

Minutes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 27 February 2003 (Thursday)

Present

Mr Wilfred Wong Ying-wai (Chairman)

Ms Vivien Chan

Mrs Cheung Ang Siew-mei

Mr Chow Chun-kay, Stephen

Ms Christine Fang Meng-sang

Mr Keith Lam Hon-keung

Mr Wilfred Lee Chee-wah

Dr Leung Cho-bun

Mrs Mary Leung Ling Tien-wei

Professor Diana Mak Ping-see

Mr Poon Huen-wai

Mr Stephen Yau How-boa

Ms Jessie Yu Sau-chu

Miss Katharine Choi (Secretary)

In Attendance

Elderly Commission

Mrs Peggy Lam

Mr Peter Wong Hong-yuen

Ms Anita Wong Yiu-ming

Rehabilitation Advisory Committee

Dr Raymond Wu Wai-yung

Mr Chong Chan-yau

Ms Wong Kwai-wan

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB)

Mrs Carrie Yau	Permanent Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
Mr Robin Gill	Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Welfare)
Miss Diane Wong	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Welfare)
Mr Stephen Pang	Commissioner for Rehabilitation
Mr Tommy Lai	Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Rehabilitation)
Ms Rainbow Chan	Senior Executive Officer (Elderly Services)

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Mrs Carrie Lam	Director of Social Welfare
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(For item 1)

Mr Chris Wardlaw	Deputy Secretary for Education and Manpower
Mr Ching Wai-hung	Senior Education Officer (Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services), Education and Manpower Bureau
Mr Fung Pak-yan	Assistant Director (Family and Child Welfare), SWD
Mr Peter Ng	Chief Social Work Officer (Family and Child Welfare), SWD
Mr Kenneth Chan	Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Welfare) 1

(For item 2)

Mr Patrick Nip	Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services)
Mrs Brenda Fung	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services)2
Mr Paul Wong	Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services)4

(1) Progress on the Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services: Way Forward for Harmonisation of Kindergartens and Child Care Centres (SWAC Paper No. 02/03)

Members noted the consultation exercise held between April and July 2002 and were briefed on the revised recommendations by the Working Party on Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services.

2. Members suggested, and the Administration concurred that the suggestion to merge the two regulatory systems in respect of kindergartens (KGs) and child care centres (CCCs), could be considered as a long-term goal. While there were views that the staff-children level could be reduced, the Administration considered that the current proposed ratios were appropriate, and indicated that the operators were free to adopt a ratio above the statutory minimum. As regards some enquiries on the financial assistance for the parents, the Administration considered that the levels of assistance under the Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme were reasonable. In addition, taking account of the views expressed by the public, the Administration had proposed modifications to the fee assistance arrangements. Members were also assured that the existing para-medical support services would also cover additional Integrated Programme places.

3. The meeting generally endorsed the proposed way forward for the harmonization of KGs and CCCs, as recommended by the Working Party on Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services.

(2) The Way Forward for the Social Security System

(SWAC Paper No. 03/03)

4. Members were briefed on issues related to the rate adjustment arrangements for the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Schemes, to be implemented in phases from 2003 onwards. Members were also informed of the intensified support for self-reliance measures to be introduced, as well as the welfare-related policy recommendations of the Report of the Task Force on Population Policy.

5. Major comments of Members included:

(a) many Members supported the downward adjustment of the CSSA/SSA payment rates;

(b) there were also views that social security payments for the disabled and the elderly should not be reduced. A Member also regarded that the rate of reduction was too steep and was implemented with too short a notice. Some Members suggested that not enough consideration had been given to the impact of the rate adjustment to recipients. There were suggestions that those recipients who had difficulties in living with the reduced rate, should be provided with additional assistance;

(c) as regards the adjustment mechanism, there were opinions that it should be based on the objective of meeting the basic and essential needs of the disadvantaged;

(d) the initiatives to promote the self-reliance of able-bodied CSSA recipients were generally supported, and some Members considered that the social security system should build in incentives for motivating and equipping recipients to move towards self-reliance. A Member opined that the self-reliance initiatives would achieve more, if participants could be engaged in decent and sustainable employment;

(e) there were suggestions that the ongoing review on the social security scheme, should explore the possible expansion of financial sources to support the system;

(f) a Member supported the suggestion to raise the residence requirements for entitlement to CSSA, from one to seven years; and

(g) there were views that the welfare-related advisory bodies should be invited to give their views on the concrete rate adjustment proposals, prior to their introduction.

6. The Chairman concluded that the various sectors in the community should work together to overcome the adverse economic environment and the challenges which arose particularly, for the disadvantaged. He noted that SWAC and RAC had been consulted on the general direction of future rate adjustments in January 2003,

and considered it appropriate if in future, SWAC' s views could be sought on the detailed adjustment arrangements, before they were announced publicly. He looked forward to future dialogue with the Administration, on the ongoing social security review.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

March 2003