

立法會
Legislative Council

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LC Paper No. CB(2) 620/04-05
(These minutes have been seen by
the Administration)

Subcommittee to study the subject of combating poverty

Minutes of meeting
held on Thursday, 9 December 2004 at 4:30 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, JP (Chairman)
Hon James TIEN Pei-chun, GBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon Margaret NG
Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-ye, GBS, JP
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Andrew CHENG Kar-foo
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon Albert Jinghan CHENG
Hon KWONG Chi-kin

Members absent : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon LAU Chin-shek, JP
Hon Abraham SHEK Lai-him, JP

Public officers attending : Ms Linda LAI
Deputy Secretary (Family and Women)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Action

Ms Salina YAN
Deputy Secretary (Elderly Services and Social Security)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Freely CHENG
Principal Assistant Secretary (Family)
Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr Paul TANG, JP
Director of Social Welfare

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

Miss Cecilla LI
Chief Social Work Officer (Family and Child Welfare) 1
Social Welfare Department

Dr Shirley LEUNG
Principal Medical and Health Officer (Family Health Office)
Department of Health

Clerk in attendance : Mrs Constance LI
Chief Council Secretary (2)5

Staff in attendance : Mr Watson CHAN
Head, Research and Library Services

Mr Simon LI
Research Officer 6

Miss Betty MA
Senior Council Secretary (2)1

Action

I. Election of Chairman and Deputy Chairman

Election of Chairman

Mr James TIEN, Member of the highest precedence in the Subcommittee, presided over the election of the Chairman of the Subcommittee. Mr TIEN called for nominations for the chairmanship of the Subcommittee. Mr Frederick FUNG was nominated by Mr Albert HO and the nomination was seconded by Mr Andrew CHENG. Mr Frederick FUNG accepted the nomination.

Action

2. As there was no other nomination, Mr James TIEN declared Mr Frederick FUNG elected as the Chairman. Mr Frederick FUNG then took the chair.
3. Members agreed to elect a deputy chairman.

Election of Deputy Chairman

4. The Chairman called for nominations for the deputy chairmanship of the Subcommittee. Mr James TIEN was nominated by Mr Ronny TONG and the nomination was seconded by Ms Emily LAU. Mr James TIEN accepted the nomination.
5. As there was no other nomination, the Chairman declared Mr James TIEN elected as the Deputy Chairman.

II. Meeting with the Administration

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 304/04-05(01) and (02))

6. The Chairman sought members' views whether the Subcommittee should first discuss its way forward before meeting with the Administration.
7. Ms Margaret NG said that since the Council had passed a motion urging the Government to set up a governmental inter-departmental committee to aid the poor, the Administration should brief members on the progress of setting up the governmental inter-departmental committee. Ms NG further said that members could discuss its work plan afterwards. Members agreed.
8. The Chairman referred members to two separate letters from a total of 51 Members on the provision of special grant to cover the costs of spectacles to children on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) (LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 347/04-05(02) and CB(2) 376/04-05(01)). The Chairman suggested that the issue should also be dealt with at the meeting. Members agreed.
9. Mr James TIEN said that in the past, the commercial sector generally held the view that the problem of poverty was confined to those who did not have earning ability and that the problem could be addressed by the provision of social security assistance. However, the commercial sector now considered that the poverty problem could be resolved only if more employment opportunities were created. Against this background, the subject of poverty straddled a number of policy areas of Panels, e.g. Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau, Economic Development and Labour Bureau. Mr TIEN added that the Subcommittee might wish to decide its areas of study before inviting representatives from the relevant bureaux and departments to attend its meetings.

Setting up of an inter-departmental committee

10. Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Family and Women) (DS(FW)) said that following the passage of the motion on “Alleviating the disparity between the rich and the poor” at the Council meeting on 3 November 2004, the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (SHWF) had reflected to the Chief Executive (CE) Members’ strong wish for the Government to set up an inter-departmental committee to aid the poor. DS(FW) further said that the matter was still under consideration, and that a decision had yet to be made.

11. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked about the consideration factors for the setting up of a governmental inter-departmental committee.

