

**Notes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 13 December 2022 at 3:00 p.m.
in Conference Room 4, G/F, Central Government Offices**

Present

Mr Lester Garson HUANG (Chairman)
Dr BAI Xue
Miss CHEUNG Sze-wing
Mr Nicholas HO Lik-chi
Mr Andy HO Wing-cheong
Mr Frederick LAI Wing-hoi
Mr Armstrong LEE Hon-cheung
Dr Wingco LO Kam-wing
Prof Petrus NG Yat-nam
Dr PAN Pey-chyou
Dr Ricky SZETO Wing-fu
Ms Rebecca TSAI Ching-yu
Dr Rizwan ULLAH
Mr John WONG Chung
Ms Eva WONG Ching-hung
Mr Barry WONG Man-sing
Ms Wendy YUEN Miu-ling

In Attendance

Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)

Ms Alice LAU	Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare (PSLW)
Mr David LEUNG	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1 (DS(W)1)
Ms Polly KWOK	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2

Ms Vega Wong	Commissioner for Rehabilitation
Mr Emmanuel LAM	Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1B (Secretary to SWAC)
Mr Adams WONG	Executive Officer (Welfare) 1A
Miss Sharon LAM	Executive Officer (Welfare) 1B

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Miss Charmaine LEE	Director of Social Welfare
Mr TAN Tick-yee (For discussion of item 1 only)	Assistant Director (Elderly)
Ms Hannah YIP (For discussion of item 1 only)	Assistant Director (Rehabilitation & Medical Social Services)

Absent with apologies

Prof Emily CHAN Ying-yang
Dr LAM James Joseph
Ms Alice LAU Oi-size
Dr Gary NG Ka-wing
Prof Frances WONG Kam-yuet

**Discussion Item 1: Support for Carers of Elderly Persons and of
Persons with Disabilities**

The Government briefed Members on the new measures to enhance support for carers of elderly persons and of persons with disabilities (carers), which included –

- (a) regularising four financial assistance schemes under the Community Care Fund (CCF);

- (b) establishing a one-stop information gateway for carers;
- (c) setting up a designated carer hotline;
- (d) increasing respite service places and enhancing the Vacancy Enquiry System for Residential Respite Service for Persons with Disabilities, Residential Respite Service for the Elderly and Emergency Placement for the Elderly; and
- (e) launching a territory-wide publicity campaign and promoting community-based peer support.

2. Members welcomed the introduction of the new measures to enhance carers' caring capability and relieve their pressure. Individual members raised the following suggestions / questions –

(a) Financial support

- i. Notwithstanding the increase of the monthly allowance for low-income carers from \$2,400 to \$3,000 after regularisation of the two pilot schemes under the CCF¹, the allowance remained insufficient to meet carers' financial need. The Government should consider further increasing the allowance.
- ii. Considering that it was not uncommon for persons in need to have multiple carers, the Government should consider expanding the scope of the existing allowances to cover non-primary carers who also participated in taking care of the persons in need.
- iii. To enable elderly persons and persons with disabilities to live in the community amid an aging population, and to reduce the burden of the primary carers, the Government should consider subsidising needy households to hire foreign domestic helpers, or offering these households tax concessions.

(b) Psychological support

To enhance psychological support to carers, the Government should actively promote peer support networks at community level or online (via chatrooms or blogs) to encourage carers with

¹ Including the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of Elderly Persons from Low-income Families and the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities.

similar background to support each other and share their experience.

(c) Respite services

While respite services could allow carers to take a break from taking care of needy persons, many carers remained unfamiliar with respite services, which led to under-utilisation of services. The Government should proactively encourage carers to make use of respite services and ensure the updated information on service availability would be accessible to carers and persons in need.

(d) Designated carer hotline

- i. Noting that the Advisory Committee on Mental Health launched a similar 24-hour hotline to cater for individuals with mental health needs, inter-bureaux coordination might be required to avoid duplication of services provided by the two hotlines.
- ii. To complement the designated carer hotline, the Government should launch a new mobile application to handle enquiries from carers. The data so generated could serve as useful reference for the Government in formulating support measures for carers.

(e) Publicity campaign

- i. Noting that the majority of carers were aged, who might have difficulties in acquiring relevant welfare service information (especially through the internet), the Government should ensure the information on the new measures should reach the intended audience, e.g. through outreaching services.
- ii. The Government should provide carers with training on the basic caring skills and guide them through the existing services available. For members of the public, the focus should be to raise their awareness of the important role of carers and to give recognition to carers' contribution. To that end, the Government might consider introducing an award scheme to recognise outstanding carers who had taken good care of needy persons and promote good practices among carers.

