

立法會
Legislative Council

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Finance Committee of the Legislative Council

**Minutes of the 8th meeting
held at the Legislative Council Chamber
on Monday, 31 March 2003, at 2:30 pm**

Members present:

Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong (Chairman)
Hon NG Leung-sing, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, JP
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Martin LEE Chu-ming, SC, JP
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon HUI Cheung-ching, JP
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, JP
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon WONG Yung-kan
Hon Howard YOUNG, JP
Dr Hon YEUNG Sum
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung, BBS
Hon Miriam LAU Kin-ye, JP
Hon Ambrose LAU Hon-chuen, GBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon SZETO Wah

Dr Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
Dr Hon TANG Siu-tong, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, JP
Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS, JP
Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, JP
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP
Dr Hon LO Wing-lok
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee
Hon IP Kwok-him, JP
Hon LAU Ping-cheung

Members absent:

Hon Kenneth TING Woo-shou, JP
Dr Hon David CHU Yu-lin, JP
Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po, GBS, JP
Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, JP
Hon Margaret NG
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP
Hon Jasper TSANG Yok-sing, GBS, JP
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah
Hon LAU Wong-fat, GBS, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, SBS, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon MA Fung-kwok, JP

Public officers attending:

Mr Frederick MA Si-hang, JP	Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury
Mr Alan LAI Nin, JP	Permanent Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury)
Mr Stanley YING, JP	Deputy Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury) 1
Mrs Carrie YAU, JP	Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mr Thomas YIU, JP	Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Health)
Miss Joanna CHOI	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
Dr Vivian WONG, JP	Director (Professional Services & Medical Development), Hospital Authority
Dr Constance CHAN	Assistant Director of Health
Mrs Ella TAM	Deputy Director of Information Services

Clerk in attendance:

Ms Pauline NG	Assistant Secretary General 1
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Staff in attendance:

Miss Polly YEUNG	Chief Assistant Secretary (1)3
Ms Rosalind MA	Senior Assistant Secretary (1)9
Ms Caris CHAN	Senior Legislative Assistant 1
Mr Frankie WOO	Legislative Assistant 2

Action

Item No. 1 - FCR(2002-03)66

HEAD 149 - GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT : HEALTH, WELFARE AND FOOD BUREAU

◆ Subhead 700 General other non-recurrent

New Item “Commitment for the fight against Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome”

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (PS(HWF)) and the Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Health) (DS(HWF)) briefed members on the discussion paper which was tabled at the meeting. They highlighted that the commitment of \$200 million being sought would mainly be used for the treatment of patients suffering from Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), strengthening infection control and public health education. However, in view of changing circumstances, the Administration might not be in a position to confirm the detailed uses of the proposed commitment at the present stage. If necessary, the Administration would seek the Finance Committee (FC)'s approval for additional funding.

Scope of the commitment

2. Referring to the isolation order in respect of Block E of Amoy Gardens which took effect on 31 March 2003, Mr Fred LI asked whether the necessary expenditure arising from the enforcement of the order would be met from the \$200 million commitment. Mr Howard YOUNG supported the present proposal and enquired about the expenditure incurred by measures such as cleansing and disinfection of public places such as markets.

Admin

3. In reply, PS(HWF) advised that as a general principle, the departments concerned would endeavour to meet the additional expenditure from existing resources. If this was not practicable and the measures in question were consistent with the main purposes of the proposed commitment, the department(s) concerned could file an application for approval by the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (SHWF). To ensure transparency, the Administration would keep the Panel on Health Services posted of applications approved on a regular basis.

4. Dr LAW Chi-kwong enquired whether provision had been earmarked under the proposed commitment to provide financial assistance to casual workers or self-employed persons affected by the SARS. In reply, PS(HWF) confirmed that such assistance would be provided for under Subhead 157 "Assistance to patients and their families" of the Social Welfare Department and not under the currently proposed commitment. If there was insufficient provision under Subhead 157 to meet the necessary expenses, the Administration would examine whether funds were available under other relevant subheads of the Department for such purposes.

