

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)489/11-12
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seen by the Administration)

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Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of special meeting
held on Friday, 21 October 2011, at 5:30 pm
in Conference Room 1 of the Legislative Council Complex**

Members present : Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Chairman)
Hon WONG Sing-chi (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon LI Fung-ying, SBS, JP
Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Members absent : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS

Member attending : Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH

Public Officers : Labour and Welfare Bureau
attending

Mr Matthew CHEUNG Kin-chung, GBS, JP
Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Mr Paul TANG, JP
Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Mr Patrick NIP, JP
Director of Social Welfare

Mr FUNG Pak-yan
Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)

Home Affairs Bureau

Mr TSANG Tak-sing, GBS, JP
Secretary for Home Affairs

Ms Florence HUI, JP
Under Secretary for Home Affairs

Mr CHENG Yan-chee, JP
Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs (1)

Miss Christine CHOW Kam-yuk
Principal Assistant Secretary (Civic Affairs)²
Home Affairs Bureau

Clerk in : Miss Betty MA
attendance Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in : Ms Candice LAM
attendance Senior Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Karen LAI
Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

I. Briefings by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare and the Secretary for Home Affairs on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2011-2012

[The 2011-2012 Policy Address Booklet entitled "From Strength to Strength", The 2011-2012 Policy Address - Policy Agenda booklet, LC Paper Nos. CB(2)30/11-12(01) to (03) and CB(2)144/11-12(01) to (02)]

Secretary for Home Affairs ("SHA") said that the new initiatives which complemented the work of the Family Council and that of the Home Affairs Bureau on the promotion of the development of social enterprises ("SEs") were detailed in the Administration's paper. His speaking note was tabled at the meeting, and he had nothing to add.

2. Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") briefed members on the new welfare initiatives in the 2011-2012 Policy Address and Policy Agenda as detailed in the Administration's paper. The speaking note of SLW was also tabled at the meeting.

(Post-meeting note: Copies of the speaking notes of SLW and SHA were issued vide LC Paper Nos. CB(2)144/11-12(01) and (02) on 24 October 2011.)

Support for the elderly

Making preparation for a new scheme for the provision of Old Age Allowance ("OAA") to Hong Kong elders who choose to move to live in Guangdong ("the GD Scheme")

3. Mr WONG Kwok-hing and Ms LI Fung-ying enquired about the implementation timetable and details of the GD Scheme. Mr WONG further asked if the proposed Scheme would be extended to Hong Kong elders who chose to move to live in the Fujian Province. Ms LI asked if the Scheme would be applicable to those retired in Macau.

4. SLW said that the GD Scheme was a new initiative to enable Hong Kong elders who chose to reside in Guangdong to continue to receive OAA. It had taken into consideration the unique and close ties between Hong Kong and Guangdong, and the greater integration between the two places as they took forward the Framework Agreement on Hong

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Kong/Guangdong Co-operation and major cross-boundary transport infrastructure projects linking the two places came on stream. The Administration was of the view that only Guangdong Province had the right conditions for implementing this Scheme at the moment. SLW added that the Administration would consider putting in place a special one-off arrangement at the initial stage of implementing the GD Scheme to allow elders who satisfied all other eligibility criteria except the one-year continuous residence requirement in Hong Kong to benefit from the Scheme without having to first return to stay in Hong Kong.

5. On the implementation timetable, SLW said that the Administration endeavoured to kick start the GD Scheme as early as practicable. However, he drew members' attention to the technicalities involved in making preparation for the new Scheme. Notably, the Administration could submit the relevant funding proposal to the Finance Committee only after the forthcoming Budget. That said, it was envisaged that more concrete details of the Scheme would be drawn up by early 2012 for implementation in 2013.

6. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung remarked that the GD Scheme could help relieve the demand for elderly care services if the elderly chose to move to live in Guangdong. However, he was concerned whether the GD Scheme could adequately support the elderly to retire on the Mainland having regard to their healthcare need and rising inflation on the Mainland.

7. SLW said that the GD Scheme aimed to facilitate and support elderly persons if they chose to live in Guangdong, instead of encouraging them to do so. The rates of OAA for recipients under the GD Scheme would be the same as those for recipients living in Hong Kong, and would be adjusted according to the same mechanism.

Strengthening elderly care services

8. Dr PAN Pey-chyou said that support services for demented elders and their families had been neglected. He hoped that the introduction of a community care service ("CCS") voucher scheme would attract more service providers and encourage the development of more diverse mode of services which would strengthen the support for demented elders and their families. He sought more information about the details of the CCS voucher scheme.

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9. SLW said that instead of subventing operators to run services, the CCS voucher scheme would provide subsidy directly to elders who had long-term care needs, so that they would have more flexibility in choosing the CCS that suited their needs. This would facilitate their ageing at home. The initial thinking was to launch a two-phased pilot scheme in selected districts, starting from 2013. The first phase of the pilot scheme would be for elders with moderate impairment, and subject to the outcome of the first phase, elders with severe impairment could also be covered in the second phase. SLW further said that the implementation of CCS voucher scheme involved a number of complex and technical issues, including setting up a quality assurance mechanism, determining the fee and subsidy levels, etc. The Social Welfare Department ("SWD") would work out the implementation details with stakeholders in the coming year. SLW added that the proposed CCS voucher scheme for elders was in line with the recommendations of the Elderly Commission's consultancy study report on CCS for the elderly.

