

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2268/11-12

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 12 March 2012, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

Members present : Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che (Chairman)
Hon WONG Sing-chi (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, SBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, 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 CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS

Public Officers attending : Item IV

The Administration

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

Ms Aubrey FUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (Civic Affairs) 2
Home Affairs Bureau

Dr CHEUNG Kwok-wah
Principal Assistant Secretary (Curriculum Development)
Education Bureau

Miss Mandy WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Security (Narcotics)
Security Bureau

Dr Christine WONG
Principal Medical and Health Officer (Family Health Service)
Department of Health

Ms WONG Yin-yee
Chief Social Work Officer (Youth)
Social Welfare Department

Family Council

Prof Daniel SHEK, BBS, JP
Convenor, Sub-committee on Family Support

Item V

Mrs Angelina CHEUNG FUNG Wing-ping
Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare
(Welfare) 3
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Miss Cecilla LI
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly)
Social Welfare Department

Item VI

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

Ms Irene YOUNG Bick-kwan, JP
Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr Patrick NIP Tak-kuen, JP
Director of Social Welfare
Social Welfare Department

Ms LUNG Siu-kit
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security)
Social Welfare Department

Mr LAU Kwai-chiu
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 6
Social Welfare Department

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

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

Miss Karen LAI
Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1324/11-12]

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2012 were confirmed.

II. Information paper(s) issued since the last meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1173/11-12(01), CB(2)1217/11-12(01) and CB(2)1270/11-12(01)]

2. Members noted that the following papers had been issued since the last meeting -

- (a) joint submission from the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social Work Assistant Branch and the Hong

Action

Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social Work Officer Grade Branch concerning the services and management of the Tuen Mun Children and Juvenile Home;

- (b) letter from the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social Security Assistants' Branch on the workload and challenges faced by Social Security Assistants; and
- (c) referral from the Public Complaints Office on policy issues relating to the permissible absence limit for Old Age Allowance and babies born to Mainland parents.

III. Items for discussion at the next meeting

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1276/11-12(01) to (02)]

3. Members agreed to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration at the next meeting to be held on 12 April 2012 at 2:15 pm -

- (a) Employment assistance programmes under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme; and
- (b) Measures to support at-risk youths.

4. Members noted that a visit of the Panel to the Tuen Mun Children and Juvenile Home was scheduled for 27 March 2012.

5. Referring to the letter dated 15 February 2012 from the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Social Security Assistants' Branch regarding the workload and challenges faced by Social Security Assistants, the Chairman advised that the Administration proposed to discuss the subject in May 2012, after it had held discussion with the staff associations concerned. Members agreed.

IV. Work progress of the Family Council

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1276/11-12(03) and CB(2)1276/11-12(04)]

6. Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs (1) ("DSHA") briefed members on the findings of the four research studies commissioned by the Family Council on youth drug abuse, youth prostitution, child neglect, and elderly neglect as well as the new policy directions arising from the findings and the measures to support these new policy directions. DSHA added that

Action

the four research studies were completed and submitted to the Family Council for deliberations last year.

7. Prof Daniel SHEK, Convenor, Subcommittee on Family Support of the Family Council elaborated that the four research studies had identified that although the causes of the four social problems under study were complicated, multi-layered and multi-faceted, they could be traced back to the family. The research studies confirmed the need for a "family-focused" strategy in order to tackle such problems effectively. Prof SHEK advised that the Family Council had further deliberated on the research findings and recommended three new policy directions, viz. family engagement, prevention, and community-based family support as well as the measures to be implemented by the relevant bureaux and departments. The Family Council considered that a cross-sectoral and inter-departmental approach in strengthening families was conducive to devising family-focused strategies and measures to tackle the social problems and would explore how to take them forward.

8. Mr WONG Sing-chi considered that the findings of the four research studies and the new policy directions were not something new, and the Administration should take the opportunity to update members on the work progress of the Family Council. He pointed out that the welfare sector had all along adopted a family-based approach to assist at-risk families to tackle family problems and to foster family engagement. Instead of identifying social problems alone, Mr WONG expected that the Family Council should also propose concrete action plans with a view to tackling the social problems at root. In his view, the Family Council should give priority to addressing the social problems faced by families with Mainland parents, single-parent families and families on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance.

