

**Minutes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 25 April 2002 (Thursday)**

Present

Mr Peter Wong Hong-yuen, GBS, JP	(Chairman)
Mr Darwin Chen	
Mrs Cheung Ang Siew-mei	
Dr Philemon Choi Yuen-wan, JP	
Miss Christine Fang Meng-sang	
Mr Keith Lam Hon-keung, JP	
Dr the Hon Law Chi-kwong, JP	
Mr Wilfred Lee Chee-wah	
Dr Leung Cho-bun	
Mrs Mary Leung Ling Tien-wei	
Professor Diana Mak Ping-see	
Miss Deborah Wan Lai-yau, JP	
Mr Wan Chi-keung, JP	
Ms Marina Wong Yu-pok	
Mr Stephen Yau How-boa, JP	
Miss Jessie Yu Sau-chu	
Ms Tsang Yin-mei	(Secretary)

In Attendance

Health and Welfare Bureau (HWB)

Mr Robin Gill	Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare
Mr Patrick Nip	Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare
Miss Diane Wong	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Mrs Carrie Lam	Director of Social Welfare
Mrs Patricia Chu	Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)
Mrs Eliza Leung	Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Services)

(For item 1)

Mr John Leung	Principal Assistant Secretary for Education and Manpower, (EMB)
Mr Lee Hing-fai	Deputy Director of Education, Education Department (ED)
Mrs Miranda Liu	Senior Education Officer (Kindergartens, Tutorial and International Schools), ED
Mr Kenneth Chan	Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare, HWB
Mr Fung Pak-yan	Assistant Director (Family and Child Welfare), SWD
Mr Peter Ng	Chief Social Work Officer (Family and Child Welfare), SWD

(For item 2)

Mr Fung Man-lok	Chief Social Work Officer (Strategic Planning), SWD
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(1) Harmonisation of Child Care Centres (CCCs) and Kindergartens (KGs) [SWAC Paper No. 11/02]

The paper sought Members' advice on the recommendations of the Working Party on Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services co-chaired by SWD and ED. The major recommendations included (i) harmonising the regulatory framework; (ii) harmonising the financial assistance schemes for parents; and (iii) harmonising the subsidy schemes for service providers. Other recommendations were (i) harmonising criteria for assessing fees for services for children aged 2 to 6; (ii) enhancing staff quality; (iii) enhancing staffing standards and operational requirements; and (iv) assuring service quality.

2. Members made the following points –

- (a) ownership of the proposal between ED and SWD in respect of KG, KG-cum-DN and CCC should be clearly defined;
- (b) there might be difficulty in monitoring the services provided by KG-cum-DN, which would be regulated under different Ordinances by the Joint Office;
- (c) different practices in providing lunch service to children in KG and CCC should be streamlined;
- (d) there was concern about how to cater for the needs of children aged 0 to 3, to provide support to improve the quality of carers and to assure quality early childhood services, which were conducive to the healthy development of children;
- (e) there was concern about whether current arrangements to cater for children with special needs and for parents with child care needs would continue under the new arrangements;
- (f) names of various early childhood services under the existing arrangements and the future arrangements should be streamlined to make it less confusing to the public;

- (g) the Working Party should speed up the processing of the proposals, so as to better meet the changing needs of society;
- (h) KG/CCC fees should be well-defined; and
- (i) there was concern about the lunch fee being excluded from the inclusive fee and thus not being subsidized.

3. The Government's responses included –

- (a) SWD was working in partnership with ED at this stage. In due course, ED would be the lead department in implementing the proposals. To ensure quality services provided to operators and users on a one-stop basis, a Joint Office would be set up under the management of ED with staff who were familiar with child care centre services being deployed from SWD;
- (b) operators providing KG-cum-DN services would only be required to submit one application form to the Joint Office for processing in future, instead of dealing with two departments as at present;
- (c) the Working Party had proposed to allow flexibility for operators to choose the mode of lunch service. The future practice would continue to ensure the quality of this service;
- (d) ED in collaboration with SWD and the Department of Health (DoH) will launch programmes to strengthen parental education. Furthermore, there were plans to enhance the quality of teachers and operators of KG/CCC, facilitate interfacing between early childhood education and primary education, as well as monitoring the performance of services;
- (e) services for children with special needs would continue to be handled by SWD. Those services meant to support families in need, such as extended hour services and occasional child care services and integrated programmes in CCC, would continue under the new arrangements. KG would also be encouraged to provide such services, and there would be more service points and improved accessibility of such support services to parents in need;
- (f) the Government would examine whether the names of various early childhood services under the existing arrangements and the future arrangements required change, so as to minimize any confusion;
- (g) in processing the proposal, the Government had, in parallel, taken forward measures, wherever practicable, in this direction, such as enhancing the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme

(KGFRS) and the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme (KSS). This had saved some time in future processing. In the schedule, the Government aimed to implement the recommendations in September 2003;

- (h) expenses directly related to all teaching activities provided to all children should be included in the inclusive fee. From last year onwards, operators needed to include such expenses in the inclusive fee;
- (i) from an educational point of view, a half-day programme would suffice for children aged 2 to 6. Lunch service was not regarded as an educational need and should thus be separated from the inclusive fee;
- (j) expenses for air-conditioning and birthday parties would be included in the inclusive fee. Subsidies under the KSS to CCC would normally increase, which would enable operators to lower the inclusive fee; and
- (k) the Government would report to SWAC on the final recommendations once they were ready.

4. The meeting concluded that the recommendations laid down in the consultation document were in the right direction to enhance early childhood services.

(2) Implications of 2001 Population Census on the Provision of Social Welfare Services [SWAC Paper No. 12/02]

5. The paper assessed the implications of the summary results of the 2001 Population Census available so far and sought Members' views on the planning and provision of social welfare services. The key findings, which would have a significant impact on the planning of social welfare services, were –

- (a) aging population : social welfare services had to address the needs of the new young-olds who were better educated and financially equipped, and the old-olds who would inevitably require residential care to meet frailty needs;
- (b) shrinking child population : it had led to a lower utilization in early childhood services. Aided child care centres, for example, only had 88% utilization rate in 2001, as compared with 98% in 1998;
- (c) increase in never-married population : together with the shrinking child population, more services would be required to cater for the care needs of an increasing number of single elders; and

- (d) increase in divorces/separations : more children would be brought up in broken families and reinforcement of services to families and single-parents would be required.

6. Members made the following comments –

- (a) there was concern about the shrinking child population;
- (b) the shrinking child population would unavoidably lead to under-utilization of children/youth services. And youth welfare services would have to be integrated with other welfare services in the long term;
- (c) child care centres and schools should be flexibly converted into homes for the aged in future to cater for the increasing needs arising from the aging population;
- (d) there were more and more people earning less income than before and a growing disparity between the rich and the poor;
- (e) it was essential to look at the workforce projection and detect the trend of unemployment, in order to plan for social services for the unemployed;
- (f) social needs assessments should be conducted for different groups of people, such as never-married people, single-parent families and children aged 0 to 3;
- (g) the following additional information should be provided for the planning of social welfare services –
- the profile of never-married population, especially females in the 40-44 age group, including their socio-economic background and education level;
 - detailed information regarding the population groups in the income brackets of the bottom 30% household income in real terms;
 - the profile of the soon-to-be olds, including their health status and education level;
 - the profile of disabled population, including their age and geographical distribution;
 - the profile of unemployed population, including their age and geographical distribution;

- social capital assessment including participation rate in voluntary work and other community activities;
- (h) the Government departments should explore adopting a unified district boundary in order to facilitate research and analysis;
 - (i) frontline social workers might not be able to cope with rapid changes and challenges arising from various new projects and programmes adopting district-based and integrated approach;
 - (j) more emphasis should be placed on prevention work; and
 - (k) a brainstorming and detailed discussion session on the implications of the population projections on the planning of social welfare services should be organized.

7. The Government made the following response –

- (a) the Census figures had shown an overall increase in income in real terms, though there was a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor;
- (b) SWD would liaise with C&SD to see if they could provide the information requested by Members. Members' views on data collection and surveys to assist the planning process of social welfare services were generally supported;
- (c) Social workers needed to possess the necessary skills to cope with the challenges under the changing social environment and new mode of subvention. The Advisory Committee on Social Work Training and Manpower Planning would look into the issue on “Training and Development for Social Workers in an Era of Changes”;
- (d) The Government was already striking a balance between preventive and remedial work;

Members' proposal to have a brainstorming and detailed discussion session on this topic was agreed, when further analysis on the data from the population projections and thematic reports were completed.

8. The meeting concluded that the paper provided useful information for the planning of social welfare services. And SWAC would have a detailed discussion session when further information was available.

Health and Welfare Bureau

May 2002