12. DS(FW) said that combating poverty was a complicated subject involving not only social welfare, but also various policy areas which were beyond the purview of the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB). She stressed that the Government was studying the proposal of setting up a governmental inter-departmental committee to be headed by an official at a level higher than a bureau secretary.

13. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that although the motion passed by the Council did not have binding effect on the Administration, it fully reflected Members’ consensus and the public expectation that the Government should take measures to examine and combat the problem of poverty. Dr CHEUNG further said that Members had formed a subcommittee under the House Committee to facilitate discussion of the subject of combating poverty with the inter-departmental committee. He expressed regret that the inter-departmental committee had not yet been set up, and there was no representative from the committee attending this meeting.

14. The Chairman said that the Clerk to the Subcommittee had written to SHWF inviting him to co-ordinate attendance of the Administration for the meeting today, and SHWF’s response had been circulated to members [LC Paper No. CB(2) 304/04-05(02)].

15. DS(FW) said that while the Administration was considering Members’ proposal of setting up an inter-departmental committee, HWFB was prepared to explain to members the policies, strategies and measures under its purview to address the needs of the vulnerable groups.

16. Ms Margaret NG said that poverty ranked the top of the list of problems to be resolved, and that the problem should be tackled at source rather than purely from the perspective of social welfare. She doubted whether the discussion could be effective with only officials from HWFB attending the meeting as they were not in the position to comment on policy issues outside their purview. Ms NG further said that the Legislative Council (LegCo) attached great importance to the problem of poverty and had set up a dedicated subcommittee to study the subject. She added that

Action

representatives from higher levels of the Administration should attend meetings of the Subcommittee.

17. Mr Ronny TONG said that the Subcommittee should not be led by Government in its deliberations on the subject of combating poverty. Mr TONG further said that even if CE eventually decided not to set up a governmental inter-departmental committee, the Subcommittee could still proceed with its study on the specific policy areas and invite representatives from the relevant bureaux and departments to attend its meetings.

18. Mr Albert HO said that in its concluding observations issued in 2001, the United Nations (UN) Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights expressed concern that a large number of elders in Hong Kong lived in poverty without access to social services, and recommended that an inter-departmental anti-poverty unit or an independent anti-poverty commissions be established. Mr HO further said that he had raised the issue with the incumbent SHWF, but the latter did not seem to be aware of the UN Committee's observations. Mr HO hoped that HWFB officials attending the meeting would convey to SHWF that he should follow up the recommendations made by the UN Committee and provide a response to the Subcommittee. Mr HO added that he might raise the issue with the relevant UN Committee if the Administration failed to make a positive response.

19. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that representatives from HWFB attending the meeting should explain the bureau's position on the setting up of a governmental inter-departmental committee, as the bureau played an important role in implementing measures to alleviate poverty. Dr CHEUNG added that the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights had also expressed concern about the issues of minimum wage and maximum working hours since 1994.

Admin

20. The Administration agreed to convey Members' concerns to SHWF.

21. Mr Andrew CHENG said that at the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services on 8 November 2004, members asked SHWF when an inter-departmental committee would be set up, and SHWF had responded that the issue would be addressed in the Policy Address 2005. Mr CHENG suggested that the Subcommittee should write to the Chief Executive (CE) urging him to set up the governmental inter-departmental committee as soon as possible, so as to enable the Subcommittee to follow up with the inter-departmental committee on measures to combat poverty.

22. Ms LI Fung-ying agreed with Mr Andrew CHENG. Ms LI said that Members had already conveyed a clear message to the Administration that they were gravely concerned about the problem of poverty by repeatedly raising questions and moving motions on the subject at Council meetings. It was high time for the Administration to let the public know whether an inter-departmental committee would be set up.

Action

23. Referring to SHWF's letter dated 20 November 2004, Ms Emily LAU said that SHWF had rightly pointed out in his letter that poverty involved more than social welfare and covered also economic development, education and manpower training. It was therefore necessary for an inter-departmental committee to be set up to coordinate the various policies. Ms LAU supported the proposal of conveying to CE Members' strong request for setting up the governmental inter-departmental committee.

