

**Minutes of the  
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting**

**7 December 2023 (Thursday) at 3:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 2, G/F, Central Government Offices**

**Present**

Mr Lester Garson HUANG (Chairman)  
Dr CHEUNG Sze-wing  
Mr Frederick LAI Wing-hoi  
Dr LAM James Joseph  
Ms Alice LAU Oi-sze  
Ms Anthea LEE Shuk-wai  
Prof Petrus NG Yat-nam  
Mr Francis NGAI Wah-sing  
Dr PAN Pey-chyou  
Dr Ricky SZETO Wing-fu  
Dr Rizwan ULLAH  
Mr John WONG Chung  
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
Mr David LEUNG	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1
Mr CHONG Wing-wun	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2
Ms Vega WONG	Commissioner for Rehabilitation
Mr Tony YIP	Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare)1 (PAS(W)1)

Ms Karen TING                      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

Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency (WFSFAA)

Mr Andrew TSANG                      Head, Working Family and Student Financial  
Assistance Agency

**Absent with apologies**

Prof BAI Xue

Mr Andy HO Wing-cheong

Dr Wingco LO Kam-wing

Ms Rebecca TSAI Ching-yu

Ms Eva WONG Ching-hung

Prof Frances WONG Kam-yuet

**Item 1: Welfare-related Initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2023  
Policy Address**

At the Chairman's invitation, the Government representative briefed Members on the paper. The Chairman then invited Members to offer comments.

2. Noting that a wide variety of new measures covering different welfare aspects were introduced in the 2023 Policy Address, Members expressed great appreciation to the Government's effort, and raised the following suggestions / questions –

(a) *Caring for the Elderly*

*Cross-boundary residential care services for the elderly*

- i. There were only limited places under the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong (the GDRCS Scheme), and the two existing operators of residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) under the GDRCS Scheme were both non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The Government should invite private RCHEs operators in Hong Kong and Mainland cities in the Greater Bay Area (GBA) to join the GDRCS Scheme so as to provide more choices to elderly persons retiring in these Mainland cities.
- ii. Some Hong Kong elderly might reside in Mainland cities other than those in the Guangdong Province. The Government should expand the GDRCS Scheme such that elderly who resided in other Mainland cities could enjoy similar support.
- iii. Most elderly who retired in the Mainland had healthcare and medical concerns. The Government might consider extending the coverage of the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (EHVS) to Grade 3A Hospitals in GBA Mainland cities, and explore the feasibility of allowing elderly living across the border to pay health insurance with their vouchers, thereby enabling them to better utilise outpatient services in the Mainland cities where they lived.
- iv. In light of the various challenges (ie. legal, medical) faced by elderly retired in the Mainland, the Government should set up integrated cross-border service centers to facilitate their integration into the Mainland. The needs of the newly retired people who intended to settle down in the Mainland should also not be overlooked.

*Local residential care services for the elderly*

- v. The quality of services varied greatly among RCHEs in Hong Kong. The Government should formulate measures and policies, such as setting up a grading system/monitoring mechanism, so as to improve the overall service quality of RCHEs.

- vi. Since most RCHEs in Hong Kong only provided basic care and medical services, the needs of middle class elderly might be overlooked.
- vii. Noting the increasing demand for elderly services in Hong Kong and high costs in meeting the demand, the Government should consider providing health insurance subsidies to elderly.

#### *Elder Academy (EA) Scheme*

- viii. The Government should consider funding courses outside schools under the EA Scheme so as to provide more diversified continuous learning opportunities for the elderly.

#### *Gerontechnology*

- ix. Members appreciated the financial commitment of the Government to inject an additional \$1 billion into the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care (I&T Fund) in 2024-25. The Government should further consider assessing the product liabilities of technology products such that the Fund could achieve the purpose of improving life quality of elderly service users.

#### *Policy planning*

- x. The care needs of elderly could vary a lot given their education background and age, and they would evolve over time. It was therefore necessary for the Government to conduct in-depth research before formulating elderly-related policies so that they could meet the needs of the society in the long run.
- xi. The Government should make reference to the practice in some countries where the government set up designated training institutions to train elderly care and nursing talents. Doing so might help increase manpower supply at different levels of care services, enhance service quality and foster professionalism within the sector.

