

**Minutes of the  
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting**

**29 March 2021 (Monday) at 10:00 a.m.  
Conference Room 4, G/F, Central Government Offices**

**Present**

Mr Lester Garson HUANG (Chairman)  
Ms Sylvia CHAN May-kuen  
Miss CHEUNG Sze-wing  
Mr CHUGH, Manohar Thakurdas  
Mr Andy HO Wing-cheong  
Mr Anthony KWAN Wai-ming  
Mr Frederick LAI Wing-hoi  
Mr Armstrong LEE Hon-Cheung  
Dr Gary NG Ka-wing  
Dr PAN Pey-chyou  
Ms Cindy PUN Siu-fung  
Dr Janice TSANG Wing-hang  
Ms Eva WONG Ching-hung  
Prof Frances WONG Kam-yuet  
Mr Anthony WONG Kin-wai  
Ms Amarantha YIP Yun-wan

**In Attendance**

**Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)**

Ms CHANG King-yiu	Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Mr David LEUNG	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1
Ms Polly KWOK (For discussion item 2 only)	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2
Ms Manda CHAN (For discussion item 2 only)	Commissioner for Rehabilitation

Mr Andrew TSANG                      Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1

Mr Michael LI                            Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)1C  
(Secretary to SWAC)

Mr Adams WONG                        Executive Officer (Welfare) 1A

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Mr Gordon LEUNG                      Director of Social Welfare

Mr KOK Che-leung                      Deputy Director of Social Welfare  
(For discussion item 1 only) (Admin)

Mr LAM Bing-chun                      Principal Social Work Officer (Information  
(For discussion item 1 only) Systems & Technology) (P(IST))

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Grace CHAN                         Business Director (BD)  
(For discussion item 1 only)

**Absent with apologies**

Dr BAI Xue

Dr Gary CHENG Faat-ting

Dr LAM James Joseph

Ms Anthea LO Wing-sze

Prof Petrus NG Yat-nam

Dr Ricky SZETO Wing-fu

**Discussion Item 1:            Use of Technology in Welfare Services**

Members welcomed the timely briefing for the Committee on the use of technology in welfare services, which had become pivotal for the delivery of welfare services amidst the outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).

2. Members raised the following comments —
- (a) Members welcomed the Joint Committee on Information Technology for the Social Welfare Sector (JCIT)'s suggestion to form a task group (the task group) to take forward JCIT's suggestions on the use of technology. Consideration might be given to including stakeholders in the task group.
  - (b) Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), especially those of medium and small scales, usually had difficulties in using technology in welfare services. Common difficulties included lack of expertise, limitation in resources and difficulty in hiring and retaining professional Information Technology (IT) personnel. Moreover, NGOs and their staff might lack motivation to change their existing practice and adopt technology in their daily work.
  - (c) The Social Welfare Development Fund and the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care (I&T Fund) had provided the needed support for the welfare sector on the technology front. Consideration might be given to promoting the projects / products supported by the Funds by means like publications and case studies. There was also a suggestion to regularise the I&T Fund. In addition to these Funds launched by the Government, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust also provided NGOs with resources on IT systems.
  - (d) Consideration might be given to including basic IT courses in social work programmes offered by tertiary institutions.
  - (e) In employing technology in welfare services, data security, privacy and ethical issues should be taken into account. The views of frontline staff on the practicability of the products and equipment concerned were also important.
  - (f) The Government should identify and focus on the problems / challenges commonly faced by the welfare sector which might be solved by technology. Sharing of experience among NGOs should also be encouraged.
  - (g) In promoting the use of technology in welfare services, the Government's role might include promoting partnership and connection among stakeholders. The Government might

consider further promoting collaboration among the industry, academic and research sectors in developing new technological products for the local welfare sector. Collaboration between the healthcare and welfare sectors in the use of technology might also be explored.

- (h) In providing technological support to NGOs, the Government should give due consideration to the maintenance / operating / manpower costs involved. There was also a suggestion that in inviting NGOs to provide new welfare services, the Government should provide corresponding support on information system.
- (i) The Government should step up its support for non-subsided services and NGOs not subsidised by SWD on the use of technology.
- (j) As regards elderly services, consideration might be given to developing interpretation devices as well as providing hardware and network support to elderly persons in need. The Government should also enhance technological support in the provision of youth services to go along with young service users' habits of communication through online means.

3. The Chairman considered that the welfare sector should be more forward-looking in the use of technology to improve service delivery. He also suggested that SWD's task group consider –

- (a) promoting experience sharing of best practices among NGOs on various fronts of using technology;
- (b) identifying key problems / challenges commonly faced by the welfare sector with a view to fostering concerted efforts to deal with them;
- (c) promoting data security and privacy by drawing reference from applications such as the Electronic Health Record Sharing System; and
- (d) exploring collaboration among the industry, academic and research sectors in developing new technological products for the local welfare sector.

## **Discussion Item 2: Welfare-related Initiatives in the 2021-22 Budget**

4. Members were invited to give comments on the paper. Members raised the following comments –

- (a) The livelihood of many, especially those in the middle and lower classes, had been hard hit by the COVID-19 epidemic. While a number of relief measures had been rolled out by the Government, consideration might be given to launching an unemployment assistance scheme. The Government should also step up measures in creating job opportunities, and should enhance the provision of services to the needy under the epidemic (in addition to cash allowances).
- (b) The abolition of the Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy (I-WITS) Scheme might discourage working across districts, and might affect the livelihood of those in need if the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme (PTFSS) eventually came to an end.
- (c) The extra allowance to recipients of social security payments announced in the 2021-22 Budget was equal to half a month of the standard rate / allowance, which was lower than those announced in the past few years. Such reduction might not be desirable given the difficulties faced by the grassroots under the epidemic. That said, given the prevailing economic and fiscal situation, it was understandable that the new initiatives in the 2021-22 Budget might have to be scaled down.

5. The Government gave the following response –

- (a) The Government's estimated recurrent expenditure on welfare services in 2021-22 had increased by 60% when compared with the actual recurrent expenditure at the beginning of the current-term Government (i.e. 2017-18). And welfare services would remain among the top priority programme areas on the Government's agenda, notwithstanding the stringent fiscal situation expected in the coming one or two years.
- (b) The Government decided to abolish the I-WITS Scheme to facilitate better use of limited resources especially amid the continuous surges in Working Family Allowance (WFA) applications. Furthermore, many considered the I-WITS

Scheme as duplicating the non-means-tested PTFSS.

- (c) While the Government had explained on various occasions the considerations against a dedicated unemployment assistance scheme, different special measures and ad hoc funds were rolled out to support the underemployed and the unemployed under the epidemic. For example, the minimum working hour requirement of the WFA Scheme for non-single-parent households would be reduced by 50% on a one-year time-limited basis. The Employees Retraining Board had launched three tranches of the Love Upgrading Special Scheme in which trainees, including the underemployed and the unemployed, were provided a special allowance of up to \$5,800 per month. Moreover, the Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme had created time-limited jobs for supporting youth employment.

SWAC Secretariat  
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