



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

Wednesday, July 18, 1973

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MAJOR PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVING SERVICES TO THE ELDERLY

Wide ranging proposals for improving services for the elderly in Hong Kong have been recommended by a working party set up to study their future needs.

The recommendations cover welfare services, medical and health services, community facilities, housing and residential care.

The working party was made up of members of government departments and of the voluntary agencies concerned with services for the elderly.

In making public the report today, Mr. T.S. Heppell, Assistant Director (General), Social Welfare Department, the Chairman of the Working Party, said the conclusion of the study was that the right approach to services for the elderly was "care in the community" rather than institutional care.

"We feel that services should be aimed primarily at enabling the elderly to remain for as long as possible as members of the community at large, either living by themselves or with members of their families," he said.

In welfare services the Working Party recommends that the first stage should be to get the disability and infirmity allowance off the ground and if the scheme works well in practice, then the qualifying age should be lowered to 70. It feels that subsequently the age limit could be further reduced to 65 but advised against doing this too rapidly.

"The Working Party is convinced an assured income for the elderly is of fundamental importance in encouraging care in the community," Mr. Heppell said.

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Other recommendations it makes for improvement of welfare services include a home help service for those who are unable to look after their home properly and a meals service, either in the form of "meals on wheels" delivered to the home or "meals in a canteen."

Day care centres designed particularly for the senile elderly conducted on an experimental basis, the development on home visiting and escort services and a counselling service, are also recommended.

On medical and health services, the Working Party recommends expanding the community nursing service for elderly. This should include, if possible, an appointment scheme, a regular check up system and special provision for dental, optical, hearing and chiropodic care with free spectacles and hearing aids when necessary. This, it suggests, could be done through an organisation similar to the school medical service board.

The Working Party recommends that community facilities for the elderly be provided as part of the general public facilities, and identified four areas in which it felt more could be done -- an expanded programme of old people's clubs: better reading material for those with poor eyesight and the use of volunteers to deliver and collect newspapers and books for the elderly; more outdoor facilities, and entertainment.

On housing, Mr. Heppell said: "The Working Party believes that more emphasis should be put on the distinct housing needs of the elderly, particularly at a time when major new developments in public housing are in hand and when the changing pattern of life in Hong Kong and the growing numbers of the elderly mean that there will be an increased demand for housing by the elderly."

/It recommends

It recommends that every effort should be made to allocate, within the 10 year housing programme, a given proportion of accommodation, perhaps two per cent of the total, to the elderly.

It says that suitable housing units should be designed for the elderly in each new and renovated estate and those to be developed in the New Territories. The elderly should not however be segregated in blocks solely designed for them.

For residential care, the Working Party recommends that more hostels of the type already provided in the Wah Fu Estate be established with the long-term aim of providing a hostel of this kind in every public housing estate of 25,000 or more residents.

It proposes a moratorium ^{延期} on the establishment of new homes for the aged for a period of two years until it is possible to assess the effect of the new emphasis on care in the community on the demand for places in such homes.

Based on the recommendations it is estimated that the additional cost of providing infirmity allowances for those aged 70 and over will amount initially to \$20 million a year, rising with the increased proportion of elderly in the population to \$27.5 million after five years.

The cost of the phased development of new, enlarged or experimental services is put at \$1.5 million rising to \$9.5 million after five years.

The Working Party feels the main responsibility for services to the elderly should rest with the government, but says this does not necessarily mean that government itself should provide all the services. The present position where both government departments and the voluntary agencies have major roles to play should continue.

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It says a co-ordinating council for services to the elderly should be established and chaired by the Social Welfare Department. The council would cover both government and non-government run services with equal representation from both sides.

Mr. Heppell said a decision should be taken as soon as possible on implementing these proposals. However, the community at large should first be given an opportunity to express its views and these will be welcomed and taken carefully into account by the government.

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Note to Editors: Copies of a summary of the report are boxed today.

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HASTILY PREPARED LEGISLATION ON FINANCE COMPANIES COULD BE DAMAGING

The government is "willing to contemplate" the possibility of regulating finance companies "where, and to the extent that, a case is established", the Financial Secretary, Mr. C.P. Haddon-Cave said today.