(b) Family & Child Welfare

*Child Development Fund (CDF)*

- i. Some Members enquired about the latest progress of CDF and whether the Government would resume applications for the 10<sup>th</sup> batch of NGO-led projects under CDF.
- ii. CDF could collaborate and interface with the Strive and Rise (S&R) Programme to achieve synergy, i.e. CDF could help cultivate children's personal development in the primary school stage while the S&R Programme could support career development of secondary school students.

*Mental health*

- iii. The Government should introduce more preventive services and measures to enhance students' problem-solving skills so as to help them overcome adversity in the future.
- iv. The Government should scale up the training of social workers, thereby raising their capacity in handling complicated cases in youth mental issues for early identification of students with mental health needs and early intervention.
- v. The Government should extend the After School Care Programme (ASCP) to cater not only for primary school students but also junior secondary school students. This could ensure proper care for participating students and alleviate the pressure of their working parents.

*Child protection*

- vi. To prepare for the implementation of the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Bill, the Government should provide early training to social workers to enable early identification and timely intervention, as well as reduce over-reporting.

(c) The Working Family Allowance (WFA) Scheme

The WFA Scheme was generally effective in providing financial relief to low-income households during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the current application requirements might be complicated for some applicants. The Government should provide assistance during the application process, in particular for ethnic minorities (EM).

(d) Targeted Poverty Alleviation

- i. A Member was concerned that only one Community Living Room (CLR), which offered additional living spaces for sub-divided units (SDU) households, might not be enough for the community. Given that some NGOs had been providing similar CLR services, the Government should take advantage of their experience and engage them in the project so as to quickly scale up the service provision.
- ii. In terms of the overall strategy of targeted poverty alleviation, a Member was of the view that the policy direction should put more focus on lifting people out of poverty.

(e) Dedicated Fund

The newly proposed Dedicated Fund of \$500 million would help NGOs operating subvented welfare services meet their development needs of staff training and system enhancement. Members were eager to know the implementation details as well as timeframe.

(f) Ethnic Minorities

- i. In light of the challenges faced by the EM community, the Government should open more Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) in areas with higher concentration of EM households so as to better cater for their specific needs.
- ii. The outreaching teams for EM and the District Councillors could play a better role in identifying the marginalised EM households and timely refer them for receiving appropriate services.

(g) Resource Coordination

- i. To benefit from the development of Northern Metropolis, early planning and coordination of welfare resources would be important. The Government should consider how different existing welfare resources and services could better connect and interface with each other for synergy and optimal use of resources.
- ii. The Government should enhance information exchange among different service units to facilitate identification of needs and service referral.

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

(a) Caring for the Elderly

- i. The Government was well aware of the growing demand of Hong Kong elderly to retire in Mainland cities and was progressively enhancing cross-boundary residential care services for them. Specifically, the Government had begun to invite private operators of RCHEs to join the GDRCS Scheme. At the same time, the Government was also planning to expand the coverage of EHVS progressively to more medical organisations in the GBA Mainland cities so that eligible elderly could receive subsidised medical services even across the boundary.
- ii. Local RCHEs were required to comply with a set of statutory requirements to ensure they met acceptable service standards. The Government would also keep abreast of service developments and meet public expectations by updating relevant requirements, e.g. increasing the minimum area of floor space per resident and manpower ratio in phases through legislative amendments.
- iii. Foreseeing that there would be more elderly in the upcoming decades, the Government would continue to promote “aging in place”, supplemented by institutional care for those in need of such support. To provide the elderly with more service choices and enhance the quality of elderly services, the Government had introduced the Community Care Service Voucher Scheme and Residential

Care Service Voucher Scheme to allow eligible elders to exercise their choice under a “money-follows-the-user” subsidy mode. These schemes would also promote competition in the market and drive quality improvements.

- iv. Under the EA Scheme, NGOs partnered with schools to offer courses for the elderly to take advantage of the learning facilities and resources available at schools. The large number of participating schools also offered wider choices in familiar neighbourhoods. The Government welcomed more NGOs to join the Scheme.
- v. Under the I&T Fund, SWD had all along attached great importance to product safety. NGOs/service units which applied for funding were required to provide valid certifications in their applications to prove that the technology products they sought to procure were in compliance with all necessary statutory requirements and safety standards.
- vi. The Government noted the acute manpower shortage in the social welfare sector at different levels, including supervisory, professional and frontline staff. To address this problem, the Government had been taking forward various measures, such as the “Special Scheme to Import Care Workers for Residential Care Homes”, the “Enrolled Nurse Training Programme for the Welfare Sector” to provide subsidised nursing training places to students, who were required to work in the sector for a specified number of years upon graduation, and the commencement of the Review of Manpower for Healthcare Services in Residential Care Homes to establish professional standards and a career progression path, with a view to attracting more locals to join the residential care sector and retaining serving staff.

