

The minutes were confirmed on 16.4.2025 without amendment.

**Minutes of the First Meeting of
Social Welfare and Labour Committee
under Yuen Long District Council in 2025**

Date: 26 February 2025 (Wednesday)

Time: 2:30 p.m. to 4:35 p.m.

Venue: Conference Room, Yuen Long District Council, 13/F., Yuen Long Government Offices, 2 Kiu Lok Square, Yuen Long

Present

Chairman: Mr CHONG Kin-shing, MH, JP

Vice Chairman: Mr SZE TO Chun-hin

Members: Mr WONG Hiu-shan

Ms HO Hiu-man

Ms LAM Wai-ming

Mr TSUI Wai-ngoi

Ms YUEN Man-yee, MH

Ms MA Shuk-yin

Mr CHEUNG Wai-sum

Mr LEUNG Ming-kin

Mr CHAN Ka-fai

Ms CHAN Yin-kwan, Yankie

Mr WONG Siu-chung

Ms WONG Wai-ling

Mr WONG Wing-ho, Allan

Ms LAI Yuet-kwan, Fennie

Mr TAM Tak-hoi

Co-opted Members: Mr WU Kin-keung, Calvin

Ms TAM Kam-lin, MH

Secretary: Ms CHUNG Shuk-man, Winky Executive Officer (District Council)
7, Yuen Long District Office

In Attendance

Mr LAU Hiu-lap, Frederick Senior Liaison Officer 4,
Yuen Long District Office

Ms WAN Yee-man, Fion Assistant District Social Welfare
Officer (Yuen Long) 2,
Social Welfare Department

Miss LUI Wing-man, Vivian Labour Officer (Employment Services) (Yuen Long),
Labour Department

Item II

Miss TSUNG Ka-yee Officer-in-charge (Central Foster Care Unit),
Social Welfare Department

Ms NG Wing-yan, Vianne Assistant Social Work Officer (Central Foster Care Unit),
Social Welfare Department

Item III & IV

Ms CHU Yi-ting Social Work Officer 3 (Planning & Coordinating),
Social Welfare Department

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Opening Remarks

The Chairman welcomed Members and department representatives to the first meeting of the Social Welfare and Labour Committee (“SWLC”) of the Yuen Long District Council (“YLDC”) in 2025.

Item I: Confirmation of minutes of the sixth meeting of Social Welfare and Labour Committee (“SWLC”) in 2024 held on 23 December 2024

2. Members unanimously confirmed the minutes of the sixth meeting of the SWLC in 2024 held on 23 December 2024.

Discussion Item:

Item II: Briefing on Foster Care Service (SWLC Paper No. 1/2025)

3. The Chairman referred Members to Paper No. 1 and welcomed Miss TSUNG Ka-yee, the Officer-in-charge of the Central Foster Care Unit of the Social Welfare Department (“SWD”), and Ms Vianne NG, Assistant Social Work Officer of the SWD, to the meeting.

4. After discussion, Members’ views and enquiries were summarised as follows:

- (1) An enquiry was made as to whether the number of foster families was sufficient to meet the demand, as well as the waitlisting arrangements for the foster care service;
- (2) Members enquired about the SWD's requirements for the home environments of foster families, the application procedures for public rental housing ("PRH") tenants looking to become foster families, and the criteria adopted for matching of the service; whether such criteria included the residing location, ethnicity and wishes of the applicant family, along with the current number of foster children;
- (3) An enquiry was made about the monitoring mechanism of foster care services as well as the support and training that the SWD would provide to foster families;
- (4) Foster families were expected to provide stable, long-term care for children in need. This would prevent them from being affected by having to switch foster families, which could interfere with their physical and mental development;
- (5) Members considered the existing procedures for parents to apply for outbound tours or enrolment in programmes for their foster children to be cumbersome. They suggested that the SWD should streamline these procedures; and
- (6) An enquiry was made to the SWD regarding the arrangements during the absence of foster parents on leave and the work plans for promoting foster care service.