Effectiveness of the new staff to cope with SARS

5. Mr Michael MAK expressed support for the present proposal but remarked that a commitment of \$200 million might not be adequate to deal with the problem. He was gravely concerned that the remuneration offered by the Hospital Authority (HA) might not be able to attract the needed medical and para-medical professionals to deal with the disease, including the tracking of its origin and following up with persons who had come into close contact with SARS sufferers.

6. In reply, the Director (Professional Services & Medical Development), Hospital Authority (D(PSMD)/HA) said that HA would seek to recruit additional health care staff of the relevant specialties at appropriate ranking. Recruitment would therefore not be limited to entry rank. HA had already recruited some nurses and provided greater flexibility in the annual leave arrangement for serving nurses. Coupled with measures such as reducing non-emergency operations, more in-house staff with the relevant experience could be redeployed to deal with SARS cases. The Assistant Director of

Health (AD of Health) added that four clinics had been designated to provide medical assessment to persons who had come into close contact with those suffering from SARS. The Department of Health (DH) would try its best to re-deploy the necessary manpower with training in public health to deal with the situation.

7. On the basis for estimating the additional health care personnel required, D(PSMD)/HA advised that the projections had been made on the basis of the number of wards required by existing patients and the corresponding number of health care staff required to manage the patients.

8. Dr LO Wing-lok pointed out that there were only a limited number of medical officers with training in public health and asked the Administration to consider engaging doctors with the requisite expertise on short-term contract so as to relieve existing medical staff. In response, PS(HWF) advised that the assistance of the Auxiliary Medical Service had already been enlisted. The Civil Service Bureau would also look into the feasibility of engaging retired medical officers with the requisite expertise. Mrs Sophie LEUNG also considered it highly useful to enlist the service of retired medical officers specializing in public health.

Infection control measures

9. Ms Emily LAU supported the present proposal. In reply to her enquiry about the procurement of face masks, D(PSMD)/HA advised that some 300 000 face masks were required each day. The Secretary for Financial services and the Treasury (SFST) added that the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau and the Government Supplies Department (GSD) played a supportive role in sourcing and procuring face masks for distribution to government departments. SFST further reported that according to the Hong Kong Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry, 4 million masks would be delivered to Hong Kong within the week and supply would be increased to 13 million in April. Hence, he believed that there should be adequate supply of face masks in the market for members of the public.

10. On whether the re-cycling of masks was feasible, D(PSMD) advised that face masks used by health care staff would be disposed immediately after use. Where masks were used by members of the public in lower risk areas, they could be worn for a longer period of time. On the relatively high expenses incurred daily, she explained that at present, face masks were distributed to patients seeking treatment at the Accident and Emergency Units who did not have masks. Moreover, the supplier had also increased the price of masks.

11. Mr Albert CHAN supported the objective of the present proposal and was concerned that the proposed commitment of \$200 million might not be sufficient. However, he expressed disappointment that no provision had been

earmarked for procuring masks for distribution to members of the public, particularly poor families and elderly persons who could not afford to buy masks. In this connection, SFST said that the Social Welfare Department would be prepared to render assistance to needy families and individuals in case of difficulties.

12. Dr LO Wing-lok conveyed the difficulties faced by private medical practitioners in procuring face masks and urged the Administration to formulate a comprehensive strategy in sourcing and procuring masks so as not to deprive private practitioners of the supply of such an essential product. He also suggested that the Administration should provide daily updates on the availability of masks for reference by private practitioners. In this regard, SFST recapped the advice of the Hong Kong Association of the Pharmaceutical Industry that there was sufficient supply of face masks in Hong Kong. AD of H said that DH was in close liaison with the private hospitals and if necessary, DH would render assistance to them.

