

立法會
Legislative Council

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(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration
and cleared with the Chairman)

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LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

Subcommittee on welfare services for squatter areas in the New Territories

Minutes of meeting
held on Friday, 16 June 2000 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room B of the Legislative Council Building

Members Present : Hon CHAN Yuen-han (Chairman)
Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEE Kai-ming, SBS, JP
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP

Members Absent : Hon HO Sai-chu, SBS, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan

Member Attending : Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung

Public Officers Attending : Mrs Betty FUNG
Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs

Mr Parrish NG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs

Mrs Suzanna MA
Senior Executive Officer (Community Building)
Home Affairs Bureau

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

Mr H W CHEUNG
Chief Social Work Officer (Youth)
Social Welfare Department

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

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

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I. Meeting with the Administration
(LC Papers Nos. CB(2)2372/99-00(01) and (02))

In response to the request made by the Subcommittee at the last meeting, Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Youth and Human Resource Management) (ADSW(Y&HRM)) provided supplementary information regarding the 4 900 cases mentioned in the paper provided by the Administration vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1782/99-00(01). She pointed out that about 60% of these cases were requests for assistance made by residents in person at the service units concerned, while the remaining 40% of cases were referrals of residents' requests for assistance made by other government departments/service units, community organizations/persons, Legislative Council (LegCo) Members/District Council (DC) members, etc. Among the said 40% of cases, only 32 of them were referred by Neighbourhood Level Community Development Project (NLCDP) teams, whilst more than 900 cases were referred by the service units of Social Welfare Department (SWD).

(Post-meeting note : The relevant details were circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2469/99-00(01) on 27 June 2000.)

2. In view of the concerns raised by members regarding the situation of residents living in rural squatter areas in the New Territories (NT), Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs (DS(HA)) advised that the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) had followed up by discussing the issue with SWD. It was considered that SWD's current proposal of establishing Rural Mobile Service Teams (mobile teams) in squatter areas not only could extend the provision of services to squatter areas in NT, but could also effectively resolve the problems faced by residents in their living. She referred members to SWD's proposal of

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establishing mobile teams in districts with a high concentration of squatter areas. These included Tai Po/North, Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan/Kwai Tsing and Sai Kung districts. These mobile teams were responsible for establishing contacts with residents in squatter areas in their respective districts, identifying the needs of residents through visits, as well as making appropriate referrals. On the other hand, mobile teams would also organize recreational and cultural activities for residents living in squatter areas in NT and would assist them to improve their living environment, thereby encouraging mutual help and creating a spirit of caring community. DS(HA) called for members' support for the proposal so that it could be implemented as soon as possible.

3. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung asked about the number of members in each mobile team and the manning ratio of team members to target clients. Moreover, he also queried whether the standard of services provided by these mobile teams, which comprised voluntary workers only, would be jeopardized.

4. In reply, ADSW(Y&HRM) advised that SWD would establish a District Co-ordinating Committee on Volunteer Movement (DCCVM) in each of the districts mentioned above. The DCCVMs would be chaired by respective District Social Welfare Officers and comprised representatives of the district-based non-government organizations (NGOs), such as DC members, school principals, representatives of non-government welfare agencies, etc. Even the representatives of the Police would also sit on DCCVMs. Moreover, a working group on mobile teams would also be set up under DCCVMs to oversee their operation and service performance.

5. Regarding the manning ratio of mobile teams, ADSW(Y&HRM) advised that the initial idea was for each team to comprise 100 to 200 voluntary workers but the actual number would depend on the size of the service areas concerned. She advised that all the mobile team members, although being voluntary workers, would be trained and supervised by professional social workers from SWD and NGOs. Moreover, DCCVMs would also monitor the services concerned. She advised that duties of mobile teams would include paying visits to residents living in the squatter areas mentioned above and briefing them on the various types of services available to them through different forms of activities (such as distribution of leaflets, etc).

6. Mr LAW Chi-kwong advised that repeated discussions had been held over the past five years within the LegCo on the question of providing NLCDP services for squatter areas in NT. The Panel on Welfare Services had also made it very clear on a number of occasions that the views of this Panel on this particular issue were different from those of the Government. Therefore, he would not repeat the relevant arguments. He pointed out that constitutionally speaking, LegCo Members were not given the power to compel the Government to accept their views. As such, the only thing he could do was to voice out his dissatisfaction about the Administration and to express his worries about the effectiveness of the services to be provided by mobile teams. Mr LAW Chi-

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kwong pointed out that as mobile teams only comprised voluntary workers, the service standard was of great concern. He urged the Administration to report the effectiveness of mobile teams to the Panel on Welfare Services of the next LegCo six months later. DS(HA) undertook to report to LegCo the implementation of the plan after the mobile teams had been set up for six to nine months.

7. The Chairman asked the Administration about the differences between the services provided under NLCDPs and those by mobile teams. In reply, ADSW(Y&HRM) advised that there would be far more team members in mobile teams than in NLCDP teams. Compared to the services provided by the latter, the former would provide more cost-effective services to larger service areas. Moreover, the objective of mobile teams was to build up a closer relationship with residents and to refer residents in need to the service units concerned.