5. A consolidated reply provided by Miss TSUNG Ka-yee and Ms Vianne NG of the SWD was as follows:

- (1) Although there were over 1 000 registered foster families at present, some were unable to participate in the service due to their leave of absence. Yuen Long District was ranked second in Hong Kong for the number of registered foster families;
- (2) Each child applying for foster care service would be assigned a referring social worker following up the case, who would provide support and

counselling services according to the needs of the family. Should the birth parents relinquish custody of their child and agree to place their child for adoption, the Director of Social Welfare would become the child's guardian, with the referring social worker following up on the adoption arrangements;

- (3) To ensure the quality of foster care services, applicants had to pass a detailed and thorough home study assessment and complete 12 hours of training before being approved as foster families. Their home environment had to be safe and tidy, featuring window grilles and a kitchen that met safety requirements, for example. There also had to be sufficient space for foster children to have separate beds and activity area. The required minimum average living space per person was 5.5 square metres;
- (4) If the foster family was a PRH tenant, the SWD would notify the Housing Department of the placement of a foster child in the flat concerned. The tenant would not need to make such declaration;
- (5) As regards matching, foster parents could indicate their preferences at the matching stage regarding the age, gender, family background, health conditions and learning needs of foster children. The SWD would also assess whether the foster family's capacity to care could meet the needs of individual children. For those existing cases that could not be successfully matched with foster families, some children would either be placed under the care of emergency foster families or receive other community support services. Alternatively, they would be admitted to units providing emergency residential care services;
- (6) In normal circumstances, a newly registered foster family would be matched with one foster child. After assessing the foster parents' child-caring ability and their home environment, the SWD might arrange for some foster families to care for two children simultaneously, where appropriate. If the foster parents were to go on leave, the foster child would be placed with another suitable substitute foster family temporarily. In this case, the foster family would take care of more than one foster child temporarily;
- (7) After a foster family had been successfully matched with a child, social workers from the foster care agency would assess how the child was getting used to and behaving in the foster family through monthly home visits, interviews and telephone contacts. They would also provide the foster parents with support and professional advice. In addition, the SWD and the

foster care agencies provided foster parents with annual training. The SWD also provided additional support to foster families caring for children with special learning or care needs. This included arranging for the foster child to receive an early assessment and appropriate professional therapy and training, thereby alleviating the foster families' pressure in providing care;

- (8) Starting from 1 April 2024, foster parents would receive a monthly maintenance grant of \$6,780 for each foster child, as well as a monthly incentive payment of either \$11,866 (for foster care service) or \$13,561 (for emergency foster care service). An extra incentive payment of \$4,068 per month would also be granted to foster families taking care of children with special needs (such as those being assessed to have mild intellectual disability, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder or autism spectrum disorder). The maintenance grant was intended to cover foster children's living expenses, including food, clothing, toys, stationery, daily necessities, pocket money, etc. Foster families were not required to submit receipts for reimbursement. The incentive payment and the extra incentive payment were intended to encourage people to become foster parents. These allowances were calculated based on each foster child in their care and were tax-exempt. Foster children's school fees, textbook costs and school bus fees would be paid by their birth families;
- (9) Foster children would usually be placed with the same foster family so that they could enjoy a stable home environment and receive care before they could reunite with their birth families, be adopted, or live independently. However, the SWD might transfer foster children in need to other foster families or residential care services based on their individual circumstances and factors such as their special care needs, or the foster families' capacity to care;
- (10) Prior consent for foster children to travel abroad was required to be obtained from their parents or guardians. Without travel documents applied for by their birth families or relevant arrangements agreed by them, the children would not be permitted to leave Hong Kong with their foster parents;
- (11) If the foster family did not have any suitable relatives or friends who could join the "one-plus-one" recruitment scheme and become designated substitute parents for their counterparts going on leave, the SWD or the foster care agencies would arrange a suitable replacement; and

(12) The SWD had been striving to promote foster care service. As well as publicising the service through various media channels and on public transport, they had distributed leaflets and put up promotional posters in public places and government venues. The SWD had also invited Members to help promote the service and encourage people to apply to become foster parents.

