

**Minutes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 4 May 2005**

Present

Mr Wilfred Wong Ying-wai	(Chairman)
Mrs Cheung Ang Siew-mei	
Dr Stephen Chow Chun-kay	
Dr Miranda Chung Chan Lai-foon	
Ms Christine Fang Meng-sang	
Mr Quentin Fong King-sang	
Dr Benjamin Lai Sau-shun	
Dr Leung Cho-bun	
Mr Vincent Lo Wing-sang	
Prof Diana Mak Ping-see	
Mr Tung Chi-fat	
Mr Aaron Wan Chi-keung	
Ms Marina Wong Yu-pok	
Mr Silva Yeung Tak-wah	
Ms Lisa Yip Sau-wah	
Miss Jessie Yu Sau-chu	
Ms Wendy Cheung	(Secretary)

In Attendance

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB)

Ms Linda Lai	Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Family and Women)
Ms Salina Yan	Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Elderly Services)
Mr Freely Cheng	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Family)
Mrs Brenda Fung	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Elderly Services) 2

Mr Gavin Kwai	Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Family) 1
Miss Annie Kong	Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Family) 2

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Mr Paul Tang	Director of Social Welfare
Mr Fung Pak-yan	Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child Welfare)
Miss Ann Hon	Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Subventions)
Mr Fu Tsun-hung	Chief Social Work Officer (Subventions)

Department of Health (DH)

Dr Shirley Leung	Principal Medical & Health Officer (Family Health Services)
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Absent with Apologies

Mr Herman Hui Chung-shing
Mr Keith Lam Hon-keung

(1) Head Start Programme on Children Development (SWAC Paper No. 4/05)

Members noted that the Administration announced in the 2005 Policy Address that it would launch in phase a pilot “Head Start Programme on Child Development” (HSP) for children aged 0-5 years in four selected communities, namely, Sham Shui Po, Tin Shui Wai, Tuen Mun and Tseung Kwan O. The paper briefed Members on the progress on the implementation of HSP.

2. Members made the following comments :
- (a) while the HSP mainly focused on the identification of health issues by nurses in Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs), the social needs of children and their families should also be looked after;
 - (b) on many occasions families tragedies did not arise from the mother and child, but the father or other isolated family members. Therefore, early identification and intervention of these isolated family members should also be done;
 - (c) although the HSP had the aim of inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaboration among Government departments, in practice it might not be easy for the front line medical staff and teachers to identify families with social and psychological problems. More training and supervision should be provided for front line staff to ensure standard of assessment;
 - (d) the term “Head Start Programme” originated from a project conducted by the US government since 1965 to help families in poverty. Under the US programme, many targeted researches had been conducted and comprehensive services, covering cognitive, learning, physical and emotional aspects were given to children under five. Employment assistance and retraining were also provided to their families. In light of such background, the proposed programme with the same name might be misleading given its service components were not solely focused on poverty alleviation as the US project;
 - (e) the HSP seemed to have no major difference from existing services. Apart from early identification of the needs of families, it was also important that timely intervention and assistance should be provided to the needy. Additional resources should also be provided for the successful implementation of HSP; and
 - (f) the HSP should not just focus on family services but also cover youth and child services. The Bureau and departments might also need to consider components on tackling children poverty so as to align with

the overall plan of Commission on Poverty in addressing the issue of inter-generation poverty.

3. The Government made the following responses :

- (a) as regards medical staff's awareness and capacity in needs identification, SWD and DH would collaborate to develop a semi-structured interview guide for MCHC staff to facilitate the early identification of families with social service needs. Nurses in MCHCs would be mainly responsible for conducting the initial screening. Identified families would then be followed up by social workers of Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) or medical specialists for further assessment and intervention as appropriate;
- (b) ongoing training and workshops had been provided to medical staff to enhance their awareness and ability in identifying families' needs. Extra nurses and medical doctors should also be deployed in launching the HSP. Service demand on HSP would be closely monitored to see if additional resources were required.
- (c) social support networks in the community and mutual support groups would also be organized for parents/families as appropriate. The more serious cases involving psychiatric problems and child abuse might be referred for professional assessment and management by relevant specialists;
- (d) the situations of fathers and other family members would also be covered in the interview guide. In following up cases, social workers would look at the circumstances of the family holistically rather than just the mother;
- (e) the term "Head Start" was adopted for the programme because the importance of comprehensive and timely service provision to children at early years to their future development was duly recognized in light of overseas experience. However, the programme had been modified to meet the actual situations in Hong Kong. The objective of the programme was to augment the existing universal services in MCHCs through better alignment of the

delivery of health, education and social services to ensure early identification of the varied needs of children and their families so that appropriate services could be made available to them in a timely manner. To avoid confusion, the programme might be renamed;

