

**Minutes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 7 July 2005**

Present

Mr Wilfred Wong Ying-wai (Chairman)
Dr Stephen Chow Chun-kay
Dr Miranda Chung Chan Lai-foon
Ms Christine Fang Meng-sang
Mr Herman Hui Chung-shing
Dr Benjamin Lai Sau-shun
Mr Keith Lam Hon-keung
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
Miss Jessie Yu Sau-chu
Miss Annie Kong (Acting 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 & Social Security)
Mr Freely Cheng Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare &
Food (Family)
Ms Dora Fu Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare &
Food (Women)
Mr Jerry Cheung Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food
(Women) 3

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

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| 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) |
| Miss Ada Leung | Principal Executive Officer (Human Resources Management) |
| Mr Fu Tsun-hung | Chief Social Work Officer (Subventions) |
| Mr Davis Kwan | Statistician (Social Work) 1 |
| Ms Michelle Lam | Senior Social Work Officer (Domestic Violence) |

Consultancy Team of the Study on Child Abuse and Spouse Battering from the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, HKU –

Dr Edward Chan Ko-ling

Ms Elsa Chiu

Ms Hesta Ho

Member of the Joint Committee on Social Work Manpower Planning

Dr Law Chi-kwong

Absent with Apologies

Mrs Cheung Ang Siew-mei

Mr Quentin Fong

Ms Lisa Yip

**Item 1 : Study on Child Abuse and Spouse Battering
(SWAC Paper No. 6/05)**

In April 2003, the Social Welfare Department commissioned the Department of Social Work and Social Administration of the University of Hong Kong (the Consultant) to conduct a Study on Child Abuse and Spouse

Battering. Part One of the Study aimed to estimate the prevalence rate of child abuse and spouse battering in Hong Kong, to analyze the demographic, social, psychological and family profile of perpetrators and victims, as well as to identify elements contributing to effective prevention and intervention, including studying the feasibility and implications of adopting mandatory treatment of perpetrators in Hong Kong and examining the existing legislative measures. The paper introduced the findings of Part One of the Study and the preliminary Administration's responses to the Consultant's recommendations.

2. Members made the following comments :

- (a) involvement of other relevant government bureaux/departments was required in tackling the problem of child abuse and spouse battering in view of the complexity of the issue which cut across the areas of legislation, law enforcement, and education etc. Comments from legal practitioners such as the Hong Kong Bar Association and the Law Society of Hong Kong should also be sought;
- (b) to follow up on the Consultant's recommendations, SWD should summarize the 21 recommendations into several major categories and take the lead in further consulting and collaborating with relevant bureaux/departments;
- (c) the Government should develop concrete implementation plan to take forward those improvement measures as recommended in the Study. By making reference to the Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai, close monitoring over the implementation of improvement measures was crucial;
- (d) at present, plenty of useful data concerning child abuse and spouse battering were held by different departments, e.g. Hospital Authority, Police, EMB, etc. More concerted efforts and coordination should be made by the Government to make best use of the data so as to gain an overall understanding on the issue;
- (e) preventive measures were far more important than remedial actions in tackling the domestic violence problem. Sufficient training to frontline workers should be provided for effective implementation of

mandatory counseling. Education and publicity targeted on individual and community levels should also be strengthened to resolve the problem in the long run; and

- (f) the Domestic Violence Ordinance should be reformed to ensure fair treatment to offenders and victims. Both parties, not just the offenders, should bear the responsibilities.

3. The Government made the following responses :

- (a) the Administration was highly concerned with the child abuse and spouse battering problem as reflected in the Policy Address 2005. Various follow-up actions had been taken / would be taken to tackle the problem; and
- (b) a multi-disciplinary approach was adopted by the Government in refining the policies and measures to tackle the problem, with HWFB and SWD taking the lead.