24. Mr James TIEN agreed that the Subcommittee should write to CE urging him to set up the governmental inter-departmental committee as soon as possible. To enable effective coordination of the various policies and initiatives to combat poverty, the inter-departmental committee should be headed by the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS). Mr TIEN said that the correspondence between the LegCo Secretariat and SHWF about setting up the inter-departmental committee should be attached to the Chairman's letter to CE.

25. The Chairman said that in the light of members' views, he would write to CE on the matter. Members agreed.

(Post-meeting note : The Chairman's letter to CE on 15 December 2004 has been circulated to the Subcommittee vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 488/04-05.)

Special grant to cover costs of spectacles for children in poverty

26. Mr James TIEN said that he was a member of the Panel on Welfare Services, and the Panel would follow up the issue of special grant to cover the costs of spectacles for children on CSSA. The Subcommittee should avoid overlapping its work with that of Panels.

27. Ms Emily LAU said that as the Panel on Welfare Services had not yet discussed the matter, the Subcommittee should deal with the matter at this meeting.

28. Dr Fernando CHEUNG briefed members on the background for bringing the matter to the Subcommittee's attention. Dr CHEUNG said that a case conference was held on 20 November 2004 during which seven Duty Roster Members including himself met with some deputations on issues relating to the rights of children. Members attending the case conference were astonished to learn that some CSSA recipients could not even afford to buy a pair of spectacles for their children, and this would impede their learning in school. Dr CHEUNG pointed out that the special grant for able-bodied children to meet the costs of spectacles was cancelled after the 1998 review of the CSSA Scheme. Dr CHEUNG further said that after the case conference, separate letters signed by a total of 51 LegCo Members had been sent to CE urging him to immediately resume the provision of grant for able-bodied children to cover the cost of spectacles.

Action

29. Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services and Social Security) (DS(ES&SS)) responded that the letters mentioned by Dr Fernando CHEUNG were also copied to HWFB. DS(ES&SS) explained that as a result of the 1998 review of the CSSA Scheme on sharp increases in the number of able-bodied cases, a package of measures were implemented in 1999 to encourage self-reliance, and special grants were no longer payable to able-bodied adults except for essential items such as rent and water charges. However, the CSSA scheme continued to take care of the special needs of children. For example, the standard rates for children were higher than those of able-bodied adults. Special grants including a one-off grant for selected items of school related expenses were also paid to able-bodied children. The Administration considered that the standard rates together with the school grants would generally be able to meet the basic needs of children and also the costs of spectacles.

30. DS(ES&SS) further said that the Administration had examined those cases discussed at the case conference on 20 November 2004. As the circumstances surrounding the cases were quite complicated, and the families concerned required in-depth follow-up services in addition to financial assistance, it was not appropriate to discuss the specific details but the Administration would provide a response to the referral from the Duty Roster Members.

31. Responding to Mr James TIEN, DS(ES&SS) explained that special grants were payable to CSSA recipients to cover expenses to meet specific needs. Presently, special grant to cover the costs of spectacles was payable, on a reimbursement basis, to the elderly, disabled persons and persons certified to be in ill-health.

32. In response to Dr Fernando CHEUNG, Assistant Director (Social Security) of Social Welfare Department (AD/SWD) said that the monthly standard rate for an able-bodied child in a family comprising four or more able-bodied adults/children was \$1,275. She added that families on CSSA would normally be able to meet the cost of spectacles for able-bodied children with the total CSSA payments, even without a special grant.

33. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that as a result of the CSSA review, the current standard rates for a four-member family had been reduced by 20% in 1999 and the special grants were abolished. As the CSSA payment was further reduced by 11% in 2003, the purchasing power of the CSSA recipients were weakened significantly. As a result, some CSSA children were unable to pay their daily school-related expenses, not to mention the costs of spectacles. Dr CHEUNG expressed doubts that the total CSSA payment for families with school children was able to meet the needs of both the adults and the children.

34. Director of Social Welfare (DSW) said that the monthly CSSA payable to a four-member family was more than \$8,000, which was considered sufficient to meet the basic needs of a family. DSW added that a flat-rate grant of \$2,505 and \$3,810 respectively was payable to primary and lower secondary students for selected items

Action

of school-related expenses. DSW further said that from experience, there were cases that the CSSA recipients had not made good use of the CSSA payment for the welfare of their children, which often was a symptom of other family problems. In such cases, his staff would look into the circumstances of individual cases and provide assistance to those children in need as well as help the families deal with their problems.

35. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed dissatisfaction with the Administration's response. Mr WONG said that the grant to full-time students was to meet the expenses for school-related items, such as books and stationery. To meet the costs for spectacles under the standard rates or the flat-grant would mean sacrificing other basic needs of the children. Mr WONG considered that spectacles were indispensable for students with eyesight problems, and that the Government was ignoring the basic needs of these children. Mr WONG further said that the letters to CE signed by 51 Members had fully reflected the consensus view of Members on the matter. Mr WONG added that the Government should in fact encourage school children to have eyesight tests to facilitate them to take corrective measures as soon as possible.

36. AD/SWD explained that special grants would be paid to meet the costs of medical items with the prescriptions of public medical practitioners. Generally speaking, spectacles for short-sightedness did not fall within this category.

37. Mr Albert HO said that it was beyond dispute that spectacles were basic needs of students with eyesight problems. Mr HO further said the Administration should immediately revise the eligibility criteria for providing special grants for spectacles for children on CSSA.

38. DSW reiterated that the Administration would consider Members' request and provide a full response.

39. Mr Ronny TONG considered the Administration's explanation unacceptable. Mr TONG said that the criticism that poor budgeting of CSSA families had resulted in their children not having spectacles was an insult to CSSA recipients. Mr TONG added that as the amount for spectacles should not be significant, such expenses should be absorbed by the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

40. DS(ES&SS) said that expenditure on CSSA payments was allocated under the vote of the central government instead of the departmental vote. DS(ES&SS) further said that the Administration was fully aware of Members' concerns. The Administration would discuss the matter and revert to the Subcommittee.

41. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that CSSA recipients, particularly those single parent families, were facing great financial difficulties after the recent reduction in CSSA payment. Mr LEUNG further said that traditionally, children did not have say in their families and their interests were often sacrificed. For example, children on

Action

CSSA were deprived of the chance to attend extra-curricular activities in school as they could not pay the expenses. Mr LEUNG strongly urged the Administration to resume the provision of special grant for spectacles for children on CSSA.

42. DSW advised that students could apply for financial assistance from their schools to attend extra-curricular activities.

43. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung commented that the Quality Education Fund had allocated substantial amounts of monies to sponsor extravagant projects such as overseas exchange programmes for school children. He said that such resources should be used to aid the poor students instead.

44. Ms Margaret NG considered it unacceptable that the Administration refused to provide grants for spectacles to these children because their parents did not use the monthly CSSA payment properly. Ms NG asked whether the Administration had estimated the number of children on CSSA who were unable to buy spectacles and the costs of providing each of them with a pair of spectacles. Ms NG further asked whether the Administration would provide grants to children on CSSA to buy spectacles first and review its policy on special grants later.

45. DSW said that the Administration considered the current level of standard rates sufficient to meet the basic needs including the cost of spectacles. The Administration would also help those CSSA families with financial management problems to deal with such problems.

46. Ms LI Fung-ying said that the question was not whether the level of CSSA payment was sufficient to meet the basic needs of CSSA recipients, but that some children on CSSA could not afford to buy spectacles, and their learning was impeded. Ms LI further said that children did not have say in family budgeting, and those children on CSSA were innocent and helpless, and they should not be penalized for the failure of their parents not using the CSSA payment properly. To prevent abuse of the grant, Ms LI suggested that the Administration could set a ceiling for reimbursement of the actual expenses of spectacles.

47. DSW stressed that under normal circumstances, the CSSA standard rates were sufficient to meet the total recognised basic needs of the recipients, and he had reservations about changing the policy on the provision of special grants. DSW said that in the event that the CSSA payment was unable to meet the basic needs of the recipients, assistance would be provided on a case-by-case basis to bridge the gap. On the referrals from the Duty Roster Members, one case had already been resolved and the child concerned had been provided with a pair of spectacles. Further referrals from Members would be welcomed. DSW stressed that these cases were isolated cases, and it did not necessarily mean that there was a need for changing the existing policy.