13. Whilst stating support for the present proposal, Mrs Selina CHOW drew the Administration's attention to feedbacks she had received about inadequate supply of face masks at Princess Margaret Hospital (PMH). In this regard, D(PSMD)/HA pointed out that HA had made great effort to procure masks for use by hospital staff and the procurement of stores was centrally co-ordinated by HA. As PMH would be the primary receiving hospital for new cases, it might experience a brief under-supply of masks during the initial period.

14. Mr Frederick FUNG expressed support for the present proposal, as well as request for additional funding, if necessary. He recalled the recent experience of the Sham Shui Po District Council and the Hong Kong Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood in successfully procuring face masks. He pointed out that HA and the authorities concerned should examine whether the shortage of masks was due to distribution problems or other reasons.

Quarantine measures

15. Mr Fred LI was concerned whether consideration would be given to setting up a centralized quarantine facility to accommodate persons affected by SARS. In response, PS(HWF) said that the Administration would consider all feasible contingency measures in the light of circumstances.

16. Mr CHAN Kam-lam expressed support for the present proposal. Referring to the case of Amoy Gardens, he was concerned about the possible spread of the virus since about two-thirds of the residents of the affected Block E had left before the issuance of the isolation order and some residents in other Blocks of the estate had also been infected. Instead of confining the residents to their homes, Mr CHAN urged the Administration to consider evacuating

them, as well as those who had left earlier on, to a camp so as to contain the spread of the disease.

17. PS(HWF) responded that the issuance of the isolation order was a proactive measure taken by the Administration to contain the spread of the disease. During the period of isolation, medical staff would visit each household and carry medical examination on the residents. Residents with symptoms of infection would be sent to hospitals for treatment. Whether or not such arrangements should also be applied to other Blocks in Amoy Gardens and the option of quarantine measures were still under consideration by the Administration.

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18. Dr YEUNG Sum reiterated his request for providing centralized quarantine facilities with the necessary support service to accommodate all persons suspected to be infected by the SARS virus. While agreeing to consider the suggestion, PS(HWF) pointed out that the Administration would have to see to it that quarantine measures, if any, must be implemented in an equitable and effective manner.

19. Ms Cyd HO shared the view that the affected residents of Amoy Gardens should be centrally accommodated, such as by making use of some currently vacant public housing units. Their premises at Amoy Gardens could then be thoroughly cleansed and disinfected. Mr James TIEN also urged the Administration to consider the feasibility of accommodating all affected persons by making use of facilities such as vacant public housing units.

20. Mr Albert CHAN supported quarantine measures but highlighted the importance of adequate consultation. According to his understanding, the Administration had planned to designate four holiday camps as quarantine centres. He nevertheless considered that it was more desirable to make use of vacant Home Ownership Scheme flats not yet sold to accommodate the affected persons. Mr Andrew CHENG also enquired about the provision of places if the four holiday camps managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department were designated as quarantine facilities.

21. In reply, PS(HWF) advised that some 700 to 800 places would be available in the four camps although it might not be practicable to utilize all the places as they would be allocated on a family basis. She confirmed that expenditure incurred from quarantine arrangements would be borne by the departments concerned. Where this was impracticable and with the approval of SHWF upon application, the expenses could be met from the proposed \$200 million commitment.

22. Noting that residents of Block E of Amoy Gardens were in fact under home quarantine, Mrs Selina CHOW expressed grave concern about the follow-up action to be taken in respect of the majority of residents who had left

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their homes before the issuance of the isolation order, given that they might already have been infected by the disease. AD of Health said that DH would try to contact these residents and appeal to them to come forward for medical checks. As these residents would not be allowed to re-enter their premises at Block E, Mrs Selina CHOW remained concerned about how they would be handled. In this connection, the Chairman requested the Administration to take note of members' concerns and to advise members how the issue would be followed up.

Latest development in combating SARS

23. Mr Michael MAK sought the Administration's clarification on the earlier use of the term "Severe Respiratory Syndrome" (SRS) instead of SARS. In reply, PS(HWF) said that as the disease in question was previously unknown, different terms had been used such as SARS, SRS and atypical pneumonia. In line with international usage, the Administration would adopt the term "SARS" in its official usage. Moreover, "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome" had also been included as one of the notifiable infectious diseases under the Quarantine and Prevention of Disease Ordinance (Amendment of First Schedule) Order 2003 and the Prevention of the Spread of Infectious Diseases Regulations (Amendment of Form) Order 2003 made by the Director of Health on 27 March 2003.