- (f) relevant departments would continue to refine the contents and operation of the HSP in light of feedback and experience gathered from the first pilot run in Sham Shui Po. Evaluation would be conducted to assess the effective functioning of the multi-disciplinary HSP service interface model. The statistics and demand for various services would be closely monitored to see if additional resources were required for respective services; and
- (g) although IFSCs were primarily involved, there would be integration and collaboration with other welfare sectors including the youth and child services sectors as appropriate.

4. The meeting generally agreed with the objective and service contents of the HSP. It was appreciated that medical staff was willing to take on additional responsibilities in identifying the needs of families. To avoid confusion with other overseas programme bearing the same name, the Government might need to consider renaming the HSP. More definite evaluation on the effectiveness and success of the pilot scheme would also be required to review the effectiveness of the programme and whether it should be extended to other communities. The HSP might also need to cover additional service components on poverty alleviation, in light of any recommendation that might be proposed by the Commission on Poverty in future.

(2) Support after the Tide-over Grant Period to Non-Governmental Organizations currently receiving Tide-over Grant (SWAC Paper No. 5/05)

5. The paper gave an outline of Social Welfare Department's proposal to provide a Special One-off Grant (SOG) to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) after the Tide-over Grant (TOG) termination in 2006-07. The SOG would be time-limited and meant to give greater

flexibility and more time for the NGOs in making whatever necessary adjustments to meet their financial and/or staff commitment. Two options were available to NGOs for application on a voluntary basis.

6. The following comments were made:
 - (a) the 25% cap on the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) Reserve should be raised so that NGOs could make use of the Reserve to overcome the operating deficits in the coming transitional years;
 - (b) the proposed schedule to invite applications for the SOG in around July 2005 might be a bit too rush given that many NGOs were still not acquainted with the proposal. There should be more time for consultation with the welfare sector;
 - (c) the two proposed options seemed to label NGOs as successful and unsuccessful in their operation under LSG, which was not desirable. Many NGOs had already tried their very best to prepare for the cessation of TOG as scheduled, but because of Efficiency Savings (ES) and Enhanced Productivity Programme (EPP) measures that were introduced in the course of implementation, some NGOs might have difficulties in coping with the financial pressure after the TOG period. The Government might need to clarify that the options were not meant to distinguish bad and good performers. More detailed information about the mechanism in implementing the two options should also be provided to facilitate NGOs in making the right choice;
 - (d) some considered that those NGOs which were able to operate within LSG provision after the cessation of TOG as scheduled should be given some kind of recognition. On the other hand, there were views that the provision of Option B under SOG was already an award to those NGOs. They should not be further accorded priorities in bidding/allocating new services;
 - (e) the Government appeared to be a bit too generous in extending financial support for another two years in the form of SOG after the TOG termination in 2006-07 because NGOs had the responsibility to

deal with the commitment to their Snapshot Staff and there were already five years of financial support to NGOs through TOG as a transitional arrangement. There were worries that the problems of some NGOs might persist even after the SOG and some NGOs might have a false hope that further financial assistance would be available;

- (f) SWD should set targets to be achieved by NGOs and conduct mid-term review for them to be able to continue receiving the SOG after the TOG cessation. SWD also needed to consider other facilitating measures to help NGOs achieve financial viability more effectively such as sharing of good practice; and
- (g) NGOs should not regret for having joined the LSG as their participation was made on a voluntary basis. They also had the responsibility to deal with the commitment to their Snapshot Staff and make resource planning in advance. Furthermore, they had already received financial support for 5 years to cope with the transitional years. If NGOs did not critically review the salary structure of the Snapshot Staff, it would be impossible for them to sustain financial viability.