8. The Chairman advised that, as mobile teams were primarily voluntary in nature, she did not believe that the standard of services rendered by mobile teams would be better than NLCDP services. She also pointed out that residents had made a clear indication of preference for the latter. In response, ADSW(Y&HRM) advised that SWD intended to phase in the provision of mobile teams to residents of the seven administrative districts mentioned above. She believed that if the provision of NLCDP services were to be extended to these seven administrative districts, there would be a substantial increase in the resources involved. DS(HA) added that the establishment of mobile teams would allow residents living in squatter areas in NT to be acquainted with various types of social welfare services and facilities. The teams may also render appropriate referral services to residents whenever necessary.

9. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan commented that on this particular issue, the Administration focused only on the output and neglected the nature of the services. It overlooked the fact that voluntary workers could not take up the job of organizing residents to facilitate their collective bargaining with the Government. While agreeing that mobile teams could not take up the work performed by other types of service units, DS(HA) pointed out that the proposed mobile teams sought to expand the scope of service areas so that more residents could be served. She further remarked that with the full implementation of the District Administration Scheme, plenty of channels were already available within the existing administrative framework for residents to express their views. She informed members that as there were up to 200 000 residents currently in need of contact and referral services, it was simply impossible for NLCDP teams to cope with squatter residents living in various districts across NT. She said that the Administration's idea was to allow voluntary workers to establish contacts with squatter residents first, and then refer their requests to the relevant organizations.

10. However, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan opined that DC members lacked adequate resources for rendering various types of services to residents. For example, apart from rendering direct services to residents, NLCDP teams also played the

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“empowerment” role in helping residents build up their communities, learn about and fight for their own benefits.

11. DS(HA) reiterated that, in terms of the use of resources, the Administration did not consider it most desirable to provide NLCDP services for squatter areas in NT. She proposed that a review of the effectiveness of the services provided by mobile teams should be conducted after the services had been provided for residents in squatter areas in NT for about six to nine months.

12. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung criticized the Administration’s remarks in paragraph 9 of its paper, in which it was stressed that “the problems pertaining to the squatter areas will have to be resolved ultimately by the relevant service units”. He also queried whether the Administration sought to obliterate the contributions made by NLCDP teams in assisting residents to resolve their problems. In response, DS(HA) clarified that the Administration had no intention whatsoever to obliterate the contributions made by NLCDP teams. Nevertheless, she remarked that with the development of society, the Administration considered that the urgency of NLCDPs had diminished relatively, and believed that it might be replaceable by other modes of services.

13. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung further proposed that the Administration should retain NLCDP teams and concurrently, set up additional mobile teams, so that the two types of service teams could complement one another, while the effectiveness of mobile teams might also be put to the test. In reply, DS(HA) pointed out that Mr LEUNG’s suggestion could not be accepted having regard to resource constraints. She advised that at present, each NLCDP team required over \$1 million per year to operate. If the services were to be expanded to cover over 200 000 squatter residents in NT, the Government would have to expend an additional amount of several tens of millions of dollars per year. In view of the substantial amount of resources input by the Administration over the years for improving the environment of and services for rural areas in NT, she doubted whether HAB could successfully bid for the required funding. However, Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung opined that he was dismayed by the reluctance of the Government to commit itself to a mere amount of several tens of millions of dollars for providing services for more than 200 000 residents.

14. PAS(HA) explained that the Administration’s decision of not to further extend NLCDPs to squatter areas in NT was not made solely on the ground of resources. It also took into account the fact that actual improvements to the environment of rural areas in NT had been brought about by the substantial amount of resources input by the Administration for this purpose over the years. As a result of such efforts, the needs of local residents for NLCDP services had diminished relatively. He further remarked that with the full implementation of the district administrative framework, adequate channels, such as DCs, Area Committees and resident groups in various districts, were currently available for residents to express their views and reflect their needs.

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15. Mr YEUNG Yiu-chung pointed out that, in fact, considerable amount of resources were required for training and supervising mobile teams. He questioned whether the cost effectiveness of mobile teams would definitely be greater than that of NLCDP teams.

16. In response, ADSW(Y&HRM) explained that at present, a DCCVM had already been set up in each district, under which a standing organization was also set up to provide training for voluntary workers. As the mobile teams were manned by voluntary workers trained by that standing organization, no additional resources were involved. She further pointed out that mobile teams would also organize various activities to enhance the residents' awareness of existing welfare services and help them learn about their benefits. Support and assistance from professional social workers would be available to voluntary workers when they encountered problems.

17. In conclusion, the Chairman remarked that the justifications as given by the Administration failed to convince members that mobile teams could replace NLCDP teams in providing services of same quality. She suggested the subject be followed-up by the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services for further discussion in the next legislative session.

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18. Moreover, the Chairman requested that the report to be provided by the Administration on the review of the services provided by mobile teams should include such information as examples showing the ways in which mobile teams assisted in "resident empowerment", as well as the time spent by mobile teams on following up the problems raised by residents. Mr LAW Chi-kwong further suggested that the Administration should explain in the review report how it achieved the three objectives as set out in paragraph 10 of the paper and list out the results achieved. ADSW(Y&HRM) clarified that the "empowerment role" of mobile teams was meant to be the role of enhancing the residents' knowledge of the full range of welfare and community services currently available to them and making appropriate referral services for residents, instead of organizing residents to stage protests.

II. Any other business

19. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11:45 am.

Legislative Council Secretariat
20 September 2000