24. Regarding the latest development, PS(HWF) informed members that the viral disease in question, hitherto unknown, was being studied by experts worldwide. Hong Kong was tackling the disease from different fronts and was stepping up various preventive measures. PS(HWF) also reported that some 85% of the patients had responded positively to the treatment protocol and medication.

25. Dr YEUNG Sum recalled that at the last House Committee meeting held on 28 March 2003, members had agreed to write to the Administration to convey member' appreciation for the hard work of the health care workers. He requested to put on record a similar appreciation and urged members and the community to join efforts in combating SARS. In reply to Dr YEUNG's enquiry about the latest progress in the development of vaccines, PS(HWF) and D(PSMD)/HA advised that related researches on the curative effect of the blood plasma taken from recovered patients were underway. However, as confirmed by overseas authorities such as the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control of the United States, it was unlikely that a solution could be found in the near future.

26. On researches into the new virus, PS(HWF) said that the two universities had accorded priority to conducting researches into the disease which might be caused by two viruses. At present, the two universities were undertaking the researches on their own resources. If necessary, the

Government might need to provide them with additional resources to conduct further researches so as to step up infection control. The amount of funding required could not be ascertained at this stage. In this connection, Ms Emily LAU remarked that the two universities should be given adequate funding support.

27. In reply to Ms Emily LAU's enquiry about the life-span of the coronavirus believed to be a cause for SARS, PS(HWF) and D(PSMD)/HA said that according to researches, the virus could stay active for three hours. Nevertheless, the relevant researches on the new virus were still in progress. Ms Emily LAU remarked that the public should be properly informed of the progress and outcome of the research when available.

28. In reply to Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung's enquiry about the effectiveness of the new rapid diagnostic tests at a unit cost of \$500, D(PSMD)/HA informed members that several procedures were involved in each test. They included paired samples of blood serum to be tested for immunoglobulin, and PCR tests on aspirates or swabs from the nose and throat. As the accuracy level of the test was about 60%, it must also be accompanied by clinical diagnosis.

29. As to whether there were sufficient resources for administering the new diagnostic tests, D(PSMD)/HA said that HA had just commenced administering the tests and it would take some time before they could be fully developed. Where necessary, manpower for this area of work would be strengthened.

30. Mr IP Kwok-him said that Members of the Democratic Alliance for Betterment of Hong Kong supported the present proposal. In reply to his enquiry, D(PSMD)/HA said that the majority of the 530 infected cases were in stable condition and pending recovery. She added that if the conditions of an infected person deteriorated, he would be admitted to the Intensive Care Unit for treatment.

31. On the number of health care personnel who had contracted SARS and the current working hours of hospital health care staff, DS(HWF) reported that so far, of the 530 patients treated in hospitals 60 had been discharged. Out of the 530 cases, 162 were health care personnel working in clinics and hospitals and medical students. 36 of them had been discharged. The remaining 368 cases consisted mainly of the family members/relatives and visitors of SARS patients and 24 of them had been discharged. DS(HWF) remarked that according to the current trend, the number of health care personnel who were infected with SARS had dropped while the number of infected cases in the community had risen. As regards the working hours of hospital health care staff, D(PSMD)/HA informed members that nursing staff worked shifts with fixed duration. The heavy workload experienced by medical officers at the early stage of the SARS outbreak had improved as a result of re-deployment of

staff and responsibilities.

Dissemination of information and public education

32. Mr CHAN Kam-lam considered that the Administration should increase transparency by disclosing cases of infection in residential estates so that the residents could be more vigilant.

