR Rooms. He further said that the approach of first setting down a target of achieving a saving of \$97 million to create the additional 152 SSW posts and then required the NGOs to redeploy their resources to come up with savings was inappropriate. Instead, the Administration should ask the NGOs to explore the feasibility of deploying resources within their agencies to see how much money could be saved for the creation of additional SSW posts. Mr LEE further said that the Administration's paper did not provide any figures on the impact of the redeployment exercise on the existing CYCs and the SR Rooms, and requested that such information be given. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung echoed Mr LEE's views.

20. DSHW(3) reiterated that as resources were finite, it was always necessary to target them at areas of higher priority. On the impact of the redeployment exercise on existing CYCs and SR Rooms, DSHW(3) said that the exercise would involve the rationalization of the current provision of some over-provided and/or under-utilized CYCs. It would also involve redeploying staff resources from SR Rooms, which would, in future, be manned by volunteers or redeployed staff. The closure of CYCs would be kept to a minimum and no SR Rooms would be closed. In respect of the latter, the pooling of resources was confined to staff costs and NGOs would retain their premises and continue to receive Other Charges and rent and rates payments from the Government. DDSW(S) stressed that the redeployment exercise would not undermine the quality of youth services, as the exercise only involved a pooling of resources to meet the changing needs of young people. Moreover, the exercise was targetted at enhancing those services which were considered to be more effective, (i.e. by forming more ITs and creating more SSW posts). She added that although the number of staff in some SR Rooms would be reduced, the needs of young people would continue to be looked after by the social workers and other staff in the CYCs.

21. Dr YEUNG Sum and Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung were of the view that the agreement of the school principals should be sought before swapping of schools between operating agencies. DDSW(S) replied that the SWD would brief the schools which would be affected by the redeployment exercise after the completion of the consultation exercise with the HKCSS and the NGOs in May this year. To date, only three school principals had indicated that they wished to retain the service of their SSWs. DDSW(S) further said that unless the school principals had very good reasons for retaining their SSWs, the SWD would normally not entertain such an request.

22. In concluding the discussion, the Deputy Chairman asked the Administration to note the reservation and comments expressed by members on the subject.

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IV. Manpower shortage of Social Security Assistants

LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1041/99-00(05) and (06)

23. At the invitation of the Deputy Chairman, Mr CHAN Chun-wah of the Social Security Assistants' Branch of the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association (the SSA Branch) highlighted the salient points detailed in the SSA Branch's submission. In particular, Mr CHAN said that the acute shortage of the SSA staff had undermined the quality of their service delivery to the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) applicants and recipients. For example, a SSA only had 2.4 hours to handle each social security case including CSSA and Social Security Allowance case (this was calculated on the basis that the yearly working hours of one SSA were 1893 hours and he/she had to handle 793 social security cases per year), which was far from adequate. Mr CHAN pointed out that the reason why there was an acute shortage of SSA grade staff was because the SWD had not followed the manning standards recommended by the Management Services Agency (MSA) in 1995.

24. Mr WONG Chi-tung of the SSA Branch said that the work easement measures introduced by the SWD, such as extending the processing time of a new CSSA application from 14 to 21 working days, could not alleviate the work pressure of the SSA staff. Although the SSA grade staff had been working overtime to meet the 21-day deadline, complicated applications sometimes required about two months' time to process. As a result, assistance to the applicant was delayed. Mr WONG further said that the recent measure to re-shuffle the duties of Senior Social Security Assistant (SSSA) and SSA so that SSA could take up part of the investigation work related to CSSA cases was undesirable. This was because the SSAs generally did not have enough experience to detect fraudulent claims for CSSA and to understand the needs of the CSSA recipients so as to refer them to apply for the appropriate services and/or special allowances. Mr WONG also expressed concern about the efficacy of service to the clients of the Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme, having regard to the fact that a SSA could only afford to spend an average of eight minutes with his/her client in each meeting.

25. Mr WONG Chi-tung of the SSA Branch said that not only would staff shortage result in the decline of the quality of service of the Social Security Field Units (SSFUs), public money would be lost due to the lack of manpower to carry out thorough investigation work to detect social security fraud cases.

