

**Elderly Commission**  
**Minutes of the 37<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

Room 2005, Murray Building, Garden Road, Central

2:30 p.m., 4 May 2004 (Tuesday)

**Present:**

**Chairman**

The Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP

**Vice-Chairman**

Dr E K YEOH, JP

Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

**Members**

Prof Iris CHI, JP

Mrs LAM PEI Yu-dja, Peggy, GBS, JP

Mr WAN Man-yee, BBS, JP

Dr WU Wai-yung, Raymond, GBS, JP

Prof CHAN Cheung-ming, Alfred, JP

Mr LAI Kam-cheung, Michael, JP

Mr WONG Hong-yuen, Peter, GBS, JP

Dr NG Yau-yung

Dr LUM Shun-sui, Susie

Ms WONG Yiu-ming, Anita

Mr CHAN Iu-seng, Star, BBS

Dr LAM Ching-choi, JP

Mr TANG Kwok-wai, Paul, JP

Mr LAU Kai-hung, JP

Dr CHAN Wai-man, JP

Dr Daisy DAI

Director of Social Welfare

Representative of Director of Housing

Representative of Director of Health

Representative of Chief Executive,  
Hospital Authority

**Secretary**

Mrs Brenda FUNG

Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

**In Attendance:**

Ms L C WONG

Executive Director,  
Hong Kong Housing Society } In Attendance  
Senior Manager, } for Agenda  
Hong Kong Housing Society } Items 3 & 4

Mr Benny HUI

University of Hong Kong } In Attendance  
University of Hong Kong } for Agenda  
University of Hong Kong } Item 3

Dr Ernest CHUI

Dr Rebecca CHIU

Dr Lisanne KO

Mr YIU Kei-chung, Thomas, JP

Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mr NIP Tak-kuen, Patrick, JP

Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mr Eugene FUNG

Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mr FUNG Pak-yan

Assistant Director of Social Welfare, Social Welfare Department

Mrs Kathy NG

Assistant Director of Social Welfare, Social Welfare Department

Mrs YUK KWOK Lai-sum

Chief Social Work Officer, Social Welfare Department

Mr LAM Ka-tai

Chief Social Work Officer, Social Welfare Department

Ms LUNG Siu-kit

Chief Social Work Officer, Social Welfare Department

Mrs SO WONG Wei-yee

Chief Social Work Officer, Social Welfare Department

Mrs CHANG LAM Sook-yee

Senior Social Work Officer, Social Welfare Department

Dr LI Mun-pik, Teresa

Senior Medical and Health Officer, Department of Health

Dr CHAN Ching-nin, Clive

Senior Medical and Health Officer, Department of Health

Ms LOW Looi-looi

Senior Research Scientist, Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

Mr HUNG Leung-bun, John

Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mr HUEN Chi-wai, Freeman

Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mr WONG Chor-fung, David

Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Mr KWOK Fung-king

Chief Executive Officer, Health, Welfare and  
Food Bureau

Ms CHAN Oi-fun, Rainbow

Senior Executive Officer, Health, Welfare and  
Food Bureau

**Absent with Apologies:**

Secretary for Education and Manpower

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The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**Agenda Item 1: Confirmation of the Minutes of the 36<sup>th</sup> Meeting**

2. The Secretariat had received proposed amendments to the English version of the draft minutes of the last meeting, which were tabled at the meeting. The amended minutes were endorsed.

**Agenda Item 2: Matters Arising**

**Paragraphs 7 & 8 of the Minutes of the 36th Meeting**

**Assistance to Elderly Property Owners in Dilapidated Buildings**

3. The government's proposals to assist elderly property owners in dilapidated buildings would be discussed under Agenda Item 4.

**Paragraphs 9 to 14 of the Minutes of the 36th Meeting**

**Report on the Visit to Universities of the Third Age (U3A) in Australia**

4. The Task Group on Active Ageing would convene a meeting on 19 May 2004 to discuss this item, amongst others.

## **Paragraph 15 of the Minutes of the 36th Meeting**

### **Revamping of the Elderly Commission Web Site**

5. The Secretariat had started work on the revamping of the Elderly Commission (EC) web site.

### **Agenda Item 3: Presentation of the Report on “Comprehensive Study on the Housing Needs of the Elderly in Hong Kong”**

6. The Chairman said that the Executive Summary of the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS)’s report on “Comprehensive Study on the Housing Needs of the Elderly in Hong Kong” had been circulated to EC members earlier. As requested by EC, HKHS had arranged to brief EC Members on the report before the findings were made public.