Admin 33. Mr SIN Chung-kai recognized the need to strike a balance between the infected persons' privacy and the public's right to information relating to public health. With a view to ensuring the proper dissemination of information, he suggested that apart from revealing the number of infected cases, the Administration should consider disclosing further information on the location of the residential block(s) where infected cases were found. PS(HWF) undertook to consider the suggestion in consultation with DH.

Admin 34. Dr YEUNG Sum said that he was given to understand that there were infected cases in other districts including Kwai Tsing, Tuen Mun, Tseung Kwan O and Southern District. To enhance transparency and facilitate community effort in gearing up preventive work, he urged the Administration to release more information on these cases. In response, PS(HWF) undertook to look into the suggestion but remarked that releasing information on isolated cases of infection found in certain residential estates might have the unintended effect of causing unnecessary panic.

35. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung considered that the residential block(s) where infected cases were found should be made known in order to avoid unnecessary speculation and panic. Mr LAU Ping-cheung also shared the view that more information on the infected cases should be released. He also urged for better co-ordination in the dissemination of information by different bodies such as the two universities, HA and the relevant government departments. The Administration noted their concerns.

Admin 36. Mr James TIEN said that Members of the Liberal Party supported the present proposal and appreciated the hard work of the health care workers. Having regard to privacy on one hand and public interest on the other, he enquired about the feasibility of disclosing the identity of the infected persons. PS(HWF) noted Mr TIEN's concern and said that the Administration would have to seek legal advice as to whether it was appropriate to disclose the identity of the infected persons.

37. Mr Albert HO did not consider it necessary to disclose the identity of the infected person or the unit in which the person resided. However, he urged that DH should release information on the residential block(s) of an estate where the infected cases were found. He understood that DH was in the course of preparing a standard letter to notify estate residents of some basic

information on the infected case(s) found in the estate, including the age and sex of the infected person(s).

38. Whilst appreciating the heavy workload and manpower constraints of DH, Mr Albert HO said that consideration might be given to engaging non-health care personnel to carry out some public education and publicity work. PS(HWF) stressed that for the time being, priority was given to combating SARS. DH had already issued guidelines on how to carry out cleansing and disinfection for reference by owners corporations and management companies. While most of the educational and publicity initiatives would require knowledge on public health, PS(HWF) would not rule out the possibility that at some stage, other options might be explored.

39. On other publicity measures, the Deputy Director of Information Services (DDIS) informed the meeting that ISD had published a series of leaflets on precautionary measures at schools, crowded places and the workplace. Some leaflets were also deposited at entry control points such as the airport for the information of arriving visitors. ISD would continue its publicity efforts in the light of needs.

40. On the dissemination of information relating to SARS, Mrs Selina CHOW referred to the Administration's recent comment that the virus could be air-borne while previously, no such possibility had been mentioned. She said that the Administration should be more careful about presenting information and managing the public's expectation. In this connection, PS(HWF) explained that the comments by SHWF and the Director of Health were not in conflict as evidence to date suggested that the virus was most likely transmitted by droplets although the possibility of air-borne transmission could not be ruled out.

41. In response to Mr Martin LEE's enquiry on the effectiveness of wearing face masks as a precautionary measure, D(PSMD)/HA advised that it might not be necessary to wear masks at all times. Generally speaking, masks should be worn when the person was in a high-risk place such as a hospital or in close contact with patients. Nevertheless, both D(PSMD)/HA and PS(HWF) stressed that face masks must be worn correctly and were no substitute for good personal hygiene.

42. Mr Martin LEE considered that the Administration should produce more Announcements of Public Interest (APIs) to educate the public about the symptoms of SARS. AD of H noted his view and advised that information on SARS had been posted on DH's website and could be obtained from DH's telephone hotline. In this regard, D(PSMD)/HA supplemented that HA had held two seminars to brief private medical practitioners about SARS.