9. DSHA clarified that the purpose of the Administration's paper aimed to provide members with an update on the deliberations of the Family Council in respect of the findings of the four research studies. He stressed that the Administration had been keeping members abreast of the work progress of the Family Council and would continue to do so. At the request of Mr WONG Sing-chi, the Administration agreed to provide members with the full reports of the four research studies after the meeting.

Admin

(Post-meeting note: The Administration had provided the full reports of the four research studies which were issued to members vide LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1546/11-12(01) to (04) on 28 March 2012.)

Action

10. Referring to the proposals made by the four research studies, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the proposals lacked insights for tackling family problems. For instance, the proposals of offering concessionary rates to families for public recreational and cultural venues to encourage family engagement failed to address the thrust of the problem, i.e. long working hours of both parents who had no time for a healthy family life. He questioned whether the Family Council had deliberated on the subject of long working hours from the family perspective in its past meetings.

11. Sharing similar views, Mr IP Wai-ming said that the causes of social problems identified by the four research studies were not something new and the Family Council should have put forward concrete proposals to tackle these problems. He also questioned whether the Family Council had looked into the impact of long working hours on families.

12. Prof Daniel SHEK advised that the four research studies had adopted a new approach to look into the causes of youth drug abuse and youth prostitution from the family perspective. Besides, the findings had shed light on the need for a "family-focused" strategy in order to tackle such problems effectively, which might resemble the approach adopted by the welfare sector to assist families in need to tackle family problems. The Family Council would keep in view the implementation of the recommended measures and review the effectiveness of these measures.

13. DSHA added that relevant bureaux and departments had implemented measures in support of the three new policy directions, details of which were set out in Annex B to the Administration's paper. As for the measures to encourage family engagement, DSHA said that in response to the positive feedback of the Family-Friendly Employers Award Scheme launched last year, the Administration would make use of the network of various chambers of commerce and retail associations for offering more intangible incentives to families, such as family sales day by the retails industry and family discount by the travel industry with a view to fostering a pro-family culture in the commercial sector. This would be an ongoing effort of the Administration and the Family Council to foster and strengthen family engagement.

14. As regards long working hours, Prof Daniel SHEK said that concerns about the impact of long working hours on families had been raised time and again in the course of deliberations by the Family Council, and the Administration was aware of the views and concerns expressed. Prof SHEK said that in implementing the family-focused measures in support of the new policy directions, consideration would be given to identifying

Action

high-risk families and the factors leading to the problems, including long working hours.

15. Ms LI Fung-ying cast doubt on the effectiveness of the measures in combating the social problems identified. Ms LI was of the view that the Administration should first identify the underlying causes of family problems and then make appropriate policy changes. In her view, one of the main reasons leading to family problems was long working hours which deprived family members from having sufficient time to spend with each other. Besides, the problem of cross-boundary families was also prone to vulnerable family relationship as well as youth problems, such as compensated dating, as the Mainland mothers of the cross-boundary families were unable to take care of their children in Hong Kong. Ms LI asked whether the Family Council had deliberated on these issues and what specific measures were adopted by the Administration to tackle such problems.

16. DSHA advised that although working hours was not the thrust of the four research studies, it had been a key concern of the Family Council. He said that the Administration would convey members' concerns and views to the Family Council.

17. On the Administration's initiatives to support youth, Chief Social Work Officer (Youth) added that the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") attached great importance to tackling youth problems including compensated dating. Specifically, the following initiatives had been adopted -

- (a) under the "one school social worker for each secondary school" programme, counselling and advice on issues including dating and relationship between either sex had been provided to teenagers. Some 96 additional school social workers had been provided for enhancing school social work service last year;
- (b) a youth enhancement scheme was jointly organised with the Education Bureau and five universities in Hong Kong with funding support from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to provide training to youths for establishing clear and positive values;
- (c) three 3-year Pilot Cyber Youth Outreaching Projects were launched in August 2011 to identify youths at risk proactively

Action

via cyber means and provide support services as appropriate;
and

- (d) the 137 Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres had been providing a wide range of services to youths. The outreaching social work service had also been strengthened to reach out to the youths in need.