7. The Government made the following responses :

- (a) the management of NGOs had the ultimate responsibility to cope with the financial requirements under LSG. In addressing the concerns of the welfare sector that LSG might not provide sufficient funds to meet their contractual commitment to the Snapshot Staff, SWD had introduced the 5-year TOG scheme to help them meet their commitment during the transitional period. However, with the implementation of EPP and ES, and the socio-economic changes in recent years, some NGOs had expressed difficulties in coping with the financial pressures especially after the TOG period and required more time to make the necessary adjustments;
- (b) in the light of the general understanding that there would be no extension of the TOG and any further financial support from Government could only be time-limited and not long-term, the SWD proposed the SOG to NGOs after the termination of the TOG. The

SOG was meant to give greater flexibility and more time for the NGO management in making necessary adjustments to meet their financial and staff commitments; and

- (c) as regards the implementation schedule, many NGOs had expressed the wish for a definite proposal as early as possible for their financial planning. Therefore, the SOG would be launched as soon as practicable, but consultation with the welfare sector would be made as much as possible which had begun even before the SOG proposal was put forward.

8. The meeting appreciated that some NGOs might have difficulties in meeting the financial and staff commitments during the transitional period towards LSG because of EPP and ES in the course of implementation. However, it was considered that every agency should face the situation and should not use this as an excuse for not making efforts on re-engineering and staff salary review. The Government should also make it clear to NGOs that the TOG would not be extended and the SOG would be final. Furthermore, there was a consensus among Members that the Government should give due recognition and encouragement to those NGOs which were able to meet the contractual commitments without TOG but this should not be too generous. Instead of giving more financial assistance, the Government might consider raising the 25% cap on LSG Reserve which was the key solution to the operating deficits of NGOs in the transitional years and their long-term financial viability.

9. On the duration of SOG, it would be better determined by the genuine needs of individual agencies rather than a fixed period across the board. Furthermore, the financial assistance should not be automatically granted to agencies but subject to mid-term evaluation of the agencies' performance in meeting the agreed targets.

10. As regards the possible labeling effects on NGOs as good or bad agencies in choosing between the two options, the meeting considered that SWD should clarify the rationale behind the two options and review whether priorities should be accorded to those NGOs which had no problem in facing the TOG cessation in bidding new services.

(3) Review of Arrangements for Single Parents under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme

11. Members noted that the Working Group (WG) of the CSSA had discussed the review on CSSA single parents. In summary, the WG generally agreed that requiring CSSA single parents with the youngest child aged above 6 (instead of until reaching 15) to seek at least part-time employment was the right direction, and the single parent supplement of \$225 per month would be given to parents earning at least \$1,430 a month, and with at least one child aged below 15 as a work incentive. The measures were meant to encourage single parents to become more self-reliant and go back to work early. A pilot scheme of the proposed arrangements would be tried out in selected districts first, before full implementation later on.

12. Members made the following comments :

- (a) it was important for the Government to consider ways to enforce the mandatory work requirement, taking into account the job opportunities situation for single parents and support measures to facilitate them going to work;
- (b) the attitude of single parents in job seeking was far more important than whether they could actually secure a job. Discipline and monitoring would be necessary for those single parents who were not positive in rejoining the workforce;
- (c) it was suggested that “single” parents should be renamed as “lone” parents according to international experience;
- (d) regarding the age requirement of the youngest child for single parent to take up part time work, some agreed that the age limit of the youngest child should be lowered from 15 to 6 in order to encourage single parents to rejoin the work force early. However, there were views that it would be better to have a transitional period instead of lowering the age in one go;

- (e) the granting of the single parent supplement should make reference to the genuine needs of individual single parents rather than by the age of their children and be given on a reimbursement basis;
- (f) the Government might encourage the business sector to take up social responsibilities in creating more jobs for the single parents in the communities; and
- (g) with reference to overseas practice, the Government might consider requiring employers to meet certain quota for single parent employment.

13. The Government made the following responses :

- (a) the proposal to conduct a pilot scheme in selected districts was aimed at trying out the proposed arrangements and building up more experience to see if the proposed arrangements were suitable before full-scale implementation. Nevertheless, the specific details of implementation were open to further discussion; and
- (b) as regards the proposal to turn the single parent supplement into a work incentive, there was concern from the Ombudsman on the rationale for the supplement, as CSSA standard payments for single parents were already higher than those for other able-bodied recipients. Turning it into a work incentive may encourage more parents to rejoin the workforce.

14. The meeting noted the Government's efforts in encouraging single parents to go back to employment. It also noted single parents would not be penalized from receiving CSSA payments if they really could not get a job after much efforts. It was considered that the mandatory work requirement of 8 hours per week was in fact a very minimum requirement that could be easily fulfilled.

15. Concerning the approach in implementing the revised arrangements for single parents, the meeting suggested the alternative of a phased

implementation starting with parents of older age children might be more acceptable. This would provide enough time for the single parents to make necessary preparations for change.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
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