He warned, however, that caution was required since hastily prepared legislation may well be damaging to the public interest as a whole, even if certain individual interests were, in a limited sense, protected.

Replying to a question from the Hon. T.K. Ann, the Financial Secretary said research was now being made into finance companies to determine precisely what they were and their range of activities.

It had been established, he said, that more than 1,500 companies - ranging from small locally-owned establishments to finance houses wholly owned by large international banks - had registered since the beginning of 1971, with finance stated as their principal object of business.

"There would clearly be very great difficulties in laying down general criteria to be observed by such a diversity of institutions," he said, "particularly if we were to avoid, as we must, inhibiting the development of the range of services by our financial sector."

Nevertheless, four aspects of their operations were being considered, the Financial Secretary said.

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The first concerned the protection of investors in securities and property from misleading advertisements and other enticements. This, he added, would be taken care of by the Protection of Investors Bill which would be introduced in council with or soon after the Securities Bill.

The second aspect concerned the misuse of shares deposited with finance companies as collateral against loan.

However, under the proposed Securities Bill, all share dealings would, in future, be transacted only by and through registered dealers and they would be required to observe certain rules and limits although licensed banks would be exempted, Mr. Haddon-Cave said.

The other aspects being considered concerned the question of competition for deposits between finance companies and the licensed banks, and the position of small depositors.

Mr. Haddon-Cave revealed that there was a tentative plan for a separate Protection of Depositors Bill designed to restrict, by amount, the minimum size of a deposit which finance companies should be permitted to accept from the general public.

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STERLING RESERVES STILL SUBSTANTIAL

Hong Kong's sterling reserves are still very substantial despite the fact that its total external reserves have fallen from the very high level reached in the middle of last year.

The Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave, said this at the Legislative Council today in reply to a question by the Hon. P.C. Woo.

Mr. Woo asked: "In view of the uncertainties in the world monetary situation and the expiry of the United Kingdom sterling guarantee to Hong Kong on September 24, 1973, will government state whether re-negotiations have already started as provided by the terms of the guarantee, and what is the present position?"

Mr. Haddon-Cave said definitive negotiations had not yet started, but the Hong Kong Government is in close touch with the British Government. "I venture to say they are very well aware of our anxieties."

He said Hong Kong had been able to benefit from the arrangement negotiated at the end of last year for the withdrawal of part of bank-owned sterling from the Sterling Guarantee Agreement.

"We have also diversified into foreign currency assets up to the full 11 per cent permitted under the agreement."

The Financial Secretary agreed that in view of the uncertainties of the world monetary situation, a decision about the future of the sterling agreements would indeed be helpful.

He assured members of the council that the Hong Kong Government is well aware of the very great importance of these issues and is keeping the situation under constant review.

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TESTS FOR "GROOVING" ON RUNWAY

A series of tests are being carried out on the airport runway to determine when the new bituminous surface will be hard enough to allow for "grooving" to further improve the surface characteristics, the acting Director of Public Works, the Hon. A.S. Robertson, said today.

Speaking in the Legislative Council, Mr. Robertson said scientific tests, carried out during wet conditions, on the runway's new surface showed that it would presently rate as "average" according to the International Civil Aviation Organisation's standards.

He was replying to a question by the Hon. Szeto Wai who wanted clarification on the runway's safety, particularly during wet weather.

Mr. Robertson assured the council that all pilots were kept informed of runway conditions before landing or take off, and no pilot would operate in conditions which he thought to be dangerous.

He also pointed out that a bituminous runway became less slippery with age.

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NO EASY SOLUTION TO TRAFFIC PROBLEMS IN POK FU LAM AND MID-LEVELS

Traffic problems in the Pokfulam and Mid-Levels areas are not likely to improve in the near future as a result of large-scale development in the two districts, the acting Director of Public Works, the Hon. A.S. Robertson, indicated today.

Speaking in the Legislative Council during the second reading of the Temporary Restriction of Buildings Development (Pokfulam and Mid-Levels) Bill 1973, Mr. Robertson said some 3,000 flats were at present under construction in the two areas.