- iii. The Government could consider collaborating with district organisations, such as the District Services and Community Care Teams to be set up by the Government in all 18 districts, in furthering the publicity campaign. Additional resources could be provided to these organisations for organising activities targeting needy persons and carers.
- iv. To create a carer-friendly environment for employees, the Government should consider taking the lead in offering flexible work arrangement to facilitate civil servants who had to provide care for their needy family members, in the hope that the private sector would follow suit in time.

(f) Others

- i. Many teenagers were willing to take care of needy persons, and some even had innovative ideas on enhancing existing care services with technology. The Government should consider providing holistic support to motivate teenagers to become carers, and assist them to materialise their innovative ideas.
- ii. Considering that support for carers straddled across different policy areas including health, welfare and district administration, etc., the Government should strengthen inter-bureaux collaboration to provide holistic and cohesive support to carers.

3. The Government noted Members' views, and made the following responses –

- (a) On financial assistance, the Government's support for needy households and carers should be considered holistically. The Government would increase the monthly allowance upon regularisation of the CCF financial assistance schemes for low-income carers at a rate exceeding inflation since launch of the CCF schemes. In addition, other forms of financial assistance such as the Disability Allowance, Old Age Living Allowance and the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, etc. were in place to respond to the different needs of individuals. Tax concessions were also available for eligible taxpayers who incurred expenditure in caring for dependent elderly or persons with disabilities.

- (b) The Government would launch a one-stop information gateway for carers around end 2023, providing information on existing services for elderly persons and persons with disabilities, caring skills, assessment tool for evaluating carers' needs and risk levels, and other community activities and resources for carers. The website would provide user-friendly search functions to enable easy access to information. SWD would review and enrich its content after launching, having regard to users' feedback.
- (c) The new 24-hour designated hotline for carers would provide up-to-date information on community support resources, as well as instant support for carers with emotional needs. Carers in need would be referred to social workers for follow-up. The Government would promote the dedicated hotline through different means including the publicity campaign.
- (d) At present, there are around 560 and 550 respite service (including both day and residential) places for elderly persons and persons with disabilities respectively. To facilitate the use of the respite services, SWD launched an online Vacancy Enquiry System for Residential Respite Service for Persons with Disabilities, Residential Respite Service for the Elderly and Emergency Placement for the Elderly in 2019 to provide information on vacant residential respite service places. SWD planned to enhance the system in 2023 by including day respite service. SWD would continue to liaise with service operators for timely update of the vacancy position of respite service places.
- (e) SWD would launch a three-year publicity campaign, which would include a series of carer-centric programmes and public education activities. To promote a carer-friendly working environment, employers would be encouraged to adopt flexible working arrangements to facilitate their employees in balancing their roles as employees and carers.

4. The Chairman thanked Members for their suggestions and views. He invited the Government to consider Members' views in implementing the support measures for carers.

Discussion Item 2: Welfare-related Initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2022 Policy Address

5. The Government briefed Members on the paper. Members raised the following views / suggestions –

(a) *Manpower of the local welfare sector*

- i. With a continued aging population and shrinking work force, the recent wave of emigration might intensify the manpower shortage of the local welfare sector, in particular allied health/medical workers and social workers. In this connection:
 - The Government should actively nurture and attract local talents (including both teenagers and the middle-aged) to join the welfare sector by offering more financial assistance and opportunities for training and further studies. The Government should also actively liaise with the tertiary institutions in the Mainland (especially Greater Bay Area (GBA) cities) to devise appropriate curriculum for nurturing Mainland talents to fill the service gap of the local welfare sector and expand the talent pool.
 - The Government should devise policies and measures to facilitate able-bodied retirees of the local welfare sector to continue working or rejoin the workforce, with a view to slowing down the trend of manpower shortage within the local welfare sector.
- ii. While affirming the objective of the special scheme to import care workers for residential care homes for the elderly and for persons with disabilities to address the manpower shortage, there were concerns that the special scheme might lead to a surge in the supply of care workers, putting pressure on the income of local care workers and creating competition between imported and local care workers.
- iii. In view of the acute manpower shortage of nursing staff in the public healthcare system and welfare service units operated by NGOs, the Government should explore with the Nursing Council of Hong Kong the feasibility of reducing the clinical training hour requirement for nursing students, without

compromising their quality.

- iv. Apart from healthcare professionals that are subject to statutory registration (such as medical and allied-healthcare professionals), the Government should also provide incentive for tertiary education institutions to introduce programmes for grooming other healthcare personnel for the local welfare sector, such as psychologists and counsellors, who also played vital roles in the delivery of welfare services.

