

**Minutes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 27 June 2002 (Thursday)**

Present

Mr Peter Wong Hong-yuen, GBS, JP	(Chairman)
Dr the Hon Law Chi-kwong, JP	
Dr Ng Yau-yung	
Miss Deborah Wan Lai-yau, JP	
Dr Leung Cho-bun	
Mr Poon Huen-wai	
Professor Diana Mak Ping-see	
Mr Wan Chi-keung, JP	
Mrs Cheung Ang Siew-mei	
Mr Keith Lam Hon-keung, JP	
Mr Wilfred Wong Ying-wai	
Miss Jessie Yu Sau-chu	
Ms Tsang Yin-mei	(Secretary)

In Attendance

Health and Welfare Bureau (HWB)

Mr Robin Gill, JP	Deputy Secretary for Health and Welfare
Miss Diane Wong	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health and Welfare

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

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

(For item 1 and 2)

Mr Fung Pak-yan	Assistant Director (Family and Child Welfare), SWD
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(For item 3)

Mrs Anna Mak	Chief Social Work Officer (Staff Development and Training), SWD
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(1) Strategies and Measures to Prevent and Tackle Family Violence

[SWAC Paper No. 13/02]

The paper informed Members of the existing strategy and measures presently in place to prevent and tackle family violence. In response to the rising trend of family problems, SWD had adopted a three-pronged approach, together with multi-disciplinary collaboration efforts, to strengthen support for families and to provide for a more responsive and targeted assistance. The three-pronged approach was (i) at the primary level, strengthening preventive work through publicity, education, empowerment and early identification; (ii) at the secondary level, providing a full range of support services from developmental programmes to intensive counselling; and (iii) at the tertiary level, establishing specialized services to provide crisis intervention.

2. Members made the following comments -

- (a) there was concern about the tools provided to frontline workers in assessing people's problems;
- (b) the Police should consider one of their prime roles as ensuring the safety of the public and they should be more ready to make referrals to the welfare sector, having due regard to the requirements of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (PDPO);
- (c) welfare needs should be clearly defined for the Police so that they knew when to refer cases to the appropriate authorities;
- (d) there was concern about whether SWD could provide social services in advance to new towns at the early stage, to prevent and tackle social problems;
- (e) needy people usually did not know where to seek help. SWD should strengthen the publicity for family services;
- (f) SWD could consider operating an experimental project to coordinate all service providers in a particular community or district. Research should be conducted on the effectiveness of the project;
- (g) further studies would be required to look into the problem of child abuse victims aged 6-14, who were most at risk. Other studies to explore how to help children with their learning and how to help parents bring up their children should be conducted;
- (h) collaboration between different government departments was necessary for better planning of facilities so that more opportunities could be provided for children to ensure their healthy development;
- (i) there was concern about whether elder abuse was included in the scope of family violence; and
- (j) there was concern about whether there was detailed information regarding the length of residence of abusers in Hong Kong.

3. The Government's responses included -

- (a) SWD would work out referral guidelines and referral forms with the Police;
- (b) social workers in Integrated Family Service Centres would use client assessment forms to assess people's needs. Family and Child Protective Service Units and Clinical Psychology Units of SWD were also developing assessment tools to help frontline workers assess the risks of family violence. In commissioning tertiary institutes, to conduct studies including the profile of abusers, the opportunity could also be taken to develop assessment tools;
- (c) SWD was seeking advice from the Privacy Commissioner on the possibility of obtaining exemptions from the PDPO for other parties, e.g. school teachers to make referrals to SWD or NGOs, even without the consent of the persons concerned;
- (d) the task of identifying people in need should not be restricted to public officers. Members of the community should be encouraged to help people in need and to refer them for assistance;
- (e) social welfare service planning for new towns was no longer based on the size of the population to be served. SWD exercised flexibility and provided services through phased implementation to meet the needs of people already living in new towns;
- (f) to build up a strong network to help those in need, the Steering Committee on Volunteer Movement, with the involvement of the NGO sector and local organizations would launch a territory-wide "Campaign Evergreen" 『傳心傳義』計劃 in July 2002. Service units of participating agencies would be identified by a logo to signify that it was a 'help point';
- (g) a domestic violence section headed by a Chief Social Work Officer had been set up in SWD to handle all issues related to family violence, including elder abuse; and
- (h) statistics captured in the Child Protection Registry did not show that new arrivals (with 7 years or less of residence) were more prone to abuse their children. The current Central Information System on Battered Spouse cases had not captured statistics on the batterer's period of stay in Hong Kong. However, the research to be conducted which covered the profile of the batterers would help to throw light on this issue.