Another 2,000 would be built, he said, from plans submitted to the Buildings Ordinance Office before the six-month standstill on the approval of building plans for the two areas was imposed on July 4.

"Many of these flats have car parks and in any case the residents will all require some form of transport which will add to the traffic problems in these areas," he said.

The Public Works Department, he went on, already had plans in hand for improving road junctions along the critical route, and a detailed study would be made during the six-month respite to determine the extent of the problem and possible solutions.

"But, in view of the size of the problem and the limitations of any feasible road system, we should not be too sanguine that a solution will be easy to find or quickly achieved," said Mr. Robertson.

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He said the bill, which is in support of the six-month standstill imposed two weeks ago, had become a necessity because of the intensive rebuilding taking place in the two areas affected.

While no building plans will be approved during the standstill period, the bill allows for approval of plans in respect of repairs to old buildings.

Speaking during the second reading of the Buildings (Amendment) Bill 1973, Mr. Robertson explained that this bill was to prevent developers from splitting up large sites into small sections and developing them without an adequate road system connecting with public roads.

The bill provides for a road layout plan to be submitted for approval by the Building Authority when the size of the site indicates that this is necessary to ensure that adequate access for vehicles is required.

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IMPLICATIONS OF CABLE TV SYSTEMS TO BE STUDIED

The government intends to make an early study of the implications relating to the future introduction of advanced television cable systems and the wider use of closed circuit television in Hong Kong, the Hon. Jack Cater, Secretary for Home Affairs, said today.

In moving the second reading of the Telecommunications (Amendment) Bill 1973 in the Legislative Council, he said regulations would shortly be put to the Executive Council to provide for the licensing of more extensive forms of communal wired television and sound broadcast systems.

These broadcast relay station licences would be issued on a non-monopolistic basis to any company capable of meeting the necessary technical conditions.

The operators of these systems will be required to provide their subscribers with a simultaneous and uninterrupted relay service of all the authorised wireless television programmes being broadcast in Hong Kong and they will also be permitted to relay any authorised sound broadcasts, he explained.

Under the bill, aerial distribution systems and wired closed circuit television systems will be exempted from licensing requirements, subject to certain conditions.

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The bill will enable single receiving aerials, designed to serve all the television sets in a building, to be erected on single or on adjoining blocks under common ownership, subject to certain safeguards in respect of public safety and technical standards.

In effect, this will mean better reception in certain areas. Mr. Cater expressed the hope that the introduction of such aerials would also help "to stop the unsightly proliferation of individual aerials on rooftops which exist at present."

The conditions governing the scope of wired closed circuit television, he said, would permit the installation of such systems in hotels, banks and department stores, among others, but the operators would be prohibited from transmitting advertisements.

Closed circuit television would not be permitted for entertainment purposes except for private entertainment in peoples' homes.

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MORE HOUSING LAND FROM SHATIN RACE COURSE

Additional land for housing projects and recreational space will be provided by the construction of the second race course in Shatin.

The acting Secretary for the Environment, the Hon. D. Akers-Jones said today that the building of the course did not conflict with residential or industrial development in the area.

He was replying in the Legislative Council to a question from the Hon. S.Y. Chung as to whether the construction of the course had priority over housing projects.

Hill slopes used as "borrow areas" will provide additional residential land as a bonus to the 10-year reclamation and development plan for the valley, he said.

As in the Happy Valley race course, the centre of the track will form "a most useful recreational lung for the half million inhabitants of Shatin."

Mr. Akers-Jones also mentioned that the indirect benefit of surplus funds generated by the race course would be used by the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club in community projects.

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MORE FERRIES AND FACILITIES TO SOLVE OVERCROWDING

Improved pier facilities and an enlarged fleet will help towards solving the problem of overcrowding and congestion in the passenger waiting areas at the Hong Kong and Yaumati ferry piers.

The acting Director of Public Works, the Hon. A.S. Robertson, in reply to the Hon. James Wu on steps to relieve overcrowding, said in the Legislative Council today that overcrowding usually occurs during peak hours at piers operating several services.

The ferry company is planning to construct another storey over the existing ground floor waiting rooms at the Jubilee Street, Jordan Road and outlying district ferry piers, Mr. Robertson said.