26. In response, Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)(DDSW(A)) said that the SWD was very concerned about the work pressure of the SSA grade staff and had been in constant dialogue with the SSA Branch to understand and resolve the problems and difficulties they encountered in their work. To alleviate the work pressure of the SSA grade staff, a range of work easement measures had been introduced, such as streamlining and prioritizing work procedures and re-distributing duties amongst different grades of staff. On the manning standards set by the MSA in 1995, DDSW(A) explained that the reason why the SWD no longer used them for manpower planning was because the standards were drawn up based on the then

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circumstances. On the 2.4 hours and the eight minutes spent by a SSA in processing one new CSSA application and in meeting with the client of the SFS scheme respectively mentioned by the representatives of the SSA Branch above, DDSW(A) said that more study needed to be done to ascertain their accuracy.

27. DDSW(A) further said that although new services had been introduced to the SSFUs, the SWD had always assessed their impact on the SSA grade staff first and additional resources had been sought from the central government to strengthen manpower provision where justified. She informed members that the total number of CSSA cases had stabilized at around 235,000 and had started decreasing continuously since June 1999. Also, the total number of new CSSA applications from April 1999 to December 1999 had dropped by 31% (from 75,915 to 51,880) compared with the same period in 1998. This, to a large extent, had reduced the work pressure of the SSA grade.

28. DDSW(A) further said that to prevent and detect social security fraud cases, the SWD had set up special investigation teams to conduct random checks on different types of cases through home visits (more home visits were made to suspicious cases) and an Internal Committee on Fraud Cases to examine reports on fraud cases uncovered and recommended prosecution whenever appropriate. In regard to overpayments to CSSA recipients, DDSW(A) pointed out that most of the times they were due to the fact that the CSSA recipients had forgotten to inform the SWD in time of the changes in their circumstances.

29. Mr Fred LI enquired whether a backlog of 5,272 CSSA applications as at the end of November 1999 mentioned in the SSA Branch's submission was accurate. DDSW(A) replied that an average of about 5,000 pending cases at the end of each month was normal, as the number included applications newly received and/or cases to be closed. However, the number of pending cases had dropped to 4,900 at the end of January 2000.

30. In reply to Mr LI's further enquiry on the accuracy of the \$80 million overpayments made out to the CSSA recipients in 1997-98 quoted by the SSA Branch in its submission, Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 1 (CSSO) said that the figure was reported in the Report No. 32 of the Director of Audit on the Audit Review of the Administration of the CSSA and Social Security Allowance Schemes published in April 1999. CSSO further said that as pointed out by DDSW(A) earlier at the meeting, the main reason for overpayments was because some of the CSSA recipients had forgotten to inform the SWD in time of the changes in their circumstances or other reasons, such as they had been away from Hong Kong for more than 180 days in a year.

31. Mr LI also enquired whether extending the time required for processing new CSSA applications from 14 to 21 days had deviated from the performance pledge, and the number of new CSSA applications received each month.

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32. CSSO replied that there were two time periods for processing new CSSA applications, namely, one month for simple applications and more than one month for complicated applications. As such, extending the processing time from 14 to 21 working days would not deviate from the performance pledge of one month. He further said that priority would be given to those CSSA applicants in urgent need of assistance. As regards the number of new CSSA applications received each month, he referred members to Annex III of the Administration's paper. He added that given that the number of new applications for CSSA averaged over 5,000 per month from April 1999 to December 1999, it was not surprising that the number of pending cases at the end of each month averaged around 5,000.

33. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung enquired whether the shortfall of the SSA grade staff was caused by changes in the manning standards of the SSFUs. DDSW(A) replied in the negative, and said that the establishment of the SSA Grade had in fact been expanded by 63% within four years between 1995/96 to 1999/2000. The SWD would continue to keep the staffing situation of the SSA grade under review and would seek additional funding from the central government where necessary. She however pointed out that as the SWD had to bid the resources with other policy bureaux and government departments, there was no guarantee that it would always receive 100% of its requested funding from the central government.

34. In reply to Mr YEUNG's further enquiry as to whether the criterion for determining the staffing establishment of the SSA grade was based on the number of CSSA applications and cases or on the funding received, DDSW(A) said that apart from the number of CSSA applications and cases, other factors such as the complexity of the applications and cases and the objective environment of the workplace also came into play.

