

**Minutes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 7 November 2007 at 9:30 a.m.
in Room 2005, Murray Building, Garden Road, Central**

Present

Mr Wilfred Wong Ying-wai (Chairman)
Mr Bunny Chan Chung-bun
Dr Miranda Chung Chan Lai-foon
Ms Christine Fang Meng-sang
Mr Quentin Fong King-sang
Mr Herman Hui Chung-shing
Dr Benjamin Lai Sau-shun
Dr Lam Ching-choi
Dr Leung Wing-tai
Mr Vincent Lo Wing-sang
Mr Timothy Ma Kam-wah
Prof Tang Kwong-leung
Mr Tung Chi-fat
Ms Marina Wong Yu-pok
Mr Silva Yeung Tak-wah
Ms Wendy Cheung (Secretary)

In Attendance

Labour and Welfare Bureau

Mr Matthew Cheung Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Mr Paul Tang Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Miss Eliza Lee Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)1

Ms Carol Yip Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)2

Ms Irene Young Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare
(Welfare)1

Mrs Grace Ng Project Management Officer, Community Investment
and Inclusion Fund

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Mr Stephen Fisher Director of Social Welfare

Absent with apologies

Dr Stephen Chow Chun-kay

Mr Kwan Chuk-fai

Prof Japhet Sebastian Law

Dr Jimmy Wong Chi-ho

Ms Lisa Yip Sau-wah

Matters Arising

It was agreed at the last meeting that the implications of the 2007 Starting Salaries Adjustments (SSA) and the 2006-07 Civil Service Pay Adjustments on the welfare Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) might be further discussed at SWAC if necessary. Since then, the issue had been discussed in detail in the Lump Sum Grant Steering Committee (LSGSC). Nevertheless, for Members' information, Mr Fisher was invited to give a verbal update on this issue.

2. Mr Fisher said the additional subventions of \$330 million had been allocated to NGOs as a result of the 2007 SSA and the 2007-08 Civil Service Pay Adjustments. NGOs were informed in September 2007 and

the additional allocated were released to them in October 2007.

3. To address the financial difficulties faced by some NGOs and uphold service quality, non-official members of the LSGSC had put forward the following proposals for the Administration's consideration :

- (a) to conduct a review of the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) subvention system through LSGSC;
- (b) to increase the subvention baseline for NGOs by \$600 million;
and
- (c) to introduce interim facilitating measures before the subvention baseline could be increased.

4. A Member appreciated that the Government showed sincerity in solving the problem and had had constructive discussions with the sector in the past few months. However, NGOs had difficulties giving their employees the same salary adjustments as their civil service counterparts. This had resulted in a high staff turnover of 15%, affecting service quality. She hoped that the Government would favourably consider the proposals put forward by the sector.

5. The Government indicated that the sector's proposals would be examined. It was stressed that the purpose of the current review was to improve the operation of the LSG subvention system, but not to overturn

it.

6. The Meeting agreed and added that the LSG subvention system had been introduced after much deliberations with relevant parties.

Item 1: Short Briefing by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare

7. The Secretary for Labour and Welfare (SLW) briefed Members on Government's welfare policies. He said that the newly established LWB marked a strategic and significant step of the Administration in enhancing the coordination of closely related policy areas, namely, manpower development, labour, poverty alleviation and welfare.

8. On the welfare front, the Administration would continue to build up social capital and help people move from welfare to self-reliance. Training and re-training would be strengthened to equip people with working abilities to re-enter labour market.

9. SLW highlighted an important task of SWAC in the coming year, which was to study the long-term development planning for social welfare in Hong Kong, as proposed by the Chief Executive in his Election Manifesto. The Administration would consult SWAC on how to take forward the exercise before the end of the year.

Item 2: Briefing on the welfare initiatives in the 2007-08 Policy Address and Policy Agenda (paper for the Legislative Council sent to Members on 11 October 2007)

10. Members were briefed of the new and major ongoing welfare initiatives in the 2007-08 Policy Address and Policy Agenda.