7. Ms L C WONG, Executive Director of HKHS, told the meeting that HKHS had commissioned the University of Hong Kong to conduct the “Comprehensive Study on the Housing Needs of the Elderly in Hong Kong”. The findings would be useful reference for HKHS and various sectors in the community, including the government, private sector and NGOs, in the provision of housing and related services for elders in Hong Kong. The report would be submitted to HKHS’s Supervisory Board on 15 May for discussion. Proposals related to HKHS in the report would be forwarded to the relevant HKHS committees for deliberation, and HKHS stood ready to work with relevant parties to consider other proposals.

8. Dr Ernest CHUI of the University of Hong Kong pointed out that the research team, with its members comprising Prof Nelson CHOW, Prof Iris CHI, Dr Rebecca CHIU and Mr CHUNG Kim-wah, was an inter-tertiary institution collaboration. As Prof CHOW had other official commitment that day, Dr CHUI would give a PowerPoint presentation on

the findings and recommendations of the study report. He invited Members to note that the study had been conducted the year before and data was collected up to September that year.

9. Prof Iris CHI said that she had participated in the study in the capacity of a research team member. Dr LAM Ching-choi also indicated that he, being a HKHS member, was well aware of the progress of the study.

10. Members made the following comments:

- (1) Commended HKHS for being open-minded on the provision of housing and services to elders and willing to run pilot projects.
- (2) They shared the view in the report that presently the government had already provided a wide range of housing and community support services to the low-income elders, but there were not much services of this nature for the middle- and high-income elders. It was hoped that the government would tap community resources and make available more service choices to those elders.
- (3) They agreed to the recommendation in the report that a wider variety of quality housing products and services should be offered to elders. Government policies should be responsive to market demand, providing the elders with choices in suitable housing. The Jolly Place under the Senior Citizen Residences Scheme, for example, not only provided suitable accommodation for elders but was also designed to reduce the risk of home accidents.
- (4) Consumer education should be strengthened to help the elders make an informed choice.

- (5) Since a number of policy bureaux and departments were involved in providing housing and other services for elders, EC should assume the leading role and recommend the way forward regarding policy direction, such as how the existing structures of HKHS and the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA) could dovetail with the housing needs of elders.
- (6) In respect of housing and other services for elders, the government could also give private developers incentives, such as increasing the plot ratio, to encourage them to develop the “silver hair” market.
- (7) As regards assistance to elder owners living in dilapidated buildings, the study had found that there were over 5 000 elder owners in Hong Kong living in such buildings and their average monthly income was below \$2,000. The banking sector was not interested in providing these owners with reverse mortgage and the Urban Renewal Authority had no plans to acquire their properties. To assist these elder owners, HKHS might consider using its \$20 billion assets to acquire their properties by stages and then leasing the properties out after refurbishment. That could on the one hand help address the elder owners’ problem, and on the other hand, create a new market. HKHS, as a quasi-government organisation, could take on social as well as economic considerations.

11. Mr LAU Kai-hung, Deputy Director of Housing, pointed out that a few years ago HKHA had also commissioned the University of Hong Kong to conduct a study on the provision of elder housing. The recommended way forward, which included helping elders to age in place and introducing universal design to facilitate elders’ integration into the community, had now become the Housing Department (HD)’s main considerations in the

provision of housing for elders. As to offering more choices, the main service target of HD was the low-income group and the department had carried out a pilot Rent Allowance for Elderly Scheme. However, the response was not encouraging. Out of 1 000 quotas, only 600 were taken up by eligible applicants. Hence, HD was already phasing out the Scheme.

12. Dr CHAN Wai-man, Assistant Director of Health, supported the report's recommendation of setting up resource centres to enhance elders' understanding of home environment improvement. The Elderly Health Services of the Department of Health (DH) had over the past few years provided home assessment service to many elders whose needs could not be met by the Hospital Authority (HA), and HD had rendered its support by renovating homes according to the advice of occupational therapists. She suggested that HD could make use of the opportunity of regular building maintenance to introduce the concept of universal design by removing barriers, installing more handrails, etc. in order to reduce elder fall accidents which would result in bone fracture.