(b) Elderly services

- i. Given the high demand for welfare services among Hong Kong elderly residents residing in the Mainland (particularly in Guangdong), the Government should capitalise on the opportunities brought by the GBA to facilitate Hong Kong NGOs to extend subvented welfare services to the Mainland to cater for their needs. The Government should also strengthen collaboration with Mainland medical institutions to facilitate these elderly to receive publicly funded medical treatment in the Mainland.
- ii. The Government should consider carrying out public education campaigns to raise the community's awareness of the early symptoms of dementia, with a view to facilitating early identification and intervention.
- iii. To improve user experience of Neighbourhood Elderly Centres, the Government should consider introducing a greater variety of cultural and leisure activities for elderly users (e.g. organising themed events from time to time) and adopting more innovative equipment in service delivery.
- iv. In view of the negative impact over the mental health of elderly persons brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government should conduct a comprehensive study to gauge the scale and extent of mental health needs among elderly persons, with a view to formulating appropriate measures to render support.

(c) Ethnic minorities (EM)

- i. There were concerns that due to language barriers, EM with welfare needs might find it difficult to access various social

and welfare services offered by different Government bureaux and departments. The Government should strengthen internal coordination on support measures for EM.

- ii. With the increase in EM population in recent years, they constituted a sizeable portion of the work force. The Government should carry out a study on the demographics and needs of EM in order to formulate dedicated measures to facilitate them to take up employment.
- iii. The Government should consider introducing funding schemes to provide incentive for enterprises to hire EM staff.

(d) Welfare premises

In view of the need for more facilities for welfare services, especially for elderly and rehabilitation services, the Government should proactively liaise with NGO applicants to expedite the progress of projects under the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses (Special Site Scheme), as well as speeding up the purchase of private premises to accommodate more welfare facilities.

6. The Government thanked Members for their views and suggestions, and made the following responses –

- (a) In view of the manpower shortage of different professions within the welfare sector, the Government had put in place various measures to enlarge the manpower pool for meeting service demands. The Government announced in the 2022 Policy Address (PA) that, on the premise that local workers' priority for employment would be safeguarded, a special scheme to import care workers of residential care homes for the elderly and for persons with disabilities would be launched on an appropriate scale and with greater flexibility. The Government would also subsidise an additional 1 700 or more students in the coming five years to enroll in nurse training programmes and require graduates to work in the social welfare sector for at least three years. The Government would continue to provide employment and training opportunities for young people interested in working in the elderly and rehabilitation care services through the Navigation Scheme for Young Persons in Care Services. The Government would also conduct a holistic review to establish professional standards and map out a career progression path for staff of residential care

homes for the elderly and for persons with disabilities.

- (b) In terms of welfare premises, 5% of the floor area in future public housing development projects would be reserved for welfare purposes. It was expected that the supply of welfare premises would gradually increase in the coming two to three years with the completion of construction work for new public rental housing estates. To expedite the progress of the Special Site Scheme, SWD would play a coordinating role in strengthening communication between the NGO applicants and relevant Government departments for early identification and resolution of problems. NGOs would also need to put in requisite resources for taking forward works projects.
- (c) A number of initiatives had been introduced to facilitate Hong Kong residents residing in the Mainland to continue to receive welfare support. For example, the Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme provided monthly allowance for eligible elderly Hong Kong residents residing in Guangdong and Fujian respectively, and eligible elderly Hong Kong residents were provided with a choice to receive subsidised residential care services in two Mainland cities in the GBA. Upon resumption of normal cross-boundary travel between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the Government would continue to identify eligible residential care homes for the elderly run by Hong Kong operators in Mainland cities in the GBA to provide more choices for eligible service users. In addition, the Government would also suitably relax the pre-application absence limit for the Social Security Allowance Scheme from 56 days to 90 days to provide greater flexibility to elderly persons seeking to retire in the Mainland.
- (d) To unleash the potential of the EM population to join the workforce, the Labour Department had implemented the Employment Services Ambassador Programme for EM to provide and promote employment services to EM job seekers. To further enhance the employment opportunities and support for EM, the 2022 PA announced that more EM would be recruited as Employment Assistants and General Assistants in the Labour Department, and a service centre would be set up on a trial basis to provide support and counselling.
- (e) Upon liaising with the Nursing Council, the clinical practicum carried out in community settings including residential care homes for the elderly and for persons with disability would be counted

towards the required training requirement. This arrangement would enhance the training capacity of the institutions and provide nursing students an opportunity to gain working experience in the welfare sector.

7. The Chairman thanked Members for their views, and invited the Government to consider Members' comments.

SWAC Secretariat
February 2023