

**Minutes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 13 November 2008 at 2:30 p.m.
in Room 215, Main Wing, Central Government Offices**

Present

Mr Wilfred Wong Ying-wai	(Chairman)
Mr Bunny Chan Chung-bun	
Miss Maggie Chan Mei-kit	
Dr Miranda Chung Chan Lai-foon	
Mr Quentin Fong King-sang	
Mr Herman Hui Chung-shing	
Dr Benjamin Lai Sau-shun	
Dr Lam Ching-choi	
Ms Lam Shuk-yee	
Mr Christopher Law Kin-chung	
Dr Leung Wing-tai	
Mr Vincent Lo Wing-sang	
Mr Timothy Ma Kam-wah	
Dr Jimmy Wong Chi-ho	
Mr Silva Yeung Tak-wah	
Ms Lisa Yip Sau-wah	
Miss Vicky Cheung	(Secretary)

In Attendance

Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)

Mr Paul Tang	Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare (PSLW)
Miss Eliza Lee	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)1 (DS(W)1)
Ms Carol Yip	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)2 (DS(W)2)

Ms Irene Young	Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)1 (PAS(W)1)
Miss Hinny Lam	Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)2 (PAS(W)2)
Mr Stephen Sui	Commissioner for Rehabilitation (C for R)

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Mr Stephen Fisher	Director of Social Welfare (DSW)
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Absent with apologies

Dr Stephen Chow Chun-kay
Mr Kwan Chuk-fai
Mrs Agnes Mak Tang Pik-yee
Prof Tang Kwong-leung
Mr Tung Chi-fat
Mrs Teresa Tsien Wong Bik-kwan

Discussion Item: Post-Policy Address Briefing (SWAC Paper No. 05/2008)

Members were briefed on the welfare and poverty alleviation initiatives as highlighted in the 2009 Policy Address and Policy Agenda.

2. Members offered the following comments:
 - (a) Specific support services, for instance, telephone hotline services and counseling services, should be provided to families and individuals affected by the financial tsunami and publicity of these services should be stepped up;
 - (b) The 24-hour crisis support hotline had proven to be effective in helping people to cope with their psychological problem. The

Government should consider providing recurrent funding to sustain this service;

- (c) Retraining programmes should be improved to better meet the needs of the ever-changing labour market. For example, more resources should be allocated to train adults instead of youth;
- (d) Apart from focusing on job creation and retraining, the Government should also promote mutual help and support in the community, so as to reduce reliance on the welfare system;
- (e) The Child Development Fund (CDF) might be adversely affected by the economic downturn, as contributions received from the private sector might drop;
- (f) The financial crisis had also affected the poor elders. The Government could provide more support to them, and might consider subsidizing domestic care services for the elderly, for the benefit of both the unemployed and the elders;
- (g) The welfare sector could play a vital role amid the financial crisis. It could provide more services to those in need and assist them in overcoming the present difficulties;
- (h) The Government could make reference to the experience in 2003 when Hong Kong was hard hit by SARS, and identify the successful measures which had helped people overcome the challenges at that time;
- (i) People with disabilities were the most vulnerable social group and their needs should not be left unattended;
- (j) The proposal of enhancing primary care services and setting up community health centres by coordinating existing services provided by the health care service units was supported. The welfare sector could collaborate with the health sector in implementing this initiative;

- (k) Negative sentiment towards the Government might grow if the public considered that the supporting measures could not provide immediate relief. The Government should encourage the general public to put forth constructive ideas on how to rejuvenate our society;
- (l) The Government could proactively help NGOs obtain premises at concessionary rate for the provision of more welfare services;
- (m) The Government could also consider relaxing the eligibility criteria of the various funding schemes, so as to encourage more NGOs to apply for funds to launch creative projects;
- (n) Many business professionals became unemployed because of the financial crisis. The Government should invite them to participate in social enterprise projects;
- (o) Apart from providing more remedial services, the Government should also develop more preventive and developmental services as they were effective in building resilience in our society in the long-run;
- (p) The Government should make reference to overseas experiences in formulating policies and measures to enhance the competitiveness of our labour force; and
- (q) the Government should also critically assess the impact of the financial tsunami on our economy in order to come up with more effective long-term solutions.

3. The Government gave the following responses:

- (a) The first batch of CDF projects had been rolled out lately and the overall response from the business sector was very positive. So far, the operating NGOs had not encountered grave difficulty in attracting private donations;

- (b) The various funding schemes set up by the Government served different purposes and had different eligibility criteria and funding rules. It would not be appropriate for the Government to unilaterally relax the eligibility criteria for the purpose of funding more welfare projects.
- (c) A multi-pronged approach would be adopted in supporting the needy who were severely affected by the financial tsunami;
- (d) The priority of the Government at the moment was to enhance the capacities of the unemployed and create more job opportunities for them;
- (e) The Social Welfare Department (SWD) had recently provided extra funding to two NGOs for them to operate 24-hour crisis support hotlines and enhance their existing counseling services;
- (f) SWD would consider pooling resources from other areas to provide more counseling services if the demand for such services increased;
- (g) The unemployment problem could not be resolved by retraining programmes alone, yet these programmes could help enhance the skills and the capacities of the unemployed, and better prepare them for employment; and
- (h) The newly established Task Force on Economic Challenges would help to identify new opportunities and consider measures to respond to the global financial crisis.