New or additional piers will be built in North Point, Kwun Tong, Hung Hom, Sham Shui Po, Shau Kei Wan and Sam Ka Tsuen. The Cheung Chau pier is also to be enlarged.

In another effort, he said, the company had recently introduced direct sailings and one-class vessels on outlying services during holidays, allowing a higher frequency of services and reducing passenger waiting time.

Plans are also in hand to introduce more vessels for both commuter and recreational services within the next 12 months.

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BILL PROHIBITING COMMODITY EXCHANGES

A report on the possibility of establishing a commodity exchange in Hong Kong is now being prepared by a visiting British expert on the subject.

The Financial Secretary, the Hon. C.P. Haddon-Cave, told the Legislative Council today that Mr. John Wilson, from the Bank of England had been in Hong Kong for the past two and a half weeks conducting preliminary enquiries, which had been wide-ranging.

Mr. Haddon-Cave made the remarks when moving the second reading of the Commodity Exchanges (Prohibition) Bill 1973 which seeks to prohibit temporarily the establishment or operation of commodity exchanges through which commodities are to be bought and sold as futures.

Various markets and exchanges in existence on June 20, this year, such as the daily rice auctions and the Gold and Silver Exchange, are excluded from the legislation.

Mr. Haddon-Cave said the present legislation "thus prevents the establishment and operation of commodity exchanges until such time as their desirability has been established and further legislation has been enacted for their proper regulation."

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RELIEVING CONGESTION IN GOVERNMENT HOSPITALS

Action to relieve congestion in government hospitals will be taken as soon as the government approves recommendations to this effect proposed by the Medical Development Advisory Committee.

Dr. the Hon. G.H. Choa, Director of Medical and Health Services, said this today in the Legislative Council in reply to a question by the Hon. Hilton Cheong-leen, who had asked when the "visible shortage" of beds in government hospitals could be improved.

"To relieve congestion in government hospitals," Dr. Choa said, "we need not only more space, but also to make sure that we make the fullest use of the space available in both government and government-assisted hospitals.

"The Medical Development Advisory Committee have examined the question of congestion in government hospitals in great detail, and recommendations on the action that is needed will be a main feature of their report."

Dr. Choa told the Council this report was about to be submitted to the Government, and if the recommendations were accepted, they would be put into effect "with as much urgency as is possible."

In a reference to camp beds in the corridors of government hospitals, he explained that such additional beds sometimes had to be used because all patients in need of treatment were admitted.

In bad weather, for example, they had to be kept away from windows, and when wards were full, some beds had to be moved temporarily into corridors to facilitate the treatment and special examinations of other patients in the wards.

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MORE AMBULANCES ON THE ROADS

Plans are in hand for increasing the number of ambulances and ambulance depots and stations in various parts of Hong Kong.

The Colonial Secretary, Sir Hugh Norman-Walker, told the Legislative Council today that at present there were 76 ambulances based at 22 strategically situated points throughout Hong Kong - including the seven main depots and stations.

He said the current approved programme called for an increase to 91 ambulances by the end of this financial year and a further increase to 107 in 1974-75.

The programme also called for a further 10 ambulance depots and stations, including four in public housing estates.

Replying to a question by the Hon. Hilton Cheong-leen about minimizing the time taken for ambulances to reach the scene of an accident and to get to the hospital, Sir Hugh said that ways and means of ensuring this were always under review by the fire services and the police, including the problems presented by traffic congestion.

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24-HOUR CARETAKER SERVICE FOR HOUSING ESTATES

The Housing Department is seeking approval to create 400 new caretaker posts to provide a 24-hour service in public housing estates.

The Secretary for Housing, the Hon. Ian Lightbody said today in the Legislative Council that an alarm or watchman system could not compare with the personal service provided by caretakers.

He was replying to a question by the Hon. Wilfred Wong concerning security equipment and measures in the estates.

Caretakers are trained to undertake emergency repairs to equipment such as water pumps and lifts, take charge of accidents or give first aid outside normal office hours, Mr. Lightbody said.