Action

48. Ms Emily LAU said that LegCo Members held a unanimous view on the provision of grant for spectacles for children on CSSA. She saw no reasons why the children concerned should suffer from the lack of spectacles because their parents had not used the CSSA payment properly. Ms LAU asked about the number of children with such problems. DSW responded that the Administration did not have information on the number of such cases.

49. Mrs Selina CHOW said that Members held an unanimous view that spectacles were basic needs for children attending school, and that the Administration should deal with the request urgently, as the amount of money involved would not be significant. She added that the Subcommittee was not asking for assistance to individual families, which could be dealt with by case conferences. Instead, Members were urging the Administration to review its policy on the grant for spectacles. She urged the Administration to provide a response within one week.

50. Mr WONG Kwok-hing stressed that spectacles were necessary items for children with eyesight problems, and the Administration should not have to wait for referrals from Members.

Admin

51. DS(ES&SS) said that the Administration would take into account members' views in reviewing the current policy. The Administration would revert to the Subcommittee in a week.

52. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung suggested that the Administration could consider providing spectacles, instead of a grant, to children in need.

53. AD/SWD reiterated that most of these families on CSSA should have sufficient money to buy spectacles for their children. The problems of these families were more than insufficient money to buy spectacles, and SWD was working on these families to provide more welfare assistance.

54. The Chairman said that there had not been any upward adjustment for the standard rates of CSSA after the cancellation of the special grant for able-bodied recipients in 1999. The Chairman further said that the Government should recognize that spectacles were necessary items for children with eyesight problems, and these should be provided for in the standard rates of CSSA.

55. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the grant for spectacles would not be abused as it was paid on a reimbursement basis subject to a specified limit. Dr CHEUNG criticised the Administration for being unsympathetic towards children in poverty, and proposed that the following motion be moved at the meeting –

“眼鏡對於所有患有近視、遠視或散光的兒童是一項必需品，本會在再三要求政府立即回復對綜援兒童的眼鏡津貼後，政府仍然漠視兒童的基本需要。本會強烈譴責政府對於貧窮兒童態度涼薄，並違反聯合國兒童權利公約。本會對政府深表遺憾。”

[English translation

“That, as spectacles are indispensable for all children with myopia, hyperopia or astigmatism, and this Subcommittee has repeatedly requested the Government to immediately resume the provision of grant for spectacles for children on CSSA, but the Government still ignores the basic needs of children, this Subcommittee strongly condemns the Government for being unsympathetic towards children in poverty and for contravening the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; in this regard, this Subcommittee expresses deep regret for the Government.”]

56. DS(ES&SS) disagreed that Government was unsympathetic towards children in poverty. She said that the Government was very concerned about the development of children, and special grants were available for meeting the expenses of specific items. She reiterated that the Government would review the matter and revert to the Subcommittee.

57. Mr James TIEN proposed amendments to Dr CHEUNG’s motion by deleting all the words after “本會在再三要求政府立即回復對綜援兒童的眼鏡津貼”. Mr TIEN explained that as the purpose of the motion was to urge the Administration to immediately resume the provision of grant for spectacles for children on CSSA, his proposed amendments would equally achieve the purpose.

58. The Chairman put Mr James TIEN’s amendments to vote. Two members voted for and seven members voted against Mr TIEN’s amendments. The Chairman declared that Mr TIEN’s amendments were negated.

59. The Chairman then put Dr Fernando CHEUNG’s motion to vote. Seven members voted for and no member voted against the motion. Two members abstained from voting. The Chairman declared that the motion was carried. The Chairman requested the Administration to provide a response within a week.

Admin

(Post-meeting note : The Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food’s reply dated 16 December 2004 has been circulated to the Subcommittee vide LC Paper No. CB(2) 463/04-05(01).)

III. Work plan of the Subcommittee

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2) 304/04-05(03) and (04) and LC Paper No. FS 07/04-05)

60. Referring to a letter from Miss CHAN Yuen-han, Mr KWONG Chi-kin and him (LC Paper No. CB(2) 380/04-05(01)), Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that members might wish to consider the areas of study proposed in the letter in drawing up the work plan of the Subcommittee.