10. The Chairman opined that the tentative implementation date of the pilot scheme in 2013-2014 was considered acceptable as careful planning and preparations were required, and that the social welfare sector should be fully engaged.

11. Mr IP Wai-ming welcomed the new initiative of CCS voucher for elders but was disappointed that no subsidy would be provided to family carers of elderly persons.

12. SLW said that under the CCS voucher scheme, the subsidy to elders would not be provided in cash, but the voucher would enable eligible elders to procure subsidised services up to a certain value. As regards the proposal for providing an allowance to the family carers, an important factor to consider was that the various kinds of care services required by frail elders (such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy) would better be provided by care professionals. One should also be mindful of traditional social values which expected family members to support and care for each other.

13. Pointing out that Members supported unanimously the proposal of providing a residential care allowance of \$1,500 at a motion debate on the subject, Mr WONG Sing-chi asked about the rationale for setting the Residential Care Supplement at \$250, instead of acceding to the request. SLW advised that the proposed Residential Care Supplement under the

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Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme was set at the same rate as the existing Community Living Supplement, which was currently \$250 a month, so as to ease the recipients' financial burden.

14. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung was concerned about the long waiting time for admission to subvented residential care homes for elderly persons. He enquired about the plan in place to improve the waitlisting situation.

15. SLW said that the Administration would continue to strengthen subsidised services for the elderly by increasing the provision of residential care, day care and home care places. He reckoned that the pressure point was on nursing home places. Currently, there were 2 300 such subsidised places. An additional 1 259 places (i.e. 54%) would come on stream in the next five years. At the same time, the Government would continue to increase the provision of care and attention places. There would be eight new contract homes in the next five years. Besides, the Administration had earmarked sites in another nine development projects for the construction of new homes in various districts. More higher-quality places under the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme would also be purchased from participating private residential care homes for the elderly to meet the increasing demand.

Support for persons with disabilities

Public transport concessions for the elderly and persons with disabilities

16. Mr WONG Kwok-hing, Ms LI Fung-ying, Mr WONG Sing-chi and Mr IP Wai-ming enquired about the implementation timetable and details of the proposed provision of fare concessions for the elderly and persons with disabilities ("the concession scheme"). While welcoming the concession scheme, members urged the Administration to implement the scheme as soon as practicable.

17. SLW said that the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Transport and Housing Bureau and the Transport Department had been working closely on the preparations, yet there were many technical issues to be resolved with the public transport operators ("the PT operators"), such as the reimbursement arrangement, the replacement and/or upgrading of Octopus card readers on franchised buses and ferries, etc.. Provisions for the new initiative would be earmarked under the 2012-2013 Budget, and the funding approval from the Finance Committee would need to be sought.

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It was expected that the concession scheme would be introduced in the second half of 2012. SLW assured members that the concession scheme would be launched as early as practicable.

18. Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare added that the bureaux and departments concerned had already contacted the PT operators and started the preparatory work for the concession scheme. As the scheme would involve the Mass Transit Railway Corporation (MTRC), five franchised bus companies and a number of ferries operators, the Administration had to discuss with individual PT operators the operational and reimbursement details and sought PT operators' undertakings to continue with the existing fare concessions that they offered to the elderly and persons with disabilities. He stressed that the Administration would need to take forward the concession scheme prudently as it would involve a significant amount of public resources.

19. Noting that the concession scheme would be applicable to CSSA recipients with 100% disabilities aged between 12 to 64 and Disability Allowance ("DA") recipients of the same age group, Mr WONG Kwok-hing strongly urged the Administration to extend the concession scheme to persons with less than 100% disabilities, e.g. loss of functions of one limb. In his view, the Administration should take the opportunity to review the system of processing DA applications, including the definition of "severely disabled" under the DA scheme. In response, SLW said that the eligibility criteria for the provision of fare concession to persons with disabilities were in line with that of the monthly Transport Supplement of \$215 for persons with severe disabilities on CSSA or DA.

20. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung was of the view that the PT operators should fulfill their corporate social responsibility to offer fare concessions to needy passengers. Mr LEUNG asked why the Administration did not provide full fare concessions for the elderly and persons with disabilities. He further asked about the financial implications for taking forward the proposal of providing full fare concessions.

21. The Chairman considered that the proposed concessionary fare of \$2 per trip was in fact giving subsidy to the PT operators for the under-utilized service, as the proposal would encourage more elders and persons with disabilities to travel, and these groups of persons would usually take their trips during non-peak hours. Therefore, in reimbursing the revenue forgone in implementing the new initiative, the Administration should take

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into account the actual cost and revenue of the PT operators before the introduction of the concession scheme. As the funding for the concession scheme would be available after the approval of the Budget, the Chairman took the view that it would be an opportune time to implement the new initiative around summer in 2012.