To support and strengthen individuals and families, including single-parent families, the 62 Integrated Family Service Centres and two Integrated Service Centres over the territory had been providing a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial services of specific localities to address their multifarious needs.

18. Mr LEUNG Yiu-chung pointed out that in addition to long working hours, low income was another major cause of family problems. In his view, the measures proposed by the Family Council could not address the interwoven problems faced by low-income families including long working hours, lack of care for their children and inadequate support for the children's specific education needs. Mr LEUNG strongly called upon the Administration to deploy more resources with a view to implementing more specific measures to sufficiently and effectively tackle the multi-faceted family problems.

19. Prof Daniel SHEK concurred with Mr LEUNG's views that more specific measures were necessary to tackle the multi-faceted family problems. Prof SHEK advised that consequent upon the recommendations on the new policy directions made by the Family Council, these new policy directions had been featured in the Policy Agenda of the 2011-2012 Policy Address. Having engaged the relevant bureaux/departments in the new policy directions, the Family Council would continue with its efforts in reminding them of the need to include the family perspective as a factor in policy formulation.

20. Referring to the composition of the Family Council, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung cast doubt on the representation of the Family Council and remarked that the Family Council fell short in working out concrete measures to tackle family problems. He also expressed disappointment at the Government's lack of commitment to provide adequate resources for implementing concrete measures to alleviate the hardship of needy families.

Action

21. Mr Alan LEONG noted with concern that as a result of the implementation of the Lump Sum Grant subvention mode, frontline social workers were working under extreme tight manpower provision. He expressed concern about the impact of implementing the measures in support of the new policy directions on the workload of social workers.

22. Prof Daniel SHEK fully recognised the difficulties encountered by the welfare sector, although the Family Council was not tasked to deal with the issue. Nonetheless, the Family Council would spare no efforts to convey to the relevant bureaux/departments the need for additional resources to follow up the various proposed measures to support the new policy directions.

Admin

23. The Chairman was of the view that the four research studies had kicked start the formulation of family-focused strategies and measures to tackle social problems. To facilitate more in-depth analysis of the prevailing social problems, the Chairman requested and DSHA agreed to provide the full reports of the four research studies and a brief account of the work progress of the Family Council since its establishment in 2007.

24. The Chairman said that while the four research studies had identified various causes of social problems which could be traced back to the family, members expressed concern about the underlying causes of such problems. To better understand the causes and problems of high-risk families, the Family Council should consider commissioning local universities to conduct further studies on the underlying causes of family problems and make recommendations as appropriate.

Admin

25. DSHA said that the Family Council, as an advisory body to the Government, provided a high-level platform for government officials, non-governmental organisations and related stakeholders to exchange views and advise the Government on the formulation of family-related policies. The Administration would relay to the Family Council the suggestion of commissioning further studies on family problems.

V. Provision of residential care services for elderly couple
[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1276/11-12(05) to (06)]

26. Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 3 ("PAS(W)3") briefed members on the provision of subsidised residential care services ("RCS") for the elderly with long-term care ("LTC") needs and the mechanism for allocation of RCS places, in particular for group

Action

applications which covered elderly couples, as detailed in the Administration's paper. She added that, depending on the circumstances of the individual cases and provided that the applicants had no preference for specific locations or residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs"), frail elders with an immediate need for RCS could be given priority in the allocation of subsidised RCS places.

27. Dr PAN Pey-chyou noted with concern that preference for a specific location was a factor which had prolonged the waiting time for subsidised RCHE places. Noting that the Administration had earmarked several new development sites for the construction of contract RCHEs, Dr PAN asked about the additional RCS places to be provided in these new homes.