Action

61. Miss CHAN Yuen-han suggested that the Subcommittee should invite deputations to give views on the problem of poverty in Hong Kong to enable the Subcommittee to work out measures to combat the problem.

62. Mr Andrew CHENG suggested that the Subcommittee should study the poverty line and the CSSA scheme in Hong Kong.

63. Ms Margaret NG said that in drawing up its work plan, the Subcommittee should give consideration to the causes or factors giving rise to poverty. Academics and relevant organisations should be invited to give views on the situation of poverty in Hong Kong, and the Administration should be requested to provide its studies, if any, on the poverty problem. Ms NG further said that to facilitate the Subcommittee's discussion, the Administration should be urged to provide a response to the Subcommittee whether it would set up the governmental inter-departmental committee. Ms NG suggested that for better efficiency, members might set up a working group to undertake the preparatory work for drawing up the areas of study and work plan of the Subcommittee.

64. The Chairman supported Ms NG's suggestion of forming a working group to undertake the preparatory work on the work plan of the Subcommittee. The Chairman suggested that the next meeting of the Subcommittee be held before the delivery of Policy Address 2005 by CE on 12 January 2005, so that CE could take into account members' views on measures to combat poverty in his Policy Address. The Chairman proposed that the progress of the setting up of the governmental inter-departmental committee to aid the poor should be discussed at the next meeting. The Chairman further proposed that the Subcommittee should study the various definitions of poverty adopted by different governments departments for granting subsidies and financial assistance to people in need.

65. Ms Emily LAU said that while she had no objection to holding the next meeting in early January 2005, she was not optimistic about the chance of Subcommittee's influencing the content of the Policy Address. She also had reservations that the Subcommittee would be ready to discuss the definitions of poverty or "poverty line" at the next meeting.

66. Ms Emily LAU informed members that when the Finance Committee discussed the merging of the Cross-net Travel Subsidy Scheme and the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme, the Administration undertook to review the criteria for granting the means-tested education-related subsidies and report to the Subcommittee.

67. Ms LI Fung-ying said that it was clear that Members strongly requested for a governmental inter-departmental committee to be set up. She requested the Chairman to ascertain from the Administration whether such a committee would be set up before the next meeting.

Action

68. Mr James TIEN said that in the carried motion on “Alleviating the disparity between the rich and the poor”, the phrase “establish a poverty line” was deleted. As such, he expressed reservations for the Subcommittee to discuss establishing a poverty line in Hong Kong. However, he had no objection to obtaining information on the different baselines for granting subsidies and financial assistance in Hong Kong.

69. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the Subcommittee could discuss with the governmental inter-departmental committee at the next meeting, if the Administration agreed to set up such a committee. Dr CHEUNG further said that if the Administration decided not to set up an inter-departmental committee, the Subcommittee could invite deputations to give views on the poverty problem in Hong Kong. To facilitate members’ discussion at future meetings, Dr CHEUNG requested the Research and Library Services Division to summarise some of the academic studies on the problem of poverty in Hong Kong, and the different definitions or benchmarks adopted by the Administration for granting subsidies and financial assistance (e.g. CSSA, travel subsidy, allocation of public housing units, medical fee waiver mechanism, etc.).

70. Mrs Selina CHOW said that even if the Administration decided not to set up a governmental inter-departmental committee, the Subcommittee could still invite representatives from relevant bureaux and departments to its meetings to discuss specific topics. She hoped members would adopt a practical approach and have consensus among themselves when discussing with the Administration. She agreed that the Subcommittee could start with gathering more information and focus on areas requiring improvements.

71. The Chairman proposed that a working group be formed to draw up a work plan for the Subcommittee’s consideration at the next meeting. Members agreed. The Chairman said that while awaiting the response from CE on the setting up of the governmental inter-departmental committee to aid the poor, the Subcommittee could meet with academics and deputations to receive views on the problem of poverty in Hong Kong and measures to combat poverty.

72. Members agreed that the next meeting would be held on 4 January 2005 at 2:30 pm.

IV. Any other business

73. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:35 pm.