6. The Chairman concluded by asking the SWD to continue monitoring the quality of foster care services, ensuring that foster children could enjoy family life and receive proper care.

Questions Raised by Members:

Item III: Mr TAM Tak-hoi, Ms HO Hiu-man, Ms WONG Wai-ling, Mr WONG Siu-chung, Mr Allan WONG, Mr WONG Hiu-shan, Mr CHEUNG Wai-sum and Mr SZE TO Chun-hin proposed a discussion on “Welfare needs of residents of transitional housing in Yuen Long District” (SWLC Paper No. 2/2025)

7. The Chairman referred Members to Paper No. 2 and the written replies tabled at the meeting by the SWD and the Housing Bureau (“HB”). He then welcomed Ms CHU Yi-ting, Social Work Officer 3 (Planning & Coordinating) (Yuen Long) of the SWD, to the meeting.

8. After discussion, Members’ views and enquiries on the issue were summarised as follows:

- (1) An enquiry was made about the support services offered by the SWD to transitional housing (“TH”) residents in Yuen Long District;
- (2) The occupancy rate of TH projects in the district had been on the rise, as had the demand for this type of housing. Meanwhile, the Light Public Housing (“LPH”) project at Yau Pok Road in Yuen Long was nearing completion. Members enquired about the SWD’s manpower and resource arrangements, proposing the formation of a dedicated team to liaise with the relevant operating organisations and provide enhanced support for the tenants concerned;
- (3) Members enquired about the promotion arrangements for the “Colourful Life @ Yuen Long” community building programme. They recommended that

the SWD include more information in the Social Service Overview to make it easier for the public to access relevant information;

- (4) It was noted that the public facilities available at the district's TH and LPH projects were different. Some of these developments offered only a limited number of leisure facilities and public spaces for residents. In order to enhance residents' physical and mental health, it was recommended that the HB should exercise supervision of operating organisations during the project design stage to ensure the efficient utilisation of space and provision of additional public recreational facilities as far as possible;
 - (5) Some of the TH projects in Yuen Long District were located in remote, rural areas with poor transport links. This affected the occupancy rate of these projects and made it inconvenient for residents to commute to work or school and carry out other daily activities. It was therefore suggested that the HB take relevant transport facilities into account when selecting sites for TH projects in future; and
 - (6) An enquiry was made about the eligibility criteria and details of the "Trial Scheme on Special Allowance" mentioned in the written reply by the HB.
9. A consolidated reply provided by Ms Fion WAN of the SWD was as follows:
- (1) Social welfare service units operated by either the SWD or non-governmental organisations ("NGOs") such as Integrated Family Service Centres ("IFSCs"), Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres ("ICYSCs"), District Elderly Community Centres ("DECCs"), Neighbourhood Elderly Centres ("NECs") and Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness ("ICCMWs"), as well as District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities ("DSCs") had been providing welfare support for those in need in the district, including TH residents;
 - (2) The SWD had already invited the operating organisations of TH and LPH projects in the district to establish a collaborative platform to foster exchange and experience sharing. This would enable the IFSCs and other social service units to provide residents with more targeted services;
 - (3) Regarding the service needs arising from the completion of TH and LPH projects in the district, the IFSCs in their respective service boundaries had

already liaised and worked closely with the project operating organisations to provide residents with information on community services and assist those in need. Additionally, the two ICCMWs in the district would organise suitable activities in response to the demand for mental health services from residents; and

- (4) Under the “Colourful Life @ Yuen Long” community building programme, the SWD had produced the Yuen Long District Social Service Overview, which provided the public with information on social service units in the district by way of a map. Copies were available from the Yuen Long District Office, hospitals, maternal and child health centres, and various social service units.

10. The Chairman concluded by raising concerns about the welfare needs of TH residents in Yuen Long District, inviting the SWD to take note of the Members’ views and suggestions. He also requested that the Secretariat convey these views to the HB in writing.