4. The Meeting noted the findings of Part One of the Study on the seriousness of child abuse and spouse battering in Hong Kong. It considered that it was of foremost importance for the Government to have a concerted plan in taking forward the various recommendations on preventive and remedial measures. While appreciating that it would be difficult for SWD to implement all the measures on its own (as they might involve other bureaux/departments), SWD should start with those matters that were within the welfare portfolio, and then collaborate with relevant parties on the long-term and complicated issues. When more definite action plans were ready, the Government should report on the follow-up actions taken/to be taken to the SWAC for further discussion.

**Item 2 : Social Work Manpower Requirements System
(SWAC Paper No. 7/05)**

5. The paper briefed Members of a proposed new system titled “Social Work Manpower Requirements System” (SWMRS) which would replace the “Social Work Manpower Planning System” (SWMPS) from 2005 onwards.

6. Members made the following comments :

- (a) as more organizations other than the welfare NGOs e.g. district groups, private companies, etc. also employed social workers, the new system might need to extend its coverage of organizations in data collection;
- (b) the employment situations of social work graduates in welfare-related sector and other non-conventional sector should have impacts on the future directions of the University Grant Committee (UGC) in providing social work training places. Furthermore, with the increasing number of self-financed social work training programmes offered by tertiary institutions, including associate degree programmes, the UGC might need to critically review the system of university education;

7. The Government made the following responses :

- (a) as the number of non-conventional organizations which employed social workers was relatively small, it would not be practical to cover them in the data collection. It was more advisable to confine the coverage of organizations to NGOs only at this stage, other than major non-conventional settings employing social work personnel, such as private elderly homes and primary schools; and
- (b) on employment situations, based on previous statistics, every year, around 10% – 20% of social work graduates were not employed in the welfare sector. They might find job opportunities in other sectors. As regards the overall review of the university education system, it was beyond the scope of the proposed SWMRS which served to improve the existing social work manpower data collection and projection system.

8. The Meeting noted that with the changes in market situations in recent years, the original purpose for the manpower projections of social workers had faded out and the worthiness of keeping the existing manpower planning system became doubtful. Therefore, the system had to be revised to streamline the unnecessary data and cumbersome data collection

procedures, whilst keeping track of the major market trends for the social work field. Furthermore, the rising number of self-financed social work training programmes offered by tertiary institutions reflected the increasing popularity of the discipline among students who regarded it as a general education to develop one's critical thinking and concern for the society's well-being.

Item 3 : Revised Proposals for Single Parents Recipients under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme (SWAC Paper 10/05)

9. The paper briefed Members on the revised package of proposals for CSSA single parents in light of the comments received during the past two months. In gist, under the revised proposals, single parents on CSSA with the youngest child aged 12 to 14 (instead of 6 to 14 as originally proposed) were required to seek part-time employment. The revised package would also put in abeyance the proposal to pay the single parent supplement only to single parent recipients earning at least \$1,430 a month and with at least one child aged below 15, pending the review on the implementation of the new arrangements.

10. Members made the following comments :

- (a) those single parents exempted from mandatory work requirement or community work were supposed to be looked after by social workers in Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs). In this connection, the mode of service provision under the IFSCs should be reviewed;
- (b) it was necessary to give more leeway for the single parents in finding part-time employment during the initial stage of implementation of the revised package. In addition, other than penalizing single parents who did not seek part-time employment, it was more important for the Government to consider supportive measures in encouraging them to achieve self-reliance through employment counselling and assistance;
- (c) on SWD's proposal to adapt the existing Active Employment Assistance (AEA) programme to the mandatory employment assistance programme for single parents on CSSA, some had doubt

on the adequacy of the existing manpower in coping with the additional work, particularly in respect of social side support and professional judgments in making referrals; and

- (d) the Government should strengthen the publicity in promoting the business sector to take up their social responsibilities in creating more jobs for the single parents which could accommodate their specific needs.