11. Individual Members made the following comments:

- (a) welcomed the policy initiatives on welfare, which largely addressed the concerns of the welfare sector;
- (b) it might not be easy for the newly established Task Force on Poverty to mobilize the community to tackle poverty together;
- (c) supported the proposal to improve the homes of the elderly but cautioned that some owners of the flats concerned might not allow such improvement works. The works, if carried out by NGOs or social enterprises, would boost employment of the disadvantaged groups;
- (d) supported the proposal to enhance the dissemination of information on elderly services;
- (e) appreciated the need for studying the long-term development planning for social welfare and suggested that a strategic

approach should be adopted;

- (f) appreciated the flexibility that the LSG subvention system provided to NGOs, and emphasized that human resources was also crucial to service delivery;
- (g) strengthening of district-based welfare planning and coordination could be one of the strategic directions in the long-term development planning for social welfare;
- (h) welcomed the Family Support Programme as some needy families were reluctant to seek assistance. The Programme would also help to enhance neighbourhood mutual support;
- (i) suggested exploring the possibility of providing taxi services for both the able-bodied and the people with disabilities (PWDs);
- (j) the present 550 training places for enrolled nurses might not be sufficient to ease the problem of nurse shortage in the welfare sector;
- (k) suggested that the Administration widely publicize service information to potential service recipients, their family members and volunteers. Public education to promote a caring and resilient community should also be stepped up;

- (l) as most elders were now taken care of by foreign domestic helpers, the employees retraining levy paid by the employers should be used to provide more carers' training for those domestic helpers;
- (m) suggested some form of high-level inter-bureaux communication platform for discussing issues of mutual concern; and
- (n) stressed the importance of continued inter-bureau/departmental collaboration to address different service needs.

12. The Government made the following responses:

- (a) on alleviating poverty, SLW would chair an inter-bureau/departmental task force to oversee poverty alleviation matters and follow up the recommendations of the then Commission on Poverty;
- (b) agreed that the engagement of NGOs/social enterprises in the home improvement works for the elderly would boost employment particularly for the disadvantaged groups;
- (c) agreed that the long-term development planning for social welfare should be strategic. The long-term plan would

provide the Government, NGOs and volunteer organizations with blueprint for planning their services and financial arrangement in the near future;

- (d) rehabilitation taxi services would be available in the New Territories by early 2008. In addition, the Chief Executive's Community Project list had supported a project for an NGO to provide 20 wheelchair accessible hire cars for PWDs;
- (e) the Administration would closely liaise with the Hospital Authority (HA), the Nursing Council and tertiary institutions with a view to increasing the training places for enrolled nurses. The Administration was also considering whether health workers could take up some minor nursing work;
- (f) as the law stipulated, the employees retraining levy should be used by the Employees Retraining Board to provide training/retraining courses for local workers;
- (g) on mental health services, a working group comprising representatives from the Government, HA and NGOs had been working on the issue; and
- (h) although health and welfare matters were now under the purview of different bureaux, inter-bureau/departmental collaboration would continue. For example, the Food and

Health Bureau (FHB) was represented in the Elderly Commission.

13. The Meeting supported the new welfare initiatives in the 2007-08 Policy Address, and suggested that the Administration adopt a district-based approach in service delivery so that resources could be flexibly deployed to cater for the specific needs of the local communities. Community involvement was also important.

14. The Meeting further suggested that the Administration invite representatives from FHB to attend SWAC meetings from time to time to discuss welfare issues with a health angle.

Item 3: Community Investment and Inclusion Fund – Progress Report (SWAC Paper No. 5/07)

15. Members were updated on the achievements of the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) and the Fund's strategies in scaling up its next phase of development.

16. Members asked how the projects would be sustained after the project period.

17. The Government responded that many successful projects could continue their operation even after the funding period. They had successfully built up social capital in the form of in-depth personal

relationships among the participants and mutual help networks that could sustain and further develop on their own. Each district could also, through social capital building, make the best use of its own strengths and resources to serve its own communities and help the less fortunate members.

18. The Meeting affirmed the effectiveness of the social capital building strategies promoted by the CIIF. It was also very encouraging that the Fund had approved 147 projects covering all the 18 districts with a broadened project scope and a variety of target groups. More importantly, there was greater support from, and involvement of, the local communities. It was suggested that further visits to the projects be arranged for Members.

Labour and Welfare Bureau

December 2007