35. Mr LAW Chi-kwong asked why the report on the review of the manning requirement of the SSFUs conducted by the MSA could not be provided to members. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security) (ADSW)(SS) replied that the report would not serve any useful purpose as it was very outdated. She further said that as an overall review of the manning requirement of the SSFUs would be conducted following the implementation of the new Computerized Social Security System (CSSS) in October 2000, she suggested members to wait for the findings of the impending review.

36. Mr LAW remarked that the CSSS might not solve the existing manpower shortage problem. Mr TONG Chi of the SSA Branch shared Mr LAW's view. In response, ADSW(SS) said that she was confident that the CSSS, which aimed at simplifying work process and enhancing service quality, would help to alleviate the work pressure on the SSA staff.

37. Dr YEUNG Sum hoped that the SSA Branch would not use the number of fraud cases as one of the reasons for justifying the need for more SSA posts to be created. In his view, the large majority of CSSA applicants were honest and they

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only came to apply for CSSA as the last resort. Referring to the SSA Branch's submission which mentioned that the number of CSSA applications and cases handled by each SSA grade staff in 1999/2000 was 866, Dr YEUNG enquired whether similar figures for the years between 1996/97 and 1998/99 could be provided. DDSW(A) undertook to provide the information.

38. In reply to Dr YEUNG's further enquiry on the SWD's plan to create additional posts, DDSW(A) said that 20 additional SSSA posts would be created within the current financial year.

39. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan supported Mr LAW Chi-kwong's view that the 1995 MSA report should be released to members. Referring to Annex II of the Administration's paper, Mr LEE enquired why 73 SSA posts earmarked for creation within the current financial year were still outstanding. DDSW(A) replied that as the recruitment of civil servants on permanent and pensionable terms had been temporarily suspended, 122 non-civil service contract staff had been hired instead. DDSW(A) said that if the temporary suspension was lifted, the recruitment of 73 permanent SSA posts would proceed.

40. In response to the remarks made by Dr YEUNG in paragraph 37 above, Mr CHAN Chun-wah of the SSA Branch said that the reason for requesting additional SSA staff was to ensure that there would be adequate manpower to do the job properly. Mr CHAN further said that the 63% increase in the establishment of the SSA grade claimed by the SWD was inaccurate, as the calculation included the 73 posts which had not been created and the 49 posts which had been created for the implementation of the SFS scheme. In the SSA Branch's view, a more accurate figure should be 43%.

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41. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that the SWD should provide members with the report of the review on the manning requirements of the SSFUs conducted by the MSA in 1995 and the number of CSSA applications and cases handled by each SSA staff between 1996/97 and 1998/99.

V. Report of the Working Group on Dementia
LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1041/99-00(07) and (08)

42. Mr Edwin YU of the Hong Kong Alzheimer's Disease & Brain Failure Association (the Association) briefed members on the salient points of the Association's submission detailing the areas of inadequacies in the community care support for the demented elderly and their carers.

43. Miss Grace FUNG and Miss LIU Wai-yee of the Association told members of the difficulties they had encountered in caring for their elderly mothers who had succumbed to dementia. Most notably, their mothers had been refused admission by the residential care homes and day care centres; and even when their mothers had

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ultimately been admitted by these centres, these centres had later asked them to take their mothers home because of the great nuisance their mothers had caused to other residents in the centres.

44. Miss Milly YU of the Association hoped that the following measures could be introduced to improve the existing services to the demented elderly and their carers -

- (a) strengthening the existing community support service by -
 - (i) increasing the number of day care centres for demented elderly, with a view to providing one such centre in each district in the long run. As the learning ability of the demented elderly was poor, training to enhance their functioning and independence in their daily living activities should be provided on a long-term basis, instead of the existing six to nine months' time. Also, the operating hours of these centres should be extended to cover sundays and public holidays and their closing hour should be extended to 7:00 pm;
 - (ii) increasing the number of respite places in day care centres and simplifying their admission procedures. In respect of the latter, as the intention of respite care was to provide temporary relief to carers and to allow them to attend to urgent unforeseen business, it would be counter-productive if the procedures were cumbersome;
 - (iii) making available home help to the carers;
- (b) educating the frontline welfare and health workers, as well as the public, about dementia so as to increase their awareness and acceptance of the disease;
- (c) promoting better service coordination and collaboration between the SWD, the Hospital Authority (HA) and the Department of Health; and
- (d) extending community support care to the demented who were under 60 years old and elderly persons living alone.