13. Ms L C WONG made the following responses:

- (1) She thanked Members for their support for the "Senior Citizen Residences Scheme" but stressed that its sustainability depended on two factors, namely finding suitable sites and continued premium exemption by the Government.
- (2) She clarified that the \$20 billion was HKHS's total assets, most of which were fixed assets including housing estates, shops, etc. The use of the assets would be guided by its Supervisory Board.
- (3) As to the ways to assist elder property owners in dilapidated buildings, HKHS would need to seek the advice of its Board.

14. Dr Ernest CHUI added that he was conducting a small-scale study on reverse mortgage and believed that preliminary findings of the study would be available in August.

[Dr Ernest CHUI, Dr Rebecca CHIU and Dr Lisanne KO left the meeting at this juncture.]

#### **Agenda Item 4: Assistance to Elderly Property Owners in Dilapidated Buildings**

(Information Paper EC/I/03-04)

15. Mr LAU Kai-hung introduced Information Paper EC/I/03-04. He said that when the measures mentioned in the paper were put in place, HD would produce information leaflets for wider publicity of these measures among elder property owners. HD would also report the results of these measures to EC in about six months' time. Mr LAU also drew Members' attention to the leaflet on the Building Safety Loan Scheme of the Buildings Department (BD) tabled at the meeting. He said that since the implementation of the scheme, BD had received applications from more than 6 800 households, but no statistics were collated specifically showing the amount of loans made to elders.

16. Members had the following views/supplementary remark:

- (1) The flexibility in HD's policy was welcomed as it allowed needy elder property owners to move into Housing for Senior Citizens as a transitional arrangement, pending the sale of their properties and handling of other related matters.
- (2) The transitional arrangements had their limitations and might discourage applications. For example, elder property owners' assets might exceed the ceiling set by HD after they had successfully sold their properties. It was also difficult to arrange elder property owners in urban districts to move into Housing for Senior Citizens in the same district.



- (3) The private and banking sectors were market oriented and would not have much interests in acquiring dilapidated buildings with limited resale prospects. It was hoped that organisations from the third sector, such as HKHS, would help solve the problem.
- (4) Rental value or recent sales records of properties of similar nature could provide some reference points for the valuation of old buildings.

17. In response to Members' enquiry on the registration of a charge against a property, Mr LAU Kai-hung believed that it might be attributable to the fact that the owners had not yet settled the arrears of building maintenance fees. The Building Safety Loan Scheme of the Buildings Department might help owners with financial difficulties in carrying out building maintenance works.

18. Ms L C WONG undertook to convey to HKHS members the comments of EC on the assistance for elder property owners in dilapidated buildings.

[Ms L C WONG and Mr Benny HUI left the meeting at this juncture.]

#### **Agenda Item 5: Update on Support for Vulnerable Elders**

(Discussion Paper EC/D/04-04)

19. Mr FUNG Pak-yan, Assistant Director of Social Welfare, briefed Members on Discussion Paper EC/D/04-04 with a PowerPoint presentation.

[The Hon TAM Yiu-chung left the meeting for an official commitment. The Vice-Chairman Dr E K YEOH then chaired the meeting.]

20. A Member provided supplementary information on “Live Life! Joint Project on Prevention of Elderly Suicide” (an information folder tabled at the meeting) and made the following observations:

- (1) The Social Welfare Department (SWD) should establish stronger links with the tertiary institutions to obtain more information on elderly suicide research, which would help the government formulate evidence-based policies.
- (2) The project generated many community activities to highlight the problem of elderly suicide to raise public awareness.
- (3) The three-tier collaboration approach was considered to be very effective and should be taken into account when mapping out the way forward. Under the three-tier approach, trained volunteers would give emotional and crisis support to elders, and refer suicidal or depressed elders to the second and third tier for counselling or medical follow-up.
- (4) The suicidal rate of elders dropped steadily or stabilised in the previous few years but started to go up again in 2003. The rise was thought to have been related to the outbreak of SARS but further studies were necessary before such view could be confirmed.

21. Other Members gave the following views:

- (1) With the ageing of the population, the problems of elderly suicide and abuse would get more serious. The government should consider devising targeted strategies and setting out work targets.