11. The Government made the following responses :

- (a) not all single parents on CSSA would be handled by IFSCs. Simple cases would be followed by the respective field units. And for cases involving domestic violence, they would be taken up by IFSCs and Family and Child Protective Services Units. Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres, school social workers, District Elderly Community Centres/Neighbourhood Elderly Centres would also be involved;
- (b) to ensure successful implementation of the revised package, some mandatory requirements would be necessary in parallel with the supportive measures. In line with the established practice for other able-bodied recipients, as long as single parents proved to be positive in re-joining the workforce, such as attending job interviews, they would not be sanctioned; and
- (c) existing manpower under the AEA would be strengthened to implement the new scheme for single parents on CSSA and would continue to make referrals where appropriate. The IFSCs would also continue to provide professional service to those families in need.

12. The Meeting agreed on the need of a review of the existing arrangements for single parents on CSSA and the latest proposal was considered to be more acceptable to the stakeholders. While some single parents might need intensive assistance in seeking an employment, others were more self-reliant. As a result, supportive measures to be provided to single parents should be considered on a case-by-case basis. It was also

important for the Government to appeal to the business sector in providing more suitable job opportunities for the single parents. Furthermore, a well-established system should be in place for mustering job openings within the district and local networks.

Item 4 : Support after the Tide-over Grant (TOG) Period to Non-Governmental Organizations currently receiving TOG (SWAC Paper 8/05)

13. The paper outlined the latest proposal of the SWD to provide financial support after the Tide-Over Grant (TOG) period to NGOs currently receiving TOG. In response to the feedback and concerns collected from the sector, including the management and staff sides of NGOs, and relevant advisory committees during the past two months, revisions had been made to the original proposal presented to SWAC on 4 May 2005. The revised proposal on Special One-off Grant (SOG) package would comprise two elements – the special one-off grant at two times of the current TOG provision and other facilitating measures. Application would be on a voluntary basis and NGOs were expected to apply for either Scheme A or B. Invitation of application from NGOs was planned to be issued in July 2005.

(Post-meeting note: The invitation of application will be made in early August.)

14. Members made the following comments :

- (a) it was generally agreed that the revised proposal had addressed the concerns of NGOs and gave them greater flexibility in making necessary arrangements to meet their financial and staff commitments in the long run;
- (b) while NGOs applying for the SOG were required to declare that they would no longer require any further financial assistance from SWD, there were views that the Government should also give definite assurance that no further enhanced productivity programme (EPP) and efficiency savings (ES) would be imposed on the NGOs;

- (c) the calculation of the Benchmark Salary should be based on the mid-point salary of recognized staff establishment for each subvented service under the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) system, discounting the ES. Furthermore, there should be an appeal mechanism for the NGOs if they were not satisfied with the amount of SOG allocated by SWD;
- (d) it was suggested that the cap on LSG Reserve at 25% be further lifted to allow greater flexibility for NGOs in making the necessary staffing and financial arrangements;
- (e) for administrative simplicity and to avoid labeling effect on NGOs, one scheme, instead of two separate Scheme A and Scheme B, should be introduced. Some considered that Scheme B was not necessary because additional one-off grant to NGOs who needed assistance in coping with the salary increment of the Snapshot Staff under Scheme A was already sufficient;
- (f) SWD should critically look into the problems of NGOs who indicated difficulties in implementing service re-engineering, such as verifications of their claims, the size and management situations of the concerned agency, nature of services provided, etc;
- (g) the revised package on SOG still failed to address the most central issues on the protection of staff salary and possibility of further budget cuts, which would undoubtedly affect staff morale and service quality. Therefore, it was essential to strengthen the communication and cooperation among the government, NGO management and the staff to ensure the maintenance of a stable workforce as well as the delivery of quality care and services to the community;
- (h) as many NGOs had already implemented service re-engineering and restructuring with encouraging results, experience sharing sessions should be arranged for these successful NGOs to pass on their experience to other NGOs. SWD should also take proactive steps to assist individual NGOs to achieve long-term financial viability and monitor their performance in the meantime;