45. Responding to the proposal for providing training to the demented elderly on a long-term basis mentioned in paragraph 44(a)(i) above, Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly) (ADSW(E)) said that the SWD had recently commissioned the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct a consultancy study to evaluate the effectiveness of the six dementia units set up in five subvented residential care homes and the four day care centres for demented elderly and to recommend long-term operating mode of the services. The Administration's current thinking was that the period of training provided by the day care centres for demented elderly should be at

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least nine months to one year. It did not consider it necessary to provide such training on a long-term basis, as carers would also be provided with training on the knowledge and skills of taking care of their demented elderly at home.

46. In regard to the proposal for increasing the respite places and simplifying the admission procedures mentioned in paragraph 44(a)(ii) above, ADSW(E) said that a review on respite service in residential care homes was near completion and the findings of the review would be submitted to the Elderly Commission for consideration next month. She believed that one of the recommendations of the review would be to increase respite places in residential care homes. To provide temporary relief to carers, the SWD had launched a three-year pilot project of providing 36 day respite places at 12 day care centres since July 1999. ADSW(E) further said that besides respite care, home care teams could also be utilized to provide temporary relief to carers.

47. Dr YEUNG Sum welcomed an increase in respite places and hoped that this would be implemented as soon as possible. Dr YEUNG further enquired whether consideration would be given to opening the day care centres all year round and extending the closing time to 7:00 pm.

48. ADSW(E) replied that a review on day care centres for the elderly, including social centres and multi-service centres, was currently being undertaken to evaluate whether the modes of service delivery could still meet the present day requirements. The issue of operating hours of these centres was certainly an area being examined. ADSW(E) said that she would not rule out the possibility that more flexible operating hours, similar to those applied to child care centres, would be applied to the day care centres. She further said that the review was expected to be completed later in the year.

49. Mr Michael HO pointed out that the problem of refusing admission mentioned by a representative of the Association earlier was common to all residential care homes. He enquired whether the SWD had any measures to prohibit the operators of the residential care homes from being very selective and turning away people who were demented.

50. ADSW(E) replied that no residential care homes with vacant places were permitted to turn away people who were demented or to admit the demented elderly on a trial basis. The reason why these incidents sometimes occurred was because the assessment of the residential care home applicants was now made by the operators of the residential care homes. To plug this loophole, a mechanism would be put in place by the SWD later in the year whereby assessments of the applicants for residential care and day care services would be handled using a set of objective assessment tool by trained assessor. ADSW(E) hoped that incidents of rejected cases in the meantime would be reported to the SWD so that appropriate follow-up action could be taken.

51. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan enquired whether consideration would be given to the

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setting up of more dementia units in residential care homes and day care centres, increasing respite places in the day care centres and the setting up of psychogeriatric day hospital, as recommended by the Working Group on Dementia.

52. Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare 2 (DSHW(2)) replied that the Administration supported all the recommendations contained in Chapter 4 of the Report of the Working Group on Dementia and had been actively considering and implementing measures to take these recommendations forward. On the recommendation for the setting up of more dementia units in residential care homes and day care centres, DSHW(2) said that as mentioned in paragraph 45 above, a consultancy study was being made to see how best such recommendation could be taken forward. In regard to the recommendation for providing more day respite places for the demented elderly, DSHW(2) said that the 12 day care centres currently providing day respite places would be examining the effectiveness of the service and the future of the operation mode. The SWD would take into account the results of the evaluation in considering whether to expand the service to other day care centres. On the recommendation of the setting up of psychogeriatric day hospital (PDH), Executive Manager, Hospital Authority said that the provision of day hospitals was an integral part of the HA's psychiatric ambulatory service. There had been an increase in the HA provision of PDH over the past few years and places for psychogeriatric patients were provided for as part of the PDH facilities.

53. In reply to Mr LEE's further enquiry as to whether the provision of community support service would be extended to demented persons under the age of 60, ADSW(E) said that such service was provided on a need basis with no age requirement. A case in point was that home care service was provided to single-parent family and to the mentally retarded.

54. In summing up, the Chairman urged the Administration and the HA to expedite the implementation of the recommendations of the Report of the Working Group on Dementia. She further hoped that the Administration and the HA would maintain close liaison with the Association so as to better understand the problems faced by the demented and their carers.

55. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:28 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

9 March 2000