

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2820/11-12
(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 10 July 2012, at 8:30 am
in Conference Room 2A 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 CHAN Kam-lam, SBS, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, SBS, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon Ronny TONG Ka-wah, SC
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
Dr Hon Samson TAM Wai-ho, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Member absent : Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po, MH, JP
Dr Hon LEUNG Ka-lau
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou

Public Officers attending : Items III and IV

Mr Patrick NIP
Director of Social Welfare
Social Welfare Department

Item III

Mr Matthew CHEUNG
Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mrs Elina CHAN
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 IV

Ms Caran WONG
Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family & Child
Welfare)
Social Welfare Department

Ms Wendy LEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare
(Welfare) 1
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Item V

Mr Stephen SUI
Commissioner for Rehabilitation
Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mrs Quinnie NG NG Lai-chun
Senior Social Work Officer (Rehabilitation & Medical
Social Services) 4
Social Welfare Department

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

Staff in attendance : Miss Karen LAI
Council Secretary (2) 4

Miss Maggie CHIU
Legislative Assistant (2) 4

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I. Confirmation of minutes

[LC Paper No. CB(2)2475/11-12]

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 April 2012 were confirmed.

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

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2400/11-12(01) and CB(2)2421/11-12(01)]

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

- (a) referral from the Public Complaints Office regarding the provision of subsidies for extra-curricular activities of primary and secondary schools; and
- (b) referral on issues raised at the meeting between Legislative Council ("LegCo") Members and Wong Tai Sin District Council members on 24 May 2012.

III. Residential care services for the elderly

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2509/11-12(01) to (02)]

3. Secretary for Labour and Welfare ("SLW") briefed members on the provision of subsidised residential care services ("RCS") for the elderly and the short-to-long-term measures to further increase the supply and enhance the service quality, as detailed in the Administration's paper.

4. The Chairman asked about the planned provision of RCS up to 2017-2018, i.e. the tenure of the current Government. SLW explained that the Administration had secured resources for about 1 700 additional places which would commence operation from now to 2014-2015. The Administration had also been bidding for the necessary resources for the provision of additional RCS in the coming years, and the requested figures would be available after the funding for the relevant projects was secured. The Administration would provide members with the relevant information in due course.

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5. The Chairman was concerned about the slow progress of the conversion programme to convert places in subvented residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs") to care-and-attention ("C&A") places with continuum of care ("COC"). To his knowledge, the Administration had reduced the subvention for RCHEs under the conversion programme, in anticipation of an increase in revenue from higher home fees for C&A places with COC after the conversion works. This had given rise to operation problems of these RCHEs as the conversion works were behind schedule. He asked about the latest progress of the programme.

6. Director of Social Welfare ("DSW") said that the conversion programme was effective in increasing the supply of C&A places with COC. Funding was available for the conversion works, but conversion works would be carried out in RCHEs when a number of RCS places was vacant arising from natural wastage in order to avoid causing disturbance to existing residents.

7. Mr TAM Yiu-chung said that notwithstanding the waitlisting situation for RCS for the elderly, some elders preferred to wait for subvented RCHE places and did not wish to admit to private RCHEs because of the substandard quality. In his view, the Administration should, in addition to purchasing more places from private RCHEs, help upgrade the living environment and service quality of private RCHEs. To enable elders to age at home, Mr TAM also urged for the enhancement of community care services ("CCS") to cater for the specific needs of elders, for example, to provide home-based services during public holidays.

8. SLW advised that of some 50 000 private RCHE places, about 7 300 were subsidised places under the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme ("EBPS"). The Administration would continue to explore practicable and feasible measures to improve the operating conditions of EBPS homes and enhance their services. DSW supplemented that, to strengthen the provision of CCS, the Administration had increased places for the Enhanced Home and Community Care Services. In response to the question about provision of CCS during public holidays, DSW said that while service operators had been flexible to offer services to needy cases during public holidays, support was also given to the elders through the coordinated efforts of volunteers and the District Elderly Community Centres. The Administration would also consider how to further strengthen service provision during public holidays.

9. Mr IP Wai-ming noted with concern that some private RCHEs were alleged to improperly use the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") payments of the elderly residents, and enquired about the monitoring mechanism on the service quality of private RCHEs.

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10. SLW advised that the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") conducted at least seven inspections, most of them unannounced, to private RCHEs per year, and would follow up on complaint cases of embezzlement of CSSA payments of the elderly residents and rectify irregularities promptly. DSW added that to provide high quality EBPS places, additional resources had been earmarked for purchasing about 600 additional EA1 places (i.e. places with higher standard of staffing and space provision under EBPS) and upgrading more than 600 EA2 places to EA1 level in 2012-2013. DSW pointed out that it was stipulated in the Code of Practice for Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) that operators should give prior notice to residents for adjustment of home fees and other related charges. Names of RCHEs being successfully prosecuted for misbehaviour would be made public on the website of SWD.