(Post-meeting note: The Secretariat already forwarded a follow-up reply by the HB to the SWLC on 3 April 2025.)

Item IV: Mr SZE TO Chun-hin, Mr CHEUNG Wai-sum, Ms WONG Wai-ling, Ms MA Shuk-yin, Ms Fennie LAI, and Ms LAM Wai-ming proposed a discussion on “Pupil suicide in the district” (SWLC Paper No. 3/2025)

11. The Chairman referred Members to Paper No. 3 and the written replies tabled at the meeting by the SWD and the Education Bureau (“EDB”).

12. After discussion, Members’ views and enquiries on the issue were summarised as follows:

- (1) Information was requested about the number of pupil suicides in Yuen Long District over the past three years;
- (2) Members asked about the SWD’s work in promoting student mental health and positive education. They also suggested further enhancements to the current arrangement of “two school social workers for each school”;

- (3) In view of the worsening situation regarding pupil suicide in recent years, Members suggested that schools implement a preventive mechanism to identify students with emotional problems at an early stage, so that they could be offered counselling and appropriate support. They also recommended that the EDB strengthen its collaboration with various stakeholders, including school managers, teaching staff, parents and local communities, in order to promote joyful learning, cope with students' mental stress, and address the issue at source; and
 - (4) Members believed that students with emotional problems might not take the initiative to seek help from schools or social workers. The SWD was therefore advised to keep closer watch on relevant activities on social media platforms, as well as cases of cyberbullying.
13. A consolidated reply provided by Ms Fion WAN of the SWD was as follows:
- (1) In order to address the emotional needs of students in the district, the District Social Welfare Office collaborated with the Tin Shui Wai "Unplug" youth support service centre, which was run by the Hong Kong Playground Association. Together, they organised lunchtime activities and musical performances in schools to help students reduce stress, foster a caring school environment, and build stronger connections with students experiencing emotional difficulties so they could provide counselling;
 - (2) To enhance the mental health and resilience of students in the district, the SWD collaborated with 20 social service units to organise activities and provide relevant training for primary and secondary schools via the Peer Power Student Gatekeeper Training Programme;
 - (3) In response to school needs, the working group under the Yuen Long District Coordinating Committee on Family and Child Welfare Services of the SWD arranged for experts to provide support to schools, parents and pupils in the district by delivering seminars on site. Topics covered included emotional health, parenting, positive psychology, and resilience building;
 - (4) The SWD provided funding for five NGOs to set up five Cyber Youth Support Teams ("CYSTs"). These teams provided online support to students experiencing emotional difficulties, proactively searching for and approaching youths in need on social media platforms popular among them.

The CYSTs provided appropriate intervention and counselling, both online and offline. The New Territories West service was currently operated by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups; and

- (5) The SWD set up the Mobile Van for Publicity Service on Mental Wellness (“MVP Service”) in five regions throughout Hong Kong to strengthen community education. This included the “New LIFEstyle” van operated by the New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association in the New Territories West as part of the MVP Service. Mobile exhibitions, mini talks, and interactive activities were organised at various locations, including remote and rural areas. Assistance was also rendered to people in need in performing self-assessment.

14. The Chairman concluded that the issue of pupil suicide should not be overlooked, suggesting that different stakeholders should provide greater support. He requested that the Secretariat convey the Members’ views to the EDB in writing.

(Post-meeting note: The Secretariat forwarded the EDB’s follow-up reply to the SWLC on 3 April 2025.)

Reports of Government Departments:

Item V: Statistics on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance caseload and domestic violence reports in Yuen Long District (SWLC Paper No. 4/2025)

15. Members noted the above paper.

Item VI: Any other business

Item VII: Date of next meeting

16. The Chairman said that the next SWLC meeting would be held in the YLDC Conference Room at 2:30 p.m. on 16 April 2025.

17. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:35 p.m.

Yuen Long District Council Secretariat
April 2025