28. PAS(W)3 replied that the existing contract RCHEs offered around 1 500 subsidised places (i.e. 1 000 nursing homes ("NHs") and some 400 care-and-attention ("C&A") places). To cope with the increasing demand for RCS, the Government planned to set up eight new contract RCHEs in Sham Shui Po, Tung Chung, Yau Tsim Mong, Sai Ying Pun, Tai Wai and Shek Kip Mei, offering some 518 subsidised and 345 non-subsidised places. At the request of the Chairman, the Administration agreed to provide details of the additional RCS places to be provided in the new contract homes by the specific location of these homes and types of places after the meeting.

Admin

(Post-meeting note : The Administration has provided the requisite information which was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1513/11-12(01) on 26 March 2012.)

29. Referring to a recent case regarding the allocation of RCS places for an elderly couple, Mr WONG Sing-chi considered that the arrangement was inhumane as the couple were each provided with a NH and C&A place at different homes based on their impairment levels as assessed under the Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services ("SCNAMES"). He appealed to the Administration to review the existing allocation mechanism of RCS with a view to providing some flexibility to allow an elderly couple to stay in the same RCHE with appropriate care level, even though they were assessed of different impairment levels.

30. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly) ("ADSW(E)") advised that a pre-admission assessment would be conducted prior to the applicant's admission to service if the last care need assessment was conducted over 12 months ago, in order to ensure that elders whose care needs might have changed over time would receive service at the appropriate care level. In

Action

case the care needs of elders had changed prior to their admission to service, they would be recommended for another type of RCHE providing the appropriate care level. The LTC date of the applicants would remain unchanged.

31. Noting that the waiting time for group applicants with different impairment levels would be longer, Ms LI Fung-ying enquired about the average waiting time for such applications. She took the view that the Administration should give due consideration to the wish of some RCS applicants for residing in the same RCHE with their spouse.

32. PAS(W)3 advised that under the existing mechanism, elders would only be allocated with RCS places which offered service at the appropriate care levels according to their impairment level. Priority admission to RCHEs by frail elders could be arranged having regard to the recommendations of their case workers (i.e. social workers responsible for the cases) and provided that the applicants had no specific preference for particular locations or RCHEs. The purpose was to ensure that the process was fair to other applicants on the Central Waiting List ("CWL"). PAS(W)3 added that the Administration had not kept separate statistics on the waiting time for group applications.

33. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan cast doubt as to whether the Administration had attached due importance to group applications as it had not kept statistics on the waiting time for this category of applications at all. In the light of an ageing population, the Administration should plan ahead to ensure an adequate supply of subsidised RCHE places to meet the increasing demand, including the supply of RCS places specifically designed for group applicants. Mr LEE asked about the allocation mechanism for RCS places to group applicants.

34. PAS(W)3 advised that RCS was allocated on a first-come-first-served basis with reference to the date on which an applicant completed SCNAMES, i.e. the LTC date. RCS applicants who opted for group applications would have the same LTC date if they had undergone SCNAMES on the same day. However, if individual applicants with different LTC dates later decided to jointly submit a group application, the LTC date for the group application would be the latest of the original LTC dates of the group members. PAS(W)3 further advised that of some 20 000 elders on CWL, more than 30% and 20% of the elders waiting for subsidised C&A and NH places respectively had turned down the offer of placement, even though the offer suited their preferences. This suggested that some elders who applied for subsidised RCS were in

Action

fact not ready to move into RCHEs. That said, the Administration would continue to provide more subsidised RCS places, and at the same time strengthen the community care services ("CCS") to facilitate elders to age in place.

35. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that some elders had to apply for subsidised RCS well before their actual needs arose simply because of the concern about unduly long waiting time for subsidised RCS. He urged the Administration to allocate more resources and earmark appropriate sites and premises for setting up RCHEs to increase the provision of LTC services with continuum of care ("COC") to the elderly.