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43. In view of the imminent Ching Ming Festival holiday, Mr Martin LEE urged the Administration to take proactive measures to alert the public about potential health hazards arising from visiting neighbouring territories such as Guangdong Province. In response, PS(HWF) referred to the recent appeal to foreign domestic helpers not to congregate on Sundays and said that the Administration was always mindful of the need to alert the community. She undertook to follow up Mr LEE's suggestion at the Inter-departmental Action Co-ordinating Committee. On Mr LEE Cheuk-yan enquiry on whether the Government would appeal to members of the public to stay in Hong Kong instead of travelling across the border, PS(HWF) said that the Administration would need to take into account the travel advisory on Hong Kong issued by the World Health Organization.

Precautionary and Contingency measures in treating SARS patients

44. Mr NG Leung-sing urged members to support the present proposal and expressed appreciation for the hard work of health care personnel in the fight against SARS. Both he and Mr CHAN Kam-lam enquired whether the Administration would consider promulgating its proposed contingency measures or action plans to deal with different scenarios.

45. In response, D(PSMD)/HA assured members that HA was monitoring the situation closely. Given the increasing number of SARS patients being admitted into PMH, HA had made arrangements to prepare Wong Tai Sin Hospital as a secondary receiving hospital for SARS cases. She added that if the treatment method worked well and patients could be discharged earlier, more places could be made available for admitting new cases.

46. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressed concern about the support provided to front-line health care staff managing SARS patients. D(PSMD)/HA advised that HA was considering how best to provide the necessary support to front-line medical and health care staff. While acknowledging that there were not enough quarters to accommodate all frontline staff, HA had taken other measures such as providing clothing for the staff to put on while on duty to be changed when they finished work.

47. Mr Frederick FUNG urged HA to take active measures to allay the anxiety and stress currently experienced by health care staff. In this regard, D(PSMD)/HA assured members that HA was fully mindful of the need to provide adequate support to frontline staff. Apart from daily briefings and disseminating information on HA's Intranet, a new arrangement had been implemented since 31 March 2003 to keep staff posted of information on a daily basis by posting notices in hospital premises.

48. In reply to Dr YEUNG Sum and the Chairman, PS(HWF) confirmed that with a view to preventing the spread of the disease, more frequent

cleansing and disinfection would be useful. She also referred to the territory-wide Health Protection and Cleanliness Campaign and Household Cleaning Day on 30 March 2003, as well as more frequent cleansing of public places by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.

Admin 49. Mr LAU Ping-cheung drew the Administration's attention to remote villages and old buildings where no management companies had been appointed and urged the Administration to render assistance to the residents concerned in carrying out cleansing and disinfection. PS(HWF) agreed to follow up Mr LAU's suggestion with the Home Affairs Department.

50. Mrs Sophie LEUNG called on the entire community to join hands with the Government in combating SARS. Recapping past outbreaks of the Avian Flu, she cautioned that both the Government and the public should be prepared for a sustained fight against the disease. She referred to the Women's Commission's appeal to all women in Hong Kong to join efforts in fighting against SARS and urged for greater involvement on the part of community organizations. Regarding the researches into the virus conducted by the two universities, Mrs LEUNG considered that the study should also include proper ways to prevent being infected, as well as the medium of transmission.

51. PS(HWF) concurred on the importance of community involvement in combating SARS. The Home Affairs Department was in the course of mobilizing community groups. The Labour Department would approach employers and seek their co-operation while the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department would liaise with the catering trade. PS(HEF) assured members that the Administration was seeking to collaborate the effort of all sectors of the community.

Admin 52. Mr Andrew CHENG expressed concern about the busy passenger flow at the Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau control points and cast doubt on the effectiveness of relying solely on arriving passengers to declare their health conditions. Referring to the practice adopted in other countries such as Singapore and Australia, Mr Andrew CHENG asked the Administration to seriously consider conducting sample medical assessments on arriving passengers at the Lo Wu and Lok Ma Chau control points in order that possible incoming infection could be prevented. PS(HWF) took note of his suggestion for consideration but cautioned that the feasibility of such arrangement must be carefully examined in the light of practical constraints such as busy passenger flows and the incubation period of the disease.

