

**Minutes of the  
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting**

**3 September 2021 (Friday) at 3:00 p.m.  
Training cum Lecture Room, 5/F, West Wing, Central Government  
Offices**

**Present**

Mr Lester Garson HUANG (Chairman)  
Dr BAI Xue  
Ms Sylvia CHAN May-kuen  
Dr Gary CHENG Faat-ting  
Mr CHUGH, Manohar Thakurdas  
Mr Andy HO Wing-cheong  
Mr Anthony KWAN Wai-ming  
Mr Frederick LAI Wing-hoi  
Mr Armstrong LEE Hon-Cheung  
Ms Anthea LO Wing-sze  
Dr Gary NG Ka-wing  
Dr PAN Pey-chyou  
Ms Cindy PUN Siu-fung  
Dr Ricky SZETO Wing-fu  
Dr Janice TSANG Wing-hang  
Prof Frances WONG Kam-yuet  
Mr Anthony WONG Kin-wai  
Ms Amarantha YIP Yun-wan

**In Attendance**

**Labour and Welfare Bureau**

Ms Alice LAU	Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Mr David LEUNG	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1
Ms Polly KWOK (For discussion item 2 only)	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2

Ms Manda CHAN  
(For discussion item 2 only) Commissioner for Rehabilitation

Mr Andrew TSANG Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour  
and Welfare (Welfare) 1

Mr Michael LI Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare  
(Welfare) 1C  
(Secretary to SWAC)

Mr Adams WONG Executive Officer (Welfare) 1A

Ms Jessica LI Executive Officer (Welfare) 1B

Social Welfare Department

Mr KOK Che-leung Director of Social Welfare (Acting) /  
Deputy Director of Social Welfare  
(Services)

**Absent with apologies**

Miss CHEUNG Sze-wing  
Dr LAM James Joseph  
Prof Petrus NG Yat-nam  
Ms Eva WONG Ching-hung

**Discussion Item 1: Proposed Mandatory Reporting Requirement  
for Suspected Child Abuse Cases**

Members were briefed on the pros and cons of introducing a mandatory reporting mechanism for suspected child abuse cases with reference to overseas experience, and the key parameters that should be considered if such a mechanism were to be introduced in Hong Kong. Members raised the following comments –

- (a) The majority of Members supported the setting up of a mandatory reporting mechanism. Individual Members made the following further suggestions –
  - (i) Apart from the designated professionals proposed, the

mandatory reporting requirement could include other categories of persons who had frequent contact with children, including clinical psychologists, educational psychologists, counselors, supervisors of residential care homes for children with disabilities, police officers and domestic helpers, or even family members / neighbours.

- (ii) The mandatory reporting requirement should cover children aged 16 or below.
  - (iii) The level of penalty for non-compliance should be proportionate to the age of children suspected to have been abused. There was also a suggestion to set the level of penalty at a lower level when the mandatory reporting requirement was first implemented.
  - (iv) The Government should strengthen training on the identification and reporting of suspected cases for people who would be subject to the statutory reporting requirement.
  - (v) To complement the mandatory reporting mechanism, the Government should explore administrative measures for enhancing the protection of children.
- (b) Some Members considered that the Government should not rush to mandate reporting of suspected child abuse cases by legislation. Views of individual Members included –
- (i) Before implementation, the Government should allow sufficient time for stakeholders to get prepared for the mandatory reporting requirement, with clear guidelines made available for them.
  - (ii) Priority should be accorded to public education, as well as raising awareness on children protection among neighbours and in the community.
  - (iii) The Government should regularise the Pilot Scheme on Social Work Services for Pre-primary Institutions.
- (c) Irrespective of their stance on the proposed mandatory reporting mechanism, Members suggested that the Government should undertake the following preparatory work –

- (i) The proposed threshold of reporting abuses which caused “imminent risk of serious harm” to children should be clearly defined with clear guidelines.
- (ii) In anticipation of a significant increase in the number of reported cases, the Government should formulate a detailed plan to address key concerns including resource and manpower requirements of both the Government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) concerned, guidelines on reporting procedures, and the necessary supporting measures.
- (iii) The Government should address potential conflict between the mandatory reporting obligations and some professions’ duty of confidentiality to clients. The Government should also provide due safeguards for the informants.
- (iv) The Government should not focus only on bringing the abusers to justice, but should also protect the well-being of suspected child abuse victims.
- (v) The Government should strengthen support for child abuse victims, such as making available case follow-up work. Residential support service should also be enhanced to cater for an expected increase in caseload if the mandatory requirement was to be implemented.

