

Minutes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 7 February 2005

Present

Mr Wilfred Wong Ying-wai (Chairman)

Mrs Cheung Ang Siew-mei

Dr Miranda Chung Chan Lai-foon

Ms Christine Fang Meng-sang

Mr Quentin Fong King-sang

Mr Herman Hui Chung-shing

Dr Benjamin Lai Sau-shun

Mr Keith Lam Hon-keung

Dr Leung Cho-bun

Mr Vincent Lo Wing-sang

Prof Diana Mak Ping-see

Mr Aaron Wan Chi-keung

Ms Marina Wong Yu-pok

Mr Silva Yeung Tak-wah

Miss Jessie Yu Sau-chu

Ms Wendy Cheung (Secretary)

In Attendance

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB)

Ms Linda Lai	Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Family and Women)
Mr Freely Cheng	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Family)
Mr Eugene Fung	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Elderly Services) 1
Mrs Brenda Fung	Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Elderly Services) 2
Mr Gavin Kwai	Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare & Food (Family) 1

Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB)

Ms Jane Cheng	Principal Education Officer (Quality Assurance)
Mr Chan Hung-to	Senior Education Officer (Harmonization of Pre-primary Services)

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Mr Paul Tang	Director of Social Welfare
Mrs Agnes Allcock	Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)
Mr Fung Pak-yan	Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Family and Child Welfare)
Mr Peter Ng	Chief Social Work Officer (Family and Child Welfare) 2
Ms May Fung	Social Work Officer (Child Care Centre)

Absent with Apologies

Dr Stephen Chow Chun-kay

Mr Tung Chi-fat

Ms Lisa Yip Sau-wah

(1) Briefing on the new initiatives for the welfare sector in the Policy Address and Policy Agenda 2005 (paper for the Legislative Council sent to Members on 13 January 2005)

Members noted that a number of new initiatives for the welfare policy area were announced by the Chief Executive at the Policy Address on 13 January 2005, which mainly involved measures to alleviate poverty. A paper on the new initiatives prepared for the Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services was used as the basis of discussions.

2. Members made the following comments :

- (a) the review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) scheme should not only cover three specific areas proposed by the Government, but also other areas that the CSSA Working Group considered to be essential such as the abuse of CSSA and the 7-year residency requirement;
- (b) the Government should consider transferring the employment assistance under CSSA for able-bodied recipients to the Education and Manpower Bureau and providing only time-limited assistance to them;
- (c) the shortage of health care workers, especially nurses, in nursing homes and rehabilitation hostels should be looked into;
- (d) whether the amount of new resources to be allocated for implementing the new policy initiatives relating to youth and people with disabilities could be disclosed at this stage; and
- (e) apart from mainstream services, more targeted services should also be provided to children of ethnic minorities.

3. The Government made the following response :

- (a) while it was more practical for the Government to focus on the review of three specific programmes, if the SWAC Working Group on CSSA considered that there were other critical areas that would impinge on the success of CSSA, such issues might be raised. But, the Government considered that the abuse of CSSA was an operational rather than a policy matter and Social Welfare Department (SWD) all along had been conducting ongoing review of the fraud investigation mechanism. The 7-year residency requirement was related to the overall population policy and should not be a major point of consideration for the review of CSSA;
- (b) the proposal of transferring CSSA for the able-bodied to another bureau was related to the issue of poverty and would require a high-level collaboration and interfacing within the Government. This could be tackled in the Commission on Poverty to be set up shortly;
- (c) shortage of nurses should be alleviated with projected improvement in manpower supply in the few years ahead. To solve the problem in the interim, service operators were encouraged to hire part-time nurses. Other initiatives, such as continued training for nurses working in the welfare sector, availability of part-time nurses from those retired from the Hospital Authority and speeding up of the registration of nurses from the Mainland should also be able to help;
- (d) the exact provisions for the new welfare initiatives such as those for youth and people with disabilities could only be finalised after the announcement of the Budget Speech for 2005-06. SWD would discuss with the welfare sector on the details of provisions afterwards. In general, additional resources would be provided to enhance existing services; and
- (e) As the Government's intention was to integrate people of different background into the community for social harmony instead of singling out a particular group, there was no special mainstream programme for ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, some projects under the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund did cater for the special needs of the ethnic minorities at district levels. Furthermore, for districts with more ethnic minorities, short-term funding from Home Affairs Bureau was also available for providing more targeted services.

(2) Implementation of the Harmonisation of Pre-primary Services (SWAC Paper No. 2/05)

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4. The harmonisation proposals were endorsed by SWAC at its meeting on 27 February 2003 (SWAC Paper No. 02/03). SWD briefed members of the latest position and the plan to complete the legislative amendments by July 2005 for implementation in the 2005/06 school year.

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5. Members made the following comments :

- (a) whether the new mechanism for determining financial assistance after the harmonization of pre-primary services would impact on the service providers and needy parents; and
- (b) whether there was any vision behind the proposal and how the performance of child care centres converted into kindergartens would be measured.

6. The Government made the following responses :

- (a) for assistance to service providers, the existing 5% direct subsidy for child care centres would be replaced by the Kindergarten Subsidy Scheme (KSS) under which the rate of subsidy would depend on the number of students enrolled. In most cases, assistance to service providers should not be worse-off upon harmonization unless the enrolment of the centre was very low;
- (b) for assistance to parents, the Child Care Centre Fee Assistance Scheme (CCCFAS), which provided fee assistance on a sliding scale, would be replaced by the enhanced Kindergarten Fee Remission Scheme (KGFRS) which provided only three levels of assistance (100%, 75% and 50% remission). Although the amount of assistance under the new arrangement might be lower in some situation, the level of assistance remained reasonable, e.g. a 4-person household earning \$8,055 a month or below would be eligible for full remission under KGFRS. Besides, the assistance arrangement for existing CCCFAS recipients would be grandfathered; and
- (c) the harmonization exercise was not just an administrative measure, but with the overriding

vision to provide quality edu-care to children. On performance indicators, the EMB had since 2000 started to develop such indicators for kindergartens covering a wide range of areas, which included management and organization, learning and teaching, support to children and school culture, and children' s development.

7. With the above remarks, the Meeting endorsed the harmonization proposals and the proposed legislative amendments

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

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