Decision-making and implementation mechanism

53. Mr IP Kwok-him enquired about the composition and work of the Inter-departmental Action Co-ordinating Committee. In reply, PS(HWF) informed members that the aforesaid committee was chaired by PS(HWF) and its

members comprised representatives from the Security Bureau, Police, Home Affairs Department, Transport Department, Housing Department, ISD and other members co-opted on a need basis. The Inter-departmental Action Co-ordinating Committee had been set up within existing resources and its main task was to devise implementation strategies for various initiatives, as well as to formulate action plans in connection with contingency measures.

54. Mr IP Kwok-him asked whether the decision to issue an isolation order in respect of Block E of Amoy Gardens had been made by the aforesaid committee or by a higher level body. In reply, PS(HWF) said that the policy decision had been made by the Chief Executive after considering the options recommended by the bureau and department concerned.

55. Mr Andrew WONG stated support for the present proposal. He commented that while the Chief Executive and SHWF, (being a principal official), were key players in the decision-making process, the statutory power to issue an isolation order rested with the Director of Health who was a civil servant. Mr WONG said that this decision-making framework should be further examined in due course in the context of the accountability system for principal officials.

56. Ms Emily LAU stressed that it was necessary to put in place an effective mechanism which could decide on the strategies and measures to take in a prompt and unequivocal manner. In response, PS(HWF) advised that under the existing decision-making mechanism, the highest level was the Executive Council. At present, the Administration was considering whether a high-powered working group headed by the Chief Secretary for Administration should be set up to spearhead and co-ordinate efforts from all fronts. Meanwhile, an Expert Group headed by SHWF was in full operation and met everyday to provide guidance and co-ordinate measures taken by various parties, as well as to facilitate the exchange of information. The Inter-departmental Action Co-ordinating Committee chaired by PS(HWF) was tasked to implement the agreed measures.

57. Noting that the Chief Executive had called meetings and invited participants on an ad hoc basis, Ms Emily LAU reiterated the need to put in place a standing arrangement whereby a high-powered body was established to review the situation daily and to deal with the current crisis in a decisive manner.

58. Mrs Sophie LEUNG was of the view that as far as public health matters were concerned, a working group comprising top officials was not necessarily the most effective mechanism. She considered that the Expert Group headed by SHWF and comprising relevant representatives and experts could play an effective role.

59. In reply to Ms Cyd HO's enquiry about the delegation of authority in approving funding applications, PS(HWF) confirmed that apart from SHWF, the incumbent post-holder of PS(HWF) had also been delegated the authority to approve such applications.

Other support measures

60. Referring to residents of Amoy Gardens who were subject to the isolation order or who had to attend the four designated clinics for medical examination, Mr Andrew CHENG urged the Administration to issue them a proper medical certificate so that they could claim their sick leave entitlements in accordance with the Employment Ordinance. In reply, DS(HWF) reported that DH was currently working with the Labour Department to issue a medical certificate which would fulfil the requirements under the Employment Ordinance.

61. Mrs Selina CHOW highlighted the need to provide correct advice to members of the public and considered that there should be sufficient hotlines to be manned by officers who had the necessary information or knowledge. Where necessary, Mrs CHOW opined that resources on this area of work should be strengthened. In response, PS(HWF) advised that at present, the hotline enquiry service had been set up mainly through re-deployment of existing resources. She took note of Mrs CHOW's concern for improvement.

62. Pointing out that the outbreak of SARS had dealt a heavy blow to many sectors of the economy, in particular small and medium enterprises, Mrs Selina CHOW anticipated that there would be calls on the Administration to provide different forms of assistance such as rent concessions etc. She urged the Administration to start to formulate a proper strategy to deal with the situation which would likely arise in the near future.

63. Mr HUI Cheung-ching said that the Hong Kong Progressive Alliance supported the present proposal and if necessary, would support the proposal for additional funding to combat the SARS disease.

64. The Committee approved the proposal.

65. The Committee was adjourned at 5:45 pm.