Special allowance for the elderly

11. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the proposal to introduce a new special allowance for the elderly, as announced by the Chief Executive ("CE") in his election manifesto, had sparked off wide public concern. He asked about the implementation progress and details of the new allowance.

12. The Chairman said that although the subject of the new allowance was not included in the agenda for the meeting, subject to the consent of SLW, he was prepared to allow members to raise questions in this respect. SLW advised that in the light of wide public concern, he would be happy to provide preliminary response on the matter.

13. SLW further advised that to support the needy elderly who were not on CSSA, CE had pledged to introduce a special allowance for the elderly who were in need so that they could receive about double the amount of the Old Age Allowance ("OAA") every month after a simple declaration of income and assets and passing the means test among other eligibility criteria. To take forward the proposal, a working group had been formed under the Labour and Welfare Bureau to work out the implementation details. SLW added that the preparatory work of the new allowance would take some time. For example, SWD would need to enhance its computer system and recruit adequate staff to cope with the influx of applications from some hundreds of thousands of eligible elders. That said, the Administration would strive to roll out the new allowance as soon as practicable.

14. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that the Labour Party was of the view that instead of introducing a new allowance, the Administration should actively consider combining the elderly CSSA and OAA schemes to alleviate the

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hardship of needy elders who had not applied for CSSA for various reasons. In his view, the Administration should raise the monthly rate of the new allowance to \$3,000, and introduce a universal retirement protection system in the long-term.

15. SLW said that the aim of the new allowance was to honour the pledge in CE's election manifesto. He pointed out that Mr LEE Cheuk-yan's proposal would require prudent and in-depth consideration, having regard to the difference in the policies underpinned the CSSA and OAA schemes. For example, applicants for CSSA would need to go through an income and assets assessment on a household basis whereas the means test for Normal OAA was conducted on an individual/couple basis.

16. Mr TAM Yiu-chung expressed grave concern about the lead time for rolling out the scheme in the light of the high expectation of the elderly population. Mr TAM was also concerned about the retrospective disbursement arrangement of the allowance.

17. Mr Frederick FUNG urged the Administration to seek funding approval from the Finance Committee ("FC") for launching of the scheme before the end of the current LegCo term. Mr WONG Sing-chi took the view that the Administration should roll out the scheme as soon as possible, and if not, the scheme should have retrospective effect from 1 July 2012. He added that in longer term, the Administration should introduce a monthly allowance of \$3,000 for the elderly to protect their retirement life. Sharing similar views, Mr Albert HO asked if the Administration would aim to launch the new scheme within the current term of LegCo by end-September 2012.

18. Responding to members' concerns, SLW said that the Administration would spare no efforts in working out the implementation details of the new allowance. While it would be difficult for the Administration to advise on the concrete implementation timetable at this juncture, he assured members that the Administration would press ahead with the preparatory work with a view to rolling out the new allowance as soon as possible. However, as explained earlier, the Administration would need to resolve various technicalities. For example, SWD would need to enhance its computer system and recruit adequate staff to tie in with the launch of the new allowance. SLW added that though no ceiling was imposed on the recurrent expenditure for the CSSA and OAA schemes, the Administration had to work out the implementation details carefully in accordance with the established procedures. The current plan was to submit the implementation details and funding proposal to the relevant Panel and FC as soon as possible after the next LegCo term commenced in October 2012.

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19. On the retrospectivity of the payment disbursement, SLW said that the Administration did not rule out this possibility. However, the means-test mechanism was premised on a simple self-declaration of income and assets by the applicants. If the proposed retrospective payment entailed a need to verify past records of income and assets of the applicants, it would be more complicated. DSW said that while the Administration would critically examine the complexity and enforceability of the retrospective arrangement, it would endeavour to take every step to shorten the lead time for early implementation.

20. Dr Samson TAM expressed concern about the financial impact of the new scheme on the Government in view of the increasing ageing population. He enquired about the estimated number of recipients for the allowance and whether one-off relief measures would be announced in the forthcoming Budget to alleviate the hardship of elders.

21. SLW said that currently there were some 523 000 elders receiving OAA; of these some 77 000 were elders aged 65 to 69 who had gone through the means test for Normal OAA while the rest were elders aged 70 or above who received the non-means-tested Higher OAA. SLW envisaged that some hundreds of thousands of elders would apply for the new allowance, having regard to the income and assets assessment by way of a simple declaration themselves. SLW further said that the provision of one-off relief measures would be considered and announced by the Government, if any, in due course.