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HONG KONG TRAINING COUNCIL

The membership and terms of reference of the proposed Hong Kong Training Council will be announced very soon.

The Commissioner of Labour, the Hon. Paul Tsui, in reply to a question on the progress of the Council by Dr. the Hon. S.Y. Chung, said the government was now in touch with the prospective chairman concerning the details.

Since January the coordination of matters which were the concern of the Industrial Training Advisory Committee and which will be that of the new council, has been undertaken by the respective branches of the Labour Department, he said.

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FACILITIES FOR HANDICAPPED

Special recreational facilities and additional transport services are being planned to cater for handicapped people.

The Director of Social Welfare, the Hon. F.K. Li said today in Legislative Council that investigations are being carried out on the possibility of making facilities in buildings more accessible to the disabled community.

The committee responsible for the investigation, comprising representatives from the Social Welfare, Public Works and Medical and Health departments, will submit its report and recommendations within the next three months.

In the mean time, Mr. Li said, the government is designing special recreational facilities for the disabled, including those confined to wheelchairs.

Additional transport services have also been included as part of the Five Year Plan of the Social Welfare Department.

Mr. Li had been asked by the Hon. Joyce Symons when the report on the provision of special facilities for handicapped people would be published.

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EARLY REGULATIONS ON BUILDING ACCIDENTS

The Hon. Szeto Wai today called for the early enactment of comprehensive regulations to reduce the high accident rate on building construction sites.

Addressing the Legislative Council in support of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Amendment) Bill 1973, he pointed out that no less than 4,500 people were killed or injured in the building and construction industry last year.

"These accidents represent almost 25 per cent of all the industrial accidents reported to the Labour Department and a 200 per cent increase over those in 1968."

The importance of this industry to Hong Kong's overall economy has been recognised, he said, but the serious and rapid increase in accidents calls for comprehensive legislation now.

Mr. Szeto said he hoped the Commissioner of Labour would present to the Council, as soon as possible, proposals covering not only the more common accidents at worksites, but also embracing all modes of construction and all possible sources of accidents from which workmen and the public must be protected.

"Measures of prevention and of first aid must also be stipulated."

He said legislation should include inspections and certification of all types of machinery and tools to be used, and periodic examinations of deep excavations and important earthwork operations as well as their required protective measures by statutorily qualified people.

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BILLS PASSED

Four bills passed their committee stage and third readings in the Legislative Council this afternoon.

They were the Civil Evidence Bill 1973, the Miscellaneous Amendments Bill 1973, the Agricultural Products (Marketing) (Amendment) Bill 1973 and the Factories and Industrial Undertakings (Amendment) Bill 1973.

Six bills had their first and second readings.

They are the Gambling (Amendment) Bill 1973, the Commodity Exchanges (Prohibition) Bill 1973, the Telecommunication (Amendment) Bill 1973, Public Health and Urban Services (Amendment) (No. 3) Bill 1973, the Buildings (Amendment) Bill 1973 and the Temporary Restriction of Building Development (Pok Fu Lam and Mid-Levels) Bill 1973.

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LADY MACLEHOSE TO VISIT CAMP FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

Lady MacLehose is to visit handicapped children attending an Outward Bound course at Tai She Wan on High Island, Sai Kung tomorrow.

This is one of the training courses designed by the Outward Bound School of Hong Kong to build up confidence in handicapped children and develop leadership potential among them.

Lady MacLehose will first arrive at the school in Tai Mong Tsai, Sai Kung, and will be met by the Principal, Mr. V.H.B. Tucker and Mrs. Tucker.

They will then board the school launch "Jim Hogan" for Tai She Wan where Lady MacLehose will see for herself the various activities and drills for the handicapped children at camp.

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Note to Editors: You are invited to send a reporter and/or photographer to cover Lady MacLehose's visit.

Press representatives are requested to assemble in the Kowloon Sub-pool car park behind the Tsim Sha Tsui Post Office NOT LATER than 9.30 a.m.

Light lunch will be provided.

The Press party is expected to return to Kowloon shortly after 3 p.m.

Mr. Dennis Leung of G.I.S. will be present to assist the Press.

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Release time: 8.30 p.m.