36. ADSW(E) responded that apart from the eight new contract RCHEs, the Administration had earmarked nine sites in different development projects (including public housing estates development projects, government premises, and projects undertaken by private developers and the Urban Renewal Authority) for the construction of more contract RCHEs.

37. Mr TAM Yiu-chung enquired whether the Administration had implemented the recommendation of the Elderly Commission to provide more LTC places providing COC such that elders could continue to stay in the same subvented RCHE when their health deteriorated and needed not switch to another RCHE which could provide a higher level of nursing care. Mr TAM was concerned that it was against the wish of some elders to resort to CCS, instead of applying for RCS, simply because of the long waiting time for RCS.

38. PAS(W)3 said that to enhance the care capability of subvented RCHEs, the Administration launched a conversion programme to convert RCS places in existing self-care hostels/homes for the aged and C&A homes of a lower care level into COC places. The conversion works would take some time, as it could only take place in phases by natural wastage to minimise the disruption to existing residents. The Government endeavoured to expedite the process. Currently, conversion works had been carried out in 69 subvented RCHEs to increase the supply of some 5 000 LTC places with COC. ADSW(E) further said that "dual option" (i.e. eligible for both RCS and CCS) was one of the service recommendations for elders who were assessed under SCNAMES to have LTC. If they so wished, these elders could receive CCS before a residential place could be offered. Of around 28 000 elders on CWL, over half of them were receiving different government subsidy or services, including subsidised RCS / CCS services.

Action

39. In concluding, the Chairman said that while recognising the inadequacy of resources, he saw no reason why C&A and NH places should be provided under different homes as such places were LTC places with COC. Moreover, many subsidised RCHEs did not have the necessary facilities to accommodate group applicants. He appealed to the Administration to take into account the needs of group applicants in taking forward the conversion programme of existing subvented RCHEs to provide more LTC places with COC by, say, reserving a few cubicles exclusively for group applications.

VI. Guangdong Scheme

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1276/11-12(07) to (08)]

40. At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") briefed members on the justifications and key features of the Administration's proposal to introduce a new Guangdong ("GD") Scheme ("the GD Scheme") under the Social Security Allowance Scheme to provide Old Age Allowance ("OAA") for eligible Hong Kong elderly people who chose to reside in GD, and details of which were set out in the Administration's paper. SLW stressed that the GD Scheme would be a groundbreaking initiative which would facilitate and support elderly persons who chose to live in GD. It should not be mistaken as a measure for encouraging them to do so.

41. Ms LI Fung-ying welcomed the GD Scheme, in particular the special one-off arrangement to allow elders who satisfied all other eligibility criteria, except the one-year continuous residence rule, to benefit from the GD Scheme without having to first return to stay in Hong Kong. Ms LI enquired about the implementation timetable of the GD Scheme. Given the special one-off arrangement would only be made during the initial stage of implementation of the GD Scheme, Ms LI called on the Administration to ensure that the publicity information could be disseminated to those eligible elders who had already resided on the Mainland. Ms LI was concerned whether the Scheme would be extended to elders on Disability Allowance ("DA") if they chose to live in GD.

42. SLW said that the Administration was taking forward the preparatory work at full steam with a view to launching the GD Scheme around mid-2013. The Administration fully agreed that it was important to disseminate information on the details of the GD Scheme to eligible elders who were currently living on the Mainland, and it would step up publicity in this respect. In addition, the agent(s) to be appointed in GD to assist in

Action

processing applications from elders played an important role to reach out to the target recipients. SLW added that the GD Scheme would not be applicable to DA recipients at this stage as the majority of them required professional rehabilitation services as well as regular assessments by medical practitioners to confirm their eligibility for DA, which in the foreseeable future could only be provided in Hong Kong. In addition, it was noteworthy that present recipients of DA were not eligible for OAA. Likewise, they would not be eligible for OAA under the GD Scheme.