22. On the means-test mechanism under the new scheme, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan and the Chairman asked whether elders aged from 65 to 69 and elders aged 70 or above were subject to the same thresholds for income and assets assessment. They considered that the current thresholds for the Normal OAA should be adopted under the new scheme in order to expedite its implementation. Mr TAM Yiu-chung was of the view that similar to the arrangement for Higher OAA, elders recipients aged 70 or above should be non-means-tested under the new scheme, and that the income and assets thresholds for the new scheme should be laxer than those of Normal OAA.

23. SLW said that all prospective applicants aged 65 or above for the new allowance would be subject to the same income and assets thresholds, which would be less stringent than those under the CSSA Scheme.

24. The Chairman said that the payment level of the new allowance was arbitrary. He urged the Administration to study the retirement needs of the elderly population, with a view to introducing a retirement protection

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system. Pointing out that Higher OAA recipients were non-means-tested, the Administration should apply the same eligibility criteria for elders aged 70 or above under the new scheme. He did not see the need to examine issues relating to retrospective arrangements of the new allowance as the eligibility of Normal OAA recipients had been means-tested and they would be held liable for making false declaration on their income and assets possession. The Chairman appealed to the Administration to roll out the new scheme by December 2012 the latest.

25. SLW stressed that the new allowance aimed to build on the existing OAA scheme and cater for the needy elders. He assured members that the Administration was fully aware of the public expectation of the new allowance, and would take every step to work out the implementation details to ensure that needy elders would have better financial support as soon as practicable.

IV. Services to support families at-risk

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2509/11-12(03) to (04)]

26. At the invitation of the Chairman, DSW briefed members on the various measures adopted under the strategy of early identification and intervention, timely support, cross-sectoral collaboration and specialised services to facilitate positive functioning of families and support those at-risk, as detailed in the Administration's paper. He said that in 2012-2013, the recurrent resources allocated for family and child welfare services was \$2,100 million, representing an increase of 30% as compared to \$1,600 million in 2008-2009.

27. Mr TAM Yiu-chung enquired about the background of and underlying reasons attributed to at-risk families. In his view, new arrival families in face of family problems, such as housing problems, were families at risk. The Administration should step up preventive measures and public education to promote family harmony.

28. DSW agreed that new arrival families from the Mainland might be more vulnerable and face multi-faceted problems, including family problems. The Administration had provided various measures to support families at risk. Specifically, the territory-wide Integrated Family Service Centres ("IFSCs") provided needy individuals and families (including new arrival families) with a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial services including family life education, groups / programmes in assisting their adjustment to Hong Kong as well as services for dealing with various problems such as child care and mental health. Child care services under the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project had since October 2011

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been regularised and extended to all 18 districts to provide needy families with flexible and enhanced child care services during late evenings, weekends and public holidays. Services for single-parent families had also been enhanced through collaboration with schools and voluntary organisations in the district. In regard to preventive measures, SWD would continue to organise territory-wide and district-based publicity and public education programmes to arouse public awareness on the importance of family solidarity and encourage those in need to seek early assistance.

29. Mr IP Wai-ming asked about the support services in place for the single-parent families, especially on counselling services and early intervention measures to prevent family tragedies.

30. DSW replied that through the network of IFSCs, various services, including counselling services and housing assistance had been provided to single-parent families in need. Support groups were formed in the district to provide these families with mutual support from peers. As at end-March 2012, 5 000 cases handled by IFSCs were relating to single-parent families, and more services to single-parent families would be provided in high-risk districts. As regards early intervention, DSW said that under the Comprehensive Child Development Service ("CCDS"), the Labour and Welfare Bureau, Education Bureau, SWD, Department of Health ("DH") and Hospital Authority ("HA") had collaborated to identify and meet, at an early stage, various health and social needs of children (aged 0 to five) and their families so as to foster healthy development of children. By the end of 2011, CCDS had covered around half of the target clientele. The service would be fully extended to all 18 districts in phases within 2012-2013. Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family & Child Welfare) supplemented that through group activities and case work of IFSCs, social workers would follow up on potential at-risk families and provide assistance as appropriate. According to a review conducted by the University of Hong Kong, it was considered more appropriate for these families to receive support services in the vicinity of their own communities.

31. The Chairman expressed concern about the effectiveness of early identification of at-risk families. In his view, social workers should be stationed at pre-primary institutions as well as Maternal and Child Health Centres ("MCHCs") for the purpose of CCDS to provide early intervention and timely support for at-risk families.

