

**For Discussion
on 13 November 2000**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**Implementation of
One School Social Worker for each Secondary School**

Purpose

With effect from the 2000/01 school year, the initiative of one school social worker (SSW) for each secondary school has been fully implemented. This paper reports to Members the progress made, the consequential redeployment of funding and staffing resources and other related matters.

Background

2. Members of the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services were briefed on the Administration's proposal to provide one SSW for each secondary school at the meeting on 14 June 1999. At the joint meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services and the Panel on Home Affairs on 12 July 1999, Members further discussed the implications of the proposal in the context of the overall provision of services for young people. At the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services on 14 February 2000, the Administration reported the plan to redeploy resources from children and youth centres (CYCs) and study and reading room (SR rooms), arising from a Fundamental Expenditure Review (FER) on Youth, to achieve the objective of one SSW for each secondary school. At the meeting of the

LegCo Panel on Home Affairs held on 10 April 2000, the Administration provided full details of the FER on Youth. Specifically on the proposed redeployment of resources from CYCs and SR rooms to SSW, we explained to Members that this initiative was justified in the overall context of making the best use of available resources to meet the changing needs of young people. We also reported on the extensive consultations with parties concerned and undertook to pay special attention in the process to avoiding staff redundancy and to the needs of the academically low achiever (ALA) schools.

Implementation Progress

3. With the strong support of Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) as well as the school sector, agreement has been reached for 28 NGOs operating services for young people to redeploy a total of \$195 million from 60 CYCs, 42 SR rooms and 3.45 outreach social work teams to provide one SSW for each secondary school and, taking the opportunity, to form Integrated Teams (IT) as far as possible. The resource redeployment has resulted in the –

- (i) creation of 148 SSWs;
- (ii) formation of 21 new ITs; and
- (iii) expansion of the manpower provision in 21 existing ITs.

4. As some agencies will need more time to release the resources for redeployment, a small part of the above redeployment will only take place in 2001-02. In order to achieve the one SSW for each secondary

school objective in one go, with the agreement of Finance Bureau, additional resources of about \$9.7 million have been identified in the 2000-01 approved Estimates to enable the early creation of an additional 23 SSW posts to make up the shortfall. The end result is full implementation of one SSW in each of the 456 secondary schools in the 2000/01 school year. This includes eight new secondary schools commissioned in the 2000/01 school year for which standard provision of one SSW per school, involving a cost of \$4.67 million, has been provided as part of the recurrent consequences for these school projects. In future, all new secondary schools will automatically be provided with one SSW.

5. It is inevitable that in a redeployment exercise involving so many agencies and schools, some mismatch will occur. 90 schools have had to change their NGOs providing them with school social work service, as a result. Schools concerned were briefed and prepared for the change in March 2000. Subsequently, District Social Welfare Officers of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) worked closely with these schools and NGOs handing over/taking up school social work service for them to ensure a smooth transition.

6. To allow sufficient time for newly-posted SSWs to prepare for services for the school year starting September 2000, induction courses were organised by SWD for 170 SSWs in mid-August. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service also conducted sharing sessions amongst

NGOs providing school social work service to enhance sharing of experience as well as support. A Guide on Multi-disciplinary Collaboration in School Social Work Service was published in July 2000 by the joint efforts of all parties concerned, with the purpose of facilitating better co-operation and co-ordination between school social workers and school personnel, community-based social services and relevant professionals in serving the needs of schools, students and the parents.

Integrated Teams

7. As pointed out above, service providers have taken the opportunity to form additional ITs or to strengthen their existing ITs. This is an encouraging development. Integrated teams comprise school social workers, centre-based services (i.e. CYCs and SR rooms) and outreach teams and are considered to be a more effective way of meeting the varied needs of young people. Whilst the policy direction to move towards more integrated youth services was endorsed in the early 1990s, progress on the formation of ITs on the ground through pooling of existing services was slow. The number of ITs in existence was 10 in 1994-95, 10 in 1995-96, 17 in 1996-97, 20 in 1997-98, 28 in 1998-99 and 34 in 1999-2000. Prompted by the redeployment exercise under the FER on Youth, the number of ITs has increased to 52 by the end of September 2000. We expect two more ITs to be formed before the end of 2000-01 and another seven in 2001-02.

Provision for Large Academically-low Achiever (ALA) Schools

8. The spirit of the policy of “one school social worker for each secondary school” is to provide every secondary school with one full-time stationing school social worker irrespective of the nature and student population of the school. Any additional service requirement will be met by community-based services.

9. For historical reasons, some large ALA schools have been provided with more than one school social worker. It is understandable that these schools may need time to attune to using community-based services as a complement to the school social work service. Taking account of this and Members’ concern previously expressed about provision in these schools, the Administration has, as a transitional measure, maintained the school social work service provision of 7 large ALA schools with a student population of 1,300 or above at the level based on the ratio of one social worker to 1,000 students for another one year. This involves an additional cost of \$1.34 million which has been made available by SWD. Meanwhile, SWD has set up a Panel under the Steering Committee on School Social Work Service to monitor the transition exercise. It will also review the efforts in using community-based services to complement the school social work service in meeting the service needs of these 7 large ALA schools. A school principal from one of these schools as well as an NGO serving these schools are Members of the Panel.

Staff redeployment

10. The redeployment from CYCs and SR rooms to SSW has given rise to surplus staff in some agencies because of the mismatch in the skills and training required. In this respect, the Administration is committed to working with the concerned agencies to avoid staff redundancy. Individual NGOs involved in the exercise have made efforts to absorb their own surplus staff, i.e. redeploying them to fill vacancies, in both subvented or non-subvented service units, within the organisation. Subsequent to the efforts made by NGOs, 124 staff, who cannot be absorbed by vacancies within their own agencies, are in need of assistance in job placement. The majority of these staff are in the ranks of Social Work Assistant, Welfare Worker, Clerical Assistant and Workman II.

11. The Social Welfare Department has taken active steps to facilitate their job placement by allocating new service units to affected agencies as appropriate, taking account of their past experience in those services. These subvented new service units include newly subvented After School Care Programme units available from September 2000 as well as other new welfare projects coming on stream in 2000-01 and 2001-02. The Administration has also discussed with NGOs without surplus staff with a view to encouraging them to take on some of the surplus staff of other agencies through the clearing house concept. New projects can be allocated to them on the condition that they take on the surplus staff. Similarly, NGOs without surplus staff have also been encouraged to absorb some of the surplus staff of other agencies through

additional posts in new projects already allocated to them and which will shortly be commissioned. Surplus staff redeployed through these arrangements will be remunerated at their current salary point and provident fund contribution. For staff released from CYCs and SR rooms but who have yet to be absorbed into the new service units, SWD will provide tide-over funding to enable the NGOs to continue to pay these surplus staff until they are suitably accommodated. Through the efforts of both SWD and NGOs, satisfactory arrangements have been put in place for **all** staff. The question of redundancy therefore does not arise.

Health and Welfare Bureau/Social Welfare Department

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