- (2) The government should make use of the research findings on elderly suicide and abuse and come up with targeted solutions and preventive measures for early intervention.
- (3) SWD should collect specific data conducive to the identification of factors (e.g. illness or depression) leading to elderly suicide. Analysis should be more thorough and comprehensive.
- (4) The relevant working group should also include elderly abuse in Residential Care Homes for the Elderly (RCHEs) in its studies. The government should also take this into account when formulating the accreditation system of the RCHEs.
- (5) In elderly suicide cases, statistics showed that there were more males than females; the suicidal rate was higher towards the end of the year; and those aged between 75 and 79 seemed to be in the high risk group. What were the reasons for such phenomena.
- (6) Elder abuse procedural guidelines, even though followed through conscientiously by frontline staff, would not eradicate elder abuse cases. Legislation should be introduced to make it compulsory for abusers to undergo counselling in order to produce a deterrent effect.
- (7) Monitoring, counselling and mutual help at the neighborhood level could be considered for the prevention of elderly abuse.

22. Mr Paul TANG, Director of Social Welfare, said that elderly suicide was a very complex issue involving cultural, economic and other factors. Basically, the present trend of elderly suicide should be analysed first and data be collected as evidence. Ongoing

collaboration and discussion with various professions should also be carried out. Only by so doing could practical solutions be identified and existing inadequacies be addressed.

23. Mr FUNG Pak-yan added as follows:

- (1) Regarding the question on elderly suicide statistics, the data were obtained from different information systems, namely the Coroner's Court and the Central Suicide Information System, and therefore a direct comparison was not feasible.
- (2) The Central Information System on Elder Abuse Cases only commenced operation in March 2004 and there had been no report of elders being abused by RCHE staff. Any professional including RCHE frontline staff and health care personnel could report to the Central Information System if they were aware of any elder abuse cases.
- (3) The government had commissioned the University of Hong Kong to conduct a study on the problems of child abuse and spouse battering, including the feasibility of subjecting abusers in family violence cases to mandatory counseling in Hong Kong.

24. Mr NIP Tak-kuen, Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food, added that the government had commissioned a multi-disciplinary research team to carry out "A Multi-Disciplinary Study on the Causes of Elderly Suicide in Hong Kong" and a report was released in 2002. The report had analysed both risk factors and prevention of elderly suicide. In order to have a clearer picture of how the risk factors developed into an act of elderly suicide, it was necessary to collect data systematically for analysis. The Central Information System had been set up for the purpose. He said that SWD presented the information from

the database at the meeting to update Members of the latest situation. He agreed that research and analysis were essential to the formulation of a set of more effective and evidence-based strategies.

25. The Vice-Chairman concluded that there were many studies on elderly suicide both locally and internationally and believed that some of the study findings would help develop targeted strategies. The Health, Welfare and Food Bureau would work with SWD, DH and HA on a long-term strategy and report to EC in due course.

[Mr Peter WONG, Mrs Peggy LAM and Mr LAU Kai-hung left the meeting when this Agenda Item was under discussion.]

#### **Agenda Item 6: Any Other Business**

26. The Vice-Chairman reported that the “Active and Healthy Ageing Progress Report (as at 4 May 2004)” was tabled for Members’ reference.

#### **Road Safety for Elderly Scavengers**

27. A Member was concerned about a recent press report that an elderly scavenger had been run over by a vehicle and killed when picking up scrap paperboard. He asked the government how the elderly scavengers could be assisted.

28. The Vice-Chairman said that he would look into the question raised by the Member. Mr Paul TANG pointed out that the government provided people who were unable to support themselves financially with a safety net to meet their basic and special needs. Dr CHAN Wai-man and Mrs Kathy NG, Assistant Director of Social Welfare, said that the World Health Day 2004 also covered road safety and DH and SWD would support the function by enhancing publicity on road safety for the elderly.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

29.            The Vice-Chairman asked Members to note that a special EC meeting would be held on 14 June 2004 (Monday) at 2:30 p.m. to discuss “Phasing out of homes for the aged and self-care hostel places” and the Draft Final Report on “The Pilot Project on Accreditation System for Residential Care Services for Elders in Hong Kong”.

### **Time of Adjournment**

30.            The meeting was adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

19 May 2004