(b) Family & Child Welfare

- i. Pending completion of an overall review of CDF by SWD in December 2023, the Steering Committee on CDF had decided to withhold the recruitment of participants for the next batch (10<sup>th</sup> batch) of School-based Projects and NGO-led Projects. The purpose of the review was to identify improvement areas and foster synergy between CDF and

S&R Programme. Subject to the review outcome, SWD aimed to launch the 10<sup>th</sup> batch of projects in the first quarter of 2024.

- ii. The Government had rolled out a set of “preventive measures” to early identify youth at risk and provide timely support to them, so as to proactively steer marginal youth back onto the right course.

(c) The WFA Scheme

- i. The WFSFAA provided assistance to WFA applicants in filing applications through various channels, including a dedicated hotline, a chatbot which provided round-the-clock enquiry service on WFSFAA’s website, as well as form-filling workshops co-organised from time to time with NGOs. Each applicant would be given a unique application number for getting quick updates on the application progress from the hotline and the chatbot.
- ii. WFA applicants with genuine difficulties in producing proof of household income or working hours, such as self-employed individuals, could submit a self-declaration statement. Tools and procedures were in place to guard against misinformation in applications.

(d) Targeted Poverty Alleviation

- i. The CLR Scheme was launched by the Commission on Poverty and thrived on collaboration among the Government, the business sector and the community. Projects which met the requirements (in terms of business sponsorship for rental and refurbishment, size of venue and duration of availability, operating hours, etc) could apply for branding as CLR under the Scheme and would receive official recognition. The Government expected more CLR to commence operation in 2024.
- ii. In addition to the CLR Scheme, the Government was also driving other targeted poverty alleviation initiatives to alleviate the plight of the most needy. For instance, the S&R Programme provided focused support for secondary students from underprivileged families, particularly those living in SDUs, to lift them out of intergenerational poverty,

while the ASCP allowed primary students in need to stay at school after normal school hours for care and learning support, thereby enabling their parents to go to work. Such support would in particular benefit single parent households.

(e) Dedicated Fund

- i. The proposed Dedicated Fund for NGOs would be mainly used on (i) meeting their development needs for staff training, and (ii) system enhancement, particularly in enhancing professional knowledge of their staff and strengthening awareness of inter-disciplinary collaboration, as well as promoting the application of information technology.
- ii. In defining the scope of the Fund, the Government would make appropriate reference to past experience and gather views from stakeholders. The objective was to make the best use of resources to foster the development of welfare sector.

(f) Ethnic Minorities

- i. Considering the unique needs of EMs, the Government had all along been reviewing EM policies through the angle of social integration in different areas including education, labour, and social welfare. The Steering Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration was formed in 2018 to enhance cross-bureau/inter-departmental co-ordination in supporting EMs.
- ii. From the welfare perspective, we focused on connecting the EMs in need with mainstream welfare services. We also sought to engage more EMs in service provision so that they could act as a bridge between the Government and the EM community, filling in gaps in communication and ensuring that the EM community had access to requisite welfare support. An example was the Ethnic Minority District Ambassador pilot scheme launched by SWD since 2020.

(g) *Resources Coordination*

- i. The current planning standards for various types of social welfare facilities were population-based, with some level of flexibility allowed for certain factors such as change in service demand resulting from demographic changes. In addition, as announced in the 2021 Policy Address, premises equivalent to about 5% of the total domestic gross floor area in suitable public housing projects would be reserved for welfare purposes.
- ii. The Government had been making continuous efforts in enhancing welfare services. Welfare expenditure had increased significantly over the years, accounting for over 20 percent of total government recurrent expenditure. At the same time, the Government also encouraged collaboration with the business sector and the wider community in directing resources to those most in need under the targeted poverty alleviation strategy.

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

**SWAC Secretariat**  
**January 2024**