2. The Government responded that the views expressed by Members on the proposed mandatory reporting mechanism would be considered by the cross-bureaux working group. If the legislative route was to be pursued, stakeholders would be consulted on implementation details of the proposed mechanism.

3. The Chairman concurred that it was important to promulgate clear guidelines and provide training to the designated professionals before implementing the proposed mandatory reporting requirement for suspected child abuse cases. He invited the Government to consider Members’ views in mapping out the way forward.

**Discussion Item 2: 2022-23 Welfare Services Suggestions and Priorities**

4. Members were invited to give comments on the paper. Members raised the following comments –

- (a) The proposed expenditure reduction programme, as announced in the 2021-22 Budget, would gravely affect the operation of NGOs in the welfare sector. It would in turn affect the well-being of service users, particularly the grassroots and underprivileged. The Government should duly consider the implications before applying the said reduction to the welfare sector.
- (b) The recent wave of emigration had intensified the manpower shortage in the welfare sector. The Government should take this into account when making manpower planning for the sector. The Government should also keep a close watch on the change in demand for elderly services, and should consider promoting active ageing. In addition, the Government should address the general needs of carers.
- (c) To address the manpower shortage in the welfare sector, the Government might consider importing labour or reviewing the entry requirements of certain job types. There were also suggestions to engage relevant talents from the Greater Bay Area, or to engage personnel with welfare-related training but without professional qualification. In addition, the Government might consider exploring mutual recognition of qualification of personnel between the Hospital Authority and subvented NGOs.
- (d) To increase the supply of land for provision of welfare facilities, the Government might consider capitalising on the periphery of country parks. A Member also pointed out that some Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness did not have sufficient space for their operation and activities.
- (e) The Government should promote good practice in the welfare sector on the use of technology, and should take into account local factors in introducing new technology in the welfare sector. There was also a suggestion for the Government to train older adults to use technology.
- (f) In light of the ever-increasing public expenditure on welfare, the Government might encourage NGOs to pool their reserve under the Lump Sum Grant Subvention System (LSGSS), engage professional investment managers and achieve higher investment

returns. As an incentive, the Government could consider allowing NGOs to keep reserves exceeding the current cap of 25% of their annual operating expenditure.

- (g) The review on enhancement of LSGSS recommended the drawing up of criteria for delineating Funding and Service Agreements (FSA)-related activities and introduced new rules for the use of lump sum grant for FSA-related activities exceeding a certain percentage. Such recommendations would impose additional administrative work on NGOs, and might hinder NGOs' provision of welfare services to those in need.
- (h) The Government might consider setting up regular project teams to take care of the welfare needs of households living in subdivided units. There was also a suggestion to enhance family life education and neighbourhood support at the community level.
- (i) The Government might consider turning aided child care services into subvented services, which would lower the cost of such services to working parents, thereby unleashing the labour force.
- (j) The Government might consider providing incentives for the business sector to hire persons with disabilities.

5. The Government gave the following response –

- (a) The expenditure reduction programme was applicable to all policy bureaux and departments. The purpose was to instil financial discipline and enhance fiscal sustainability. The Government would continue to engage the welfare sector in implementing the said programme in a pragmatic manner.
- (b) The Government was keenly aware of the high demand for various types of manpower in the welfare sector, and had implemented a number of measures to increase the manpower supply.
- (c) The Government had all along been adopting a multi-pronged approach to identify suitable sites or premises for provision of welfare facilities. In particular, since 2018, the Government had been formulating planning ratios for various types of welfare facilities on a population basis for incorporation into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines.

6. The Chairman observed that the regularised short-term food assistance service was timely in addressing the keen demand amidst economic downturn brought by COVID-19. He also suggested promoting financial education among older adults, and pointed out the importance of resilience in facing adversity.

SWAC Secretariat  
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