4. The meeting concluded that SWD should continue with its efforts to prevent and tackle the problems of family violence.

(2) Progress Report on the "Three-year Action Plan to Help Street Sleepers" [SWAC Paper No. 14/02]

5. The paper informed Member of the progress of the three-year Action Plan to help street sleepers and the preliminary assessment of the effectiveness of the Action Plan. The Action Plan was composed of three key elements: (i) midnight outreaching and other integrated supportive

services; (ii) an emergency shelter in Wan Chai run by St. James' Settlement; and (iii) an evaluative research conducted by the City University of Hong Kong to assess the effectiveness of the services (i) and (ii) as well as the existing services in tackling the street sleeper problem.

6. Members made the following points -

- (a) there was concern about the handling of non-active street sleeper cases;
- (b) there was concern about the reasons for differences in service effectiveness amongst the three NGOs;
- (c) there was concern about whether there were child street sleepers and street sleeping families;
- (d) there was concern about how the successful housing placement rate was calculated, as some street sleepers might move out from the hostel after a short while, due to adjustment problems;
- (e) psychiatrists should be involved in conducting night outreaching visits on a voluntary basis to the hardcore cases, amongst whom most had mental problems;
- (f) there should be a prevention plan for street sleepers with mild mental problems, to prevent their situation worsening;
- (g) NGOs should think about their role in tackling street sleeper problems in their respective districts. NGOs should also consider street sleepers as a priority target and flexibly deploy resources to assist them; and
- (h) the Government could prescribe certain locations for street sleeping, so as to minimize nuisance to the public.

7. The Government made the following responses -

- (a) many street sleepers were reluctant to receive help. Despite this, social workers would continue to use different approaches to try to motivate them to leave from streets;
- (b) service effectiveness depended on the three NGOs' coverage and resources available to help street sleepers. As such, the three NGOs had differing levels of effectiveness in different areas. However, all three NGOs had achieved more than the requirements originally set out by SWD;
- (c) child street sleepers were rare and there were no indications that families were sleeping on the street;
- (d) SWD and CityU did not have figures on the relapse rate, but information from NGOs reflected that there were very few of these. SWD would look into the matter; and
- (e) there were practical problems of arranging outreaching psychiatric assessments

to be made in the streets. SWD worked with the Hospital Authority to provide an outreach psychiatric service to those street sleepers staying in a sheltered environment.

8. The meeting concluded that the street sleeper problem was a complex issue and particular efforts were required to deal with the unmotivated and hardcore cases.

**(3) Social Work Manpower Planning System Report No.14
[SWAC Paper No. 15/02]**

9. This paper informed Members of the updated manpower projections for the period from 2001/02 to 2005/06 and the views and recommendations of the Joint Committee on Social Work Manpower Planning (JCSWMP) on manpower projections. As the demand for and the wastage of social work personnel varied from year to year, the projections were for indicative purposes only and were subject to variation. The accuracy was further complicated by the evolving changes in staffing requirements and structures in the welfare sector under the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) environment.

10. Members made the following comments -

(a) better understanding was necessary on the wastage figure and the reasons why the figure was relatively high given the current high unemployment environment;

(b) information on the manpower projection should only be given to the training institutions for reference purposes in future;

(c) there was a need to revisit the objectives of the manpower planning exercise, especially when LSG was now the prevailing subvention mode, many services were delivered on a project basis and the needs of society had become more complicated. It would be difficult for NGOs to estimate the number and rank of social workers required in future. And, the system involved substantial manpower resources to collect and process the data. It was essential to critically review its continuance;

(d) more emphasis should be placed on the content of social work training programmes. It was not important to monitor the number of social work graduates entering into the profession, since the training should be regarded as a kind of general education rather than vocational training, and social work graduates could choose to enter other professions;

(e) after the introduction of the LSG, the Polytechnic University no longer relied on information contained in the Report. The University of Hong Kong admitted students according to the quality of and demand from students;

(f) a more effective system was essential if only to send a warning signal to the Administration, in case of imminent manpower shortage;

(g) representatives from the training institutions should be involved in the JCSWMP to look into the manpower projection issue more thoroughly; and

(h) SWAC should consider advising the Government on whether sub-degree

programmes should be self-financing as recommended in the Report on the Higher Education Review.

11. The Government responded that there should be a fundamental rethink of the entire manpower projection system and an assessment should be made on the type of information which could be collected, and its accuracy and usefulness to the exercise. The Advisory Committee on Social Work Training and Manpower Planning (ACSWTMP) and the JCSWMP should look into the issue.

12. The meeting concluded that ACSWTMP and JCSWMP should critically review the current manpower projection system so that valid information could be provided to stakeholders for planning purposes.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
July 2002