43. Mr IP Wai-ming was concerned about the effectiveness of the publicity programme on the GD Scheme, in particular the special one-off arrangement, in reaching the eligible elders living in GD. He asked whether the Administration had enlisted the support of the GD authorities to assist in the implementation of the GD Scheme. He was also concerned about the measures in place to ensure that the monthly OAA payments would reach the eligible elders who stayed in GD. Mr IP then sought clarification on the discrepancies between the number of elderly resided in GD as cited in paragraph 2(b) and Note 5 of the Administration's paper.

44. SLW said that the Administration would work closely with the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in GD on the publicity programmes and inform the relevant GD authorities of the operational arrangements under the GD Scheme if necessary. Similar to the existing arrangements under the Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme, the OAA would be paid in Hong Kong through the recipient's personal bank account in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the appointed agent(s) would conduct postal reviews and home visits to check and verify the status of the recipients and the disbursement of OAA. Referring to Mr IP's enquiry about the figures in respect of elders in GD mentioned in the Administration's paper, SLW clarified that paragraph 2 of the paper drew members' attention to the survey findings of the Census and Statistics Department in 2011 that approximately 60% (46 000) of Hong Kong residents aged 65 or above settling on the Mainland were in GD, whereas Note 5 of the paper provided information on the number of elders of that age who stayed in GD and were not receiving CSSA, OAA or DA i.e. at least 20 000 elders.

45. Pointing out that the OAA recipients would be required to meet the 305-day permissible limit of absence per payment year, Mr WONG Sing-chi sought clarification on the payment mode, i.e. whether the OAA would be paid monthly or yearly under the GD Scheme. In relation to public rental housing ("PRH") arrangement, Mr WONG said that applicants for the GD Scheme who were PRH tenants were required to surrender flats

Action

or tenancy right when they joined the GD Scheme. He asked whether the Administration had discussed with the Housing Authority the possibility of allowing the applicants concerned to apply for PRH units through compassionate rehousing arrangement if they decided to withdraw from the GD Scheme and returned to Hong Kong for good.

46. SLW advised that the proposed GD Scheme had basically the same eligibility criteria as OAA in Hong Kong, and had the same 305-day permissible limit of absence per payment year for successful applicants, except that the recipients would be required to reside in GD instead of Hong Kong for at least 60 days for obtaining a full-year payment of allowance; and, same as the OAA payable to elders living in Hong Kong, the OAA payment of the GD Scheme would be made on a monthly basis. SLW further advised that in line with the existing arrangement for applicants for the Portable CSSA Scheme, applicants for the GD Scheme who were PRH tenants would be required to surrender their flats or tenancy right when they joined the GD Scheme. The Administration was exploring the possibility of allowing applicants of the GD Scheme to apply for a letter of assurance from the Housing Department or the Hong Kong Housing Society such that the applicants concerned would not need to apply for PRH afresh through the Waiting List again if they later chose to return to Hong Kong for good. This apart, temporary placement in subsidised RCHes could be arranged for participants of the GD Scheme who required care services if they had an urgent need to opt out of the Scheme and return to Hong Kong for good.

47. Dr PAN Pey-chyou said that the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions supported the proposed GD Scheme. He sought clarification as to whether applicants for the GD Scheme aged 65 to 69 were subject to any means test. Noting that OAA would be paid through the recipients' personal bank account in Hong Kong, Dr PAN asked whether the recipients could chose to receive the allowance through their bank accounts in the Mainland as the elders might have no bank accounts in Hong Kong after they had decided to retire on the Mainland. Dr PAN further asked if participants of the GD Scheme, who opted out of the GD Scheme and returned to Hong Kong in less than one full payment year, could continue to receive OAA in Hong Kong immediately after they had returned to Hong Kong.