22. SLW said that pending the outcome of negotiation with PT operators, the Administration had yet to finalise the assessment on the financial implications of providing full fare concessions for the elderly and persons with disabilities. A concessionary fare of \$2 per trip was proposed having regard to the existing fare concessions offered by some PT operators on specified days. The Administration would continue to urge the PT operators to absorb the costs of their existing fare concessions for the elderly and persons with disabilities to support social inclusion and fulfill their corporate social responsibility.

23. Dr PAN Pey-chyou said that consideration should be given to extending the concession scheme to mini buses and trams, and in particular providing full concessions for travelling on trams. Although the single trip fare for elderly passengers was only \$1, the provision of full concession would encourage more elderly to travel on trams and give recognition to the Hong Kong Tramways Limited in promoting the local industry as new trams were 100 percent made in Hong Kong.

24. SLW explained that the concession scheme aimed to use public resources to facilitate the provision of fare concessions for the elderly and persons with disabilities, on the basis of the current concessions offered by PT operators, at a concessionary fare of \$2 per trip on all days and at all time. As the elderly tram fare for a single journey was currently lower than the proposed concessionary fare of \$2, the Administration had no intention to include trams in the concession scheme. The Administration aimed to introduce the concession scheme to cover the three major modes of public transportation, MTRC, franchised buses and ferries in the first instance, and would review whether there would be a need to extend the scheme to other modes of public transportation after full implementation of the concession scheme.

Employment opportunities for persons with disabilities

25. Ms LI Fung-ying was concerned about the employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and the resources for the related initiatives

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announced in the Policy Address 2011-2012.

26. SLW said that the Administration would inject \$100 million into the "Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprises" Project, under which the maximum grant for each project was \$2 million, and the funding period would be extended from two years to three years. To be eligible for the grant, the number of employees with disabilities should not be less than one-half of the total employees. SLW further said that the Administration would seek additional funding to provide subsidies for employers of persons with disabilities to procure assistive devices and carry out workplace modification work. It was expected that about some 400 persons with disabilities would benefit from these initiatives annually. The Administration would also provide a \$500 mentorship award to encourage employers to render workplace guidance to persons with disabilities and help them adapt to new jobs.

Support for the youth

27. Mr WONG Sing-chi urged the Administration to keep open the 3 000 temporary work opportunities for young people. He asked whether the Administration would create more similar posts for the youth in anticipation of a double number of Form 6 and Form 7 graduates in 2012.

28. SLW drew members' attention to the background for the creation of these 3 000 temporary work opportunities in 2008 which was to enhance the employability of young people through providing working experience. It was made clear at that point of time that these were temporary posts. To allow more time for the young people to equip themselves for the labour market and for the welfare service units to make necessary adjustments, the Administration had decided to further extend these posts as needed for one year to March 2013.

Support for women

29. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung was concerned that after the implementation of the statutory minimum wage, women employees were paid less than men for similar jobs.

30. On the employment situation after the implementation of statutory minimum wage, SLW said that the latest statistics revealed that during the period from May to September 2011, the female labour force had increased

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distinctly. The number of women workers went up by 93 000, of which 41 000 were aged 50 or above and 7 000 were engaged in the retail sector. It was noteworthy that the average employment earnings for full-time women employees in the lowest decile group registered a year-on-year increase of 14.4% for the period June to August 2011.

Review of employment assistance programmes under the CSSA Scheme

31. The Chairman asked when the review on various employment assistance programmes under the CSSA Scheme would be conducted.

32. The Director of Social Welfare said that SWD had various employment assistance programmes to help employable CSSA recipients, including the youth and single parents, return to the labour market and achieve self-reliance. These programmes were currently operated by non-governmental organisations ("NGOs"). SWD would conduct a comprehensive review to see if the programmes could be integrated to enhance the effectiveness of the service and enable the NGO operators to achieve greater synergy in service provision. As the current programmes would expire by the end of 2012, SWD would keep in view the timing for conducting the review.

Development of SEs

33. The Chairman said that having promoted SEs for several years, the Administration should consider conducting a review of the development of SEs at this stage, with a view to collaborating with the SE sector to formulate strategy and plans for further development of SEs in Hong Kong.

34. SHA agreed that the community at large had increased awareness and understanding of the concept of SEs. The Administration would continue to assist the SE sector to achieve steady development in Hong Kong. In November 2011, there would be a series of activities on SEs including an SE Summit and a 3-day Bazaar for some 70 SEs of different trades to promote and sell their products and services. This apart, the SE Award Scheme and the "Be a Friend to SE" Campaign would be launched to enhance better understanding of and support for further SE development.

Family Council

35. SHA added that the Administration would continue to complement

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the work of Family Council. Separately, as announced in the Policy Address 2011-2012, the Administration would take the lead in promoting the good practice of paid paternity leave for employees to promote child-bearing and family-friendly practices, beginning with a study into the provision of paid paternity leave for civil servants. He highlighted that the Family Council noted and supported the proposal.

II. Any other business

36. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:41 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
8 December 2011