

**Minutes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 27 November 2006**

Present

Mr Wilfred Wong (Chairman)
Mrs Cheung Ang Siew-mei
Dr Miranda Chung Chan Lai-foon
Ms Christine Fang Meng-sang
Mr Quentin Fong
Mr Herman Hui Chung-shing
Prof Japhet Sebastian Law
Mr Vincent Lo Wing-sang
Mr Timothy Ma Kam-wah
Prof Tang Kwong-leung
Mr Tung Chi-fat
Ms Marina Wong Yu-pok
Ms Lisa Yip Sau-wah
Ms Wendy Cheung (Secretary)

In Attendance

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB)

Miss Eliza Lee	Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Family and Women)
Ms Joey Lam	Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Special Duties)
Mr Freely Cheng	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Family)
Miss Shea Wing-man	Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Family)

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Mr Paul Tang	Director of Social Welfare
Mrs Anna Mak	Assistant Director (Family and Child Welfare)
Ms Ann Hon	Assistant Director (Subventions)
Mr Alex Wong	Acting Chief Social Work Officer (Subventions)

Absent with apologies

Dr Stephen Chow Chun-kay
Dr Benjamin Lai
Mr Keith Lam Hon-keung
Dr Jimmy Wong Chi-ho
Mr Silva Yeung Tak-wah

Item 1: Progress Report on the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged (SWAC Paper No. 13/06)

Members were briefed of the progress of the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged since its establishment in December 2004.

2. Members made the following comments:
- (a) there was concern about the potential conflict of interest between NGOs and their business partners;
 - (b) some considered that projects with training programmes were more effective than those simply involving presenting gifts to the disadvantaged;

- (c) to further promote the NGOs to the business sector, it was suggested that hyper-links to NGOs' websites be provided on SWD's website for easy reference by the interested business partners. Furthermore, while training programmes for the disadvantaged should be promoted, we should avoid duplication of resources with other Government funding schemes such as employees retraining and youth training, etc.;
- (d) some wondered if the requirement for submission of audited financial statements of approved projects might pose difficulty to those NGOs which only received small grants as the fees for preparing the audited reports would be disproportionately high. SWD might waive the requirement of audited accounts for projects with funding approved not exceeding certain limit. An honour system on the NGOs might be sufficient for the small-scale projects; and
- (e) as the reporting standards under the new auditing regulations were getting more stringent, many auditors became reluctant to certify the accounts of projects by NGOs. Many NGOs were unable to submit the audited financial statements as required by SWD. It was hoped that SWD would resolve the issue with the accountants' institutes.

3. The Government made the following responses:

- (a) a declaration and monitoring mechanism was in place. Applicants must be bona-fide NGOs which had to declare interest at the application stage as well as after the approval of projects. An

Advisory Committee was formed to approve and monitor the projects. The ICAC had also been consulted on the management of the Fund;

- (b) it was agreed that some projects were more effective than others. Nevertheless, as a start, we should be supportive if the NGOs were able to form partnership with the business enterprises because this would pave way for more sustainable relationship in the long run. Furthermore, as a means to sustain the impetus of the Fund and to enhance NGO's capacity for forming tripartite social partnership, an overall evaluative study would be carried out tentatively from January 2007;
- (c) the background information of the NGOs as well as their hyper-links were already made available on SWD's website;
- (d) to avoid overlapping of resources, the Fund Secretariat would cross check with other major funding sources, e.g. Community Investment and Inclusion Fund, Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme, Lotteries Fund, and Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, etc. to ensure that a NGO would not receive grants twice for the same bid. However, similar projects put forward by different NGOs should be acceptable so that more needy people could benefit from the tripartite partnership; and
- (e) the audited financial statement was necessary to ensure the prudent use of public money. While an honour system might work for the traditional NGOs with long history and good reputation, it might not be feasible for the newly established ones, many of which were

approved with funding under the Fund. To resolve the technical problem in light of the new auditing regulations, the Department was liaising with the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants on the standard of accounts required for projects by NGOs.

Item 2: SWAC's visits to Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada: Brainstorming Discussion on Family-related Welfare Issues (SWAC paper No. 14/06)

4. SWAC held a brainstorming discussion on 7 November 2006 to discuss issues relating to the social security system arising from the two study tours to Australia/New Zealand and North America. This meeting continued the brainstorming discussions on family-related issues.

