

**Monitoring Committee on the Implementation of the  
SARS Expert Committee Report's Recommendations**

**Re-organisation of Health, Welfare and Food Bureau**

**Purpose**

This paper updates members on the progress of the re-organisation of the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB) and its constituent Departments.

**Background**

2. The SARS Expert Committee (EC) pointed out that the SARS epidemic had highlighted several deficiencies and ambiguities that exist in the relationships between HWFB and the Department of Health (DH) and that the current organizational separation between HWFB and DH may lead to a lack of coherence in policy development, decision making, funding and resource allocation, systems for monitoring, audit and accountability.

3. The EC, in its Report, recommended that the Government should review the organizational structure and the relationship between the HWFB and the constituent Government departments under the Bureau, and in taking forward this recommendation, the Government should consider merging the functions of separate departments within HWFB, headed by SHWF, in order to improve the capacity for coordination across the departments, and to facilitate policy making and commissioning for health protection matters.

4. At the last Monitoring Committee (MC) meeting, views were exchanged on how these recommendations of the EC should best be taken forward, in particular how HWFB should be re-organised to bring the best out of the newly-created CHP. The MC suggested that the Director of Health (DH) should take on the function of Chief Medical Officer (CMO) within the Bureau to advise the Secretary as appropriate, and that the CHP should report to the Secretary through the CMO.

## **Progress**

5. We agree that there is scope for improving the structure of the HWFB in line with EC's recommendations to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency in performing Government's public health functions in the immediate future and streamline the operation of HWFB and its constituent executive departments in the longer term.

6. We envisage that as a first step, the DH will be merged into HWFB and a CMO post be created in the Bureau to provide direct assistance to SHWF in formulating public health policies and performing the relevant regulatory functions. The CMO will directly oversee the operation of DH. He would be tasked to oversee the public health and related regulatory matters, including

- (a) Disease prevention and control : apart from assisting SHWF in public health development, CMO would oversee the work of CHP; and
- (b) Public health regulatory functions and services : these are mainly the present regulatory functions performed and other services rendered by DH.

7. With the merger, the new structure would provide SHWF with a direct line of command over the CMO and his team on public health issues and would enable SHWF to provide strategic directives on cross-sectoral issues and facilitate the CMO to take forward those directives with his counterparts in other government bureaux and non-governmental institutions.

8. Like many other policy bureaux, HWFB maintains a conventional relationship with its departments: i.e. the Bureau focuses on policy formulation while the departments are responsible for the execution of policies. Recent developments have highlighted that such delineation of duties may not best serve our public health purpose. The proposed restructuring will provide us with an opportunity to streamline our existing structure and working relationship between the Bureau and DH in terms of integrating similar functions, to make better use of resources and to enhance the efficient and effective implementation of policies and services to the public.

9. We will also review whether there is scope for and assess the relative merits of merging the food regulatory and safety standard functions of the HWFB constituent departments, to form the “feed to table regulatory and control” system. We would also explore further options for merger and reorganization.

10. Members may wish to note the above development for information.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau  
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