48. SLW advised that the proposed GD Scheme had basically the same eligibility criteria as OAA in Hong Kong, including the income and asset tests for Normal OAA. SLW further advised that all applicants for the GD Scheme, irrespective of whether they were existing OAA recipients,

Action

should approach SWD in Hong Kong to complete the application procedures in person. The monthly OAA payments would be made through the recipients' personal bank accounts in Hong Kong and if individual applicants had difficulty opening bank accounts in Hong Kong, SWD could facilitate, for instance, by helping them make enquiries and providing them with supporting documents in connection with their OAA applications. For the convenience of the applicants, SWD was considering setting up a dedicated office for the GD Scheme in a convenient location, e.g. Sheung Shui. SLW added that for those elders who were unfit to travel to Hong Kong for health reasons, SWD would make special arrangements, including appointing agent(s) in GD, to assist in processing applications from these elders if they could produce documentary proof. The Administration would only consider entrusting the appointed agent(s) to handle the monthly OAA of individual recipients under exceptional circumstances.

49. Director of Social Welfare ("DSW") supplemented that the intention of proposing a special one-off arrangement at the initial stage of implementing the GD Scheme was to facilitate those elders who had already settled in GD, so that they could join the scheme without having to first return to stay in Hong Kong. To avoid abuse, beneficiaries of the one-off special arrangement could only switch to ordinary OAA in Hong Kong one full payment year after they had first received OAA under the GD Scheme, unless they satisfied the "one-year continuous residence in Hong Kong" requirement for receiving OAA in Hong Kong. For existing OAA recipients who had opted for the GD Scheme, they might opt out of the Scheme in future, return to Hong Kong and continue to receive OAA.

50. Mr TAM Yiu-chung welcomed the GD Scheme. Mr TAM pointed out that participants of the Portable CSSA Scheme could choose to stay in GD or Fujian, he asked whether the GD Scheme could be extended to other provinces such as Fujian.

51. SLW explained that taking into consideration the growing integration and the unique relationship between Hong Kong and GD, the Administration considered that GD was at present the only place with the conditions suitable for implementing the new scheme.

52. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan called on the Administration to advance the implementation timetable of the GD Scheme. Consideration could be given to streamlining the tender procedures for appointing the agent on the Mainland. In his view, the appointed agent in the Mainland played a significant role in implementing the GD Scheme. Given the extensive

Action

service areas in GD, he was concerned about the service capacity of the agent to cope with the tremendous caseload if only one was appointed. The Administration should consider offering the service contracts to several agents and reimbursing the service cost on a unit cost basis.

53. SLW said that the Administration did not rule out the possibility of appointing more than one agent in GD to assist in implementing the GD Scheme. The Administration would have regard to the experience of appointing a non-governmental organisation (i.e. International Social Service Hong Kong Branch) to assist in implementing the Portable CSSA Scheme on the Mainland and invite more interested organisations to act as agents under the GD Scheme. DSW added that the Administration would need some time to draw up the tender specifications, in particular the specific role of the appointed agent(s). He assured members that the Administration would strive to launch the GD Scheme as early as practicable.

[To allow sufficient time for discussion, the Chairman suggested and members agreed to extend the meeting for 15 minutes.]

54. Mr Frederick FUNG welcomed the proposed GD Scheme and urged the Administration to launch the Scheme as early as practicable. In response to Mr FUNG's enquiry, SLW said that payment of the allowance under the GD Scheme would be made in Hong Kong dollars through the recipients' personal bank accounts in Hong Kong.

55. The Chairman called on the Administration to convey clearly to the participants of the GD Scheme about the arrangement for switching between receiving OAA in GD and in Hong Kong. He said that the relevant procedures should be streamlined to minimise the impact on the recipients concerned. The Chairman further called on the Administration to ensure adequate manpower provision for implementing the GD Scheme in the light of the vast service areas in GD. Specifically, the Administration should consider allocating resources to the appointed agent(s) prior to the launch of the GD Scheme to facilitate them to meet the necessary expenses for undertaking preparatory work.

56. SLW advised that the service requirements including manpower provision would be stipulated in the tender documents for the agent service. In addition, sufficient time would be provided to the appointed agent(s) to make preparation for the implementation of the GD Scheme.

Action

VII. Any other business

57. The Chairman reminded members that a special meeting of the Panel would be held on 14 March 2012 at 10:45 am.

58. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 1:06 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
8 June 2012