- (i) there were views that Government was already very generous in extending financial support to NGOs at two times of the current TOG provision in the form of SOG after the termination of TOG in 2006-07. NGOs could not rely on the Government forever. As the welfare sector was not the only sector which faced stringent financial situations in the past few years, it should be ready to shoulder their financial responsibilities and find their own ways of overcoming the problems;
- (j) there should not be an impression that NGOs were reluctant in making the necessary adjustments to meet their financial and staffing commitments in the long run. On the contrary, NGOs had already tried their very best in service re-engineering and restructuring. However, with the implementation of EPP and ES, and the socio-economic changes in recent years, some of the NGOs did face enormous pressure and encountered a lot of difficulties in meeting the changes. They had a genuine need for further assistance; and
- (k) some considered that the Administration should conduct a review of the LSG subventions system.

15. The Government made the following responses :

- (a) it was appreciated that the ES in the past few years had added uncertainties to NGOs. HWFB and SWD would convey to the Financial Secretary the welfare sector's concern on any further ES measures. However, it would be difficult to predict whether there would be any further budgetary control measures in the future at this stage;
- (b) as regards the calculation of the Benchmark Salary, since it had been already made clear in 2001 to those NGOs joining the LSG that the Benchmark was determined on the basis of the mid point salary and the recognised establishment at that time, it would not be necessary for the Government to make any further commitment;
- (c) on the roles and responsibilities between NGOs and the Government, it was considered that NGO management had the ultimate

responsibility to cope with their financial and staffing problems. For SWD, it would provide facilitating measures for NGOs to achieve the financial viability more effectively and ensure that such management issues would not affect the delivery of quality services to the community;

- (d) on strengthening communication, SWD would organize briefings for NGO management and board members on the SOG. It would also continue to facilitate experience sharing and collaboration among NGOs as far as possible;
- (e) as staff disputes were management issues, the NGO management and boards, rather than the Government, should be in a better position to initiate communication with their staff to ensure the maintenance of a stable workforce and staff morale;
- (f) the Administration had no intention to further lift the 25% cap as it was necessary to strike a balance between NGOs' concerns and public interest on the use of public money. The decision to cap the LSG Reserve at 25% as stated in the LSG Manual was reached after thorough deliberations. Moreover, the amount saved during these three years could be kept in a holding account. On the other hand, staff unions had expressed the view that allowing NGOs to save more than 25% might encourage NGO management to further cut staff costs;
- (g) as the staffing and financial conditions of NGOs varied greatly, a choice between Scheme A and Scheme B was necessary to meet the specific needs of individual NGOs;
- (h) while there was always an impression that welfare resources were being cut during the TOG period, the total amount of welfare subventions had indeed increased by about 6.3% in the past five years;
- (i) an appeal mechanism for the SOG was considered unnecessary as SWD would assess the needs of each NGO very carefully when considering their applications;

- (j) the LSG subventions system was widely accepted by NGOs and the Administration believed that it was the best vehicle to achieve effective use of public resources. Since the concern on protecting the interests of Snapshot Staff had been addressed by the enhanced measures of the revised SOG proposal, the Government considered that there was no explicit and urgent need to conduct a comprehensive review on the LSG at the present stage. However, the Government would continue to work closely with the welfare sector to put forward continuous improvement measures to the system.

16. The Meeting appreciated that the Government had carefully considered all the comments of the management and staff sides of NGOs and other relevant parties in fine-tuning the latest SOG proposal. On the whole, Members supported that the latest proposal was a reasonable arrangement as it provided greater flexibility and more time for the NGO management in making whatever necessary service re-engineering and restructuring to honour their contractual commitments to their Snapshot Staff. Furthermore, in implementing the revised arrangements, the Government should appeal to the NGO boards to take a more active role in improving their human resources practices and to strengthen communication with their staff.