32. DSW responded that currently IFSCs had been providing services to individual and families according to their assessed needs in a well-defined geographical service boundary throughout 11 SWD administrative districts. IFSCs would follow up with needy families upon receiving referrals from

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pre-primary institutions. Under CCDS, social workers would provide proactive out-reach service and visit persons in need at MCHCs to assist at-risk pregnant women, mothers with postnatal depression, and families with psychosocial needs and children with developmental and behavioural problems. It also made use of other service units, such as IFSCs and pre-primary institutions to identify needy children and families, and who would be referred to the appropriate health and/or social services for follow-up. With a view to facilitating early identification and referral of cases, the Administration would maintain close collaboration and enhance the interface among government departments, welfare service units, schools, etc.

33. Pointing out that the participation of the Batterer Intervention Programme ("BIP") for batterers was voluntary, the Chairman enquired whether the Administration would introduce court-ordered BIP to require batterers to join the programme. Raising similar concerns, Ms LI Fung-ying enquired about the effectiveness of BIP and whether the Administration would introduce a mandatory programme in this respect.

34. DSW advised that BIP, which was a psycho-educational programme run by the Family and Child Protective Services Units of SWD, was proven effective to change batterers' abusive attitudes and behaviours, and stop using violence. In 2010-2011, SWD had started providing BIP for women on a pilot basis. More publicity would be launched to encourage abusers to participate in the programme. Separately, the Anti-violence Programme for batterers had also been introduced for batterers who were required by the courts under the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance (Cap. 189) to participate in the psycho-educational programme to change their abusive attitudes and behaviours.

V. Provision of sign language service

[FS29/11-12 and LC Paper No. CB(2)2509/11-12(05)]

35. Commissioner for Rehabilitation ("C for R") advised that according to the statistics released by the Census and Statistics Department in 2008, there were some 90 000 persons with hearing impairment in Hong Kong. While majority of them were at mild and medium impairment levels, around 9% were deaf persons and some of them relied largely on sign language for communication. C for R said that to realise the spirit of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Administration had been committed to promoting barrier-free communication, including the use of sign language, and details of which were set out in the Administration's paper. C for R added that a Working Group on Promoting Sign Language ("the Working Group") was formed

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under the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee in 2010 to advise the Government on ways to promote sign language.

36. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung asked whether the Administration had set any service pledges for the provision of sign language interpretation services to patients with hearing difficulties at public clinics and hospitals. In his view, the Administration and non-governmental organisations should provide incentives to encourage their staff to learn sign language to enhance communication and upgrade the visual aids gadgets to facilitate persons with hearing impairments to use public facilities.

37. C for R replied that while some patients with hearing impairment might prefer to use their own interpreters, the Administration would provide sign language interpretation services for medical consultations upon request. In addition, the Working Group had been collaborating with HA to examine the feasibility of providing out-patient video relay service for sign language interpretation in public hospitals. C for R further said that the Working Group held a public consultation session on the promotion of sign language in September 2010, and over 100 representatives from local deaf associations had participated and gave views on the future development of barrier-free communication services. The Working Group held another sharing session on 26 June 2012 to brief persons with hearing impairment and related organisations on the progress of the programme plan and to exchange views on the way forward in the promotion of sign language.

38. Referring to the sign language training courses jointly organised by the Civil Service Training and Development Institute and the rehabilitation sector, Mr IP Wai-ming sought more information on the participating departments. In his view, the Administration should spearhead the promotion of use of sign language by the provision of sign language interpretation services at its publicity activities and encourage television operators to provide sign language for television programmes.

[To allow sufficient time for discussion, the Chairman suggested and members agreed to extend the meeting for 10 minutes.]

39. C for R responded that some 300 public officers, including frontline staff from HA, DH, SWD, the Police, Correctional Services Department, Immigration Department and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department etc., had participated in the sign language training courses since July 2011. C for R advised that to promote sign language and other forms of barrier-free communication for persons with hearing impairment, the Administration had taken forward various measures, such as allocating funds to the sector to develop a barrier-free sign language communication

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and self-learning platform, requiring television operators to provide Chinese and English subtitles for television programmes upon their licence renewal, and examining the way forward of sign language tutor training and accreditation of sign language interpreters, etc..

40. The Chairman said that the subject of promotion of sign language was added to the agenda having regard to the referral from the Public Complaints Office of the LegCo Secretariat concerning a lack of sign language interpretation service in RCHEs as most elderly residents were having different levels of hearing impairment. In the circumstances, the Chairman appealed to the Administration to take measures to enhance the provision of sign language services in day care centres for the elderly and RCHEs. C for R noted the Chairman's concern and said that the Administration would step up publicity to promote the use of sign language in the community.

VI. Any other business

41. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10:38 am.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
21 September 2012