5. Members made the following comments:

- (a) the Government might draw on the experience of the pilot domestic violence court in Australia which provided victim advocates to offer advice/information to victims. In addition, the batterer intervention programme could be adopted in Hong Kong to enhance the support services for the abusers, as it tackled domestic violence problem from the root and was far more important than the remedial counseling services for the victims;
- (b) to facilitate Members' reference in advising the Government on welfare policies in future, the summary table attached to the paper might also be expanded to cover the situation in Hong Kong. In

particular, the key services developed in Hong Kong in recent years, such as the Comprehensive Child Development Services, initiatives relating to domestic violence, etc. should be highlighted;

- (c) the Government should provide more child care benefits and support to single parents on the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). More specialized welfare programmes should also be considered for the ethnic minorities;
- (d) some considered that the emphasis of creativity and rights of the child, as well as the multi-disciplinary and team work approach in child care services in the US should be considered in Hong Kong. Furthermore, the Government should explore more choices of child care services for parents, such as office-based day care centres provided by employers;
- (e) we should note that the social and economic situation of the countries visited was very different from that of Hong Kong. We should have a clear direction of the vision of our society before we could formulate/refine our own welfare initiatives for future appropriately;
- (f) in comparing the welfare system of Hong Kong with the four countries visited, we should appreciate that the taxpayers of these countries paid very high tax to support the welfare expenditure, which was different from the situation in Hong Kong;
- (g) the Government and individual NGOs were already spending much resource on a full array of welfare services for families and children.

However, the overall coordination among the various parties ought to be improved. Furthermore, welfare services and support should not go unlimited and each family should shoulder its own responsibilities;

- (h) if a Family Commission were to set up, other welfare-related commissions and committees might need to be dissolved as there would inevitably be duplication of resources;
- (i) to promote more sustainable tripartite partnership, welfare agencies should form partnership with business enterprises on long-term mode rather than one-off project basis;
- (j) we should avoid labeling problematic families when providing support to families in need. At the same time, we had to honour the healthy families and their positive contributions to the society, such as building up neighbourhood and support network; and
- (k) SWD should organize visits to the welfare facilities relating to family and children for Members to have a better understanding of the situation in Hong Kong.

6. The Government made the following responses:

- (a) as regards Members' comments on some initiatives in Australia, the service of past victims was enlisted in helping victims but we should guard against the escalation of negative sentiments;
- (b) it was agreed that early intervention was more important than

remedial work and hence a pilot batterer intervention programme was being implemented. A review would be carried out to evaluate its effectiveness and make recommendations on the way forward. In addition, more targeted services for male would be provided in the Integrated Family Service Centres to address their special needs;

- (c) as regards child care benefits, to assist parents of low-income families to go to work, the Government provided fee waiver on after school care services for parents with children at the age of 6 to 12. Subsidy for child care service fee was also provided to parents with children below 6 if there were justified needs;
- (d) in view of the high rental in Hong Kong and the prevailing arrangements for parents to hire domestic helpers for child minding functions, it might not be practicable to set up office-based or institutionalized child care centres as in the overseas countries. Nevertheless, as set out in the 2006/07 Policy Agenda, the Government would provide more flexible day care services for children coming from the needy families in future, with due regard to the unique social and economic situation of Hong Kong;
- (e) while the Government had already spent substantial resources on family and children services, it was timely to remind all family members of their respective responsibilities to solve their family problems and build a healthy family relationship; and
- (f) in the coming six months, the Government would seriously study the feasibility of establishing a Family Commission to examine how to study and address problems from a cross-policy perspective with

a view to achieving more effective coordination.

7. The Meeting concluded that the two study tours provided Members with relevant overseas experience so that they could advise Government on the welfare policies from a more macro and holistic perspective. On the study of Family Commission and family issues, it was agreed that the core values of families were foundation of a harmonious society. The Government should continue its effort on family education to empower individuals and families to resolve their problems. Furthermore, in studying the feasibility of establishing a Family Commission, the Government should avoid duplication of resources with other commissions and committees currently responsible for handling issues for different age groups and genders.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

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