

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

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## **Report of the Panel on Welfare Services for submission to the Legislative Council**

### **Purpose**

This report gives an account of the work of the Panel on Welfare Services during the 2000-2001 Legislative Council (LegCo) session. It will be tabled at the LegCo Council meeting on 27 June 2001 in accordance with Rule 77(14) of the Rules of Procedure.

### **The Panel**

2. The Panel was formed by a resolution passed by the Council on 8 July 1998 and as amended on 20 December 2000 for the purpose of monitoring and examining Government policies and issues of public concern relating to welfare services matters.

3. The terms of reference of the Panel are in **Appendix I**.

4. The Panel comprises 15 members, with Hon LAW Chi-kwong and Hon CHAN Yuen-han elected as Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Panel respectively. The membership list of the Panel is in **Appendix II**.

### **Major work**

#### Review of family welfare services

5. The Administration briefed the Panel in March 2001 on the progress of an eight-month study on the review of family services it had commissioned the University of Hong Kong to conduct commencing from August 2000.

6. Given the growing complexity of family problems brought about by changes in traditional Chinese family values and structures, immigration, population mobility, an ageing society and economic recession, members considered that services to families should aim at enhancing their resilience

rather than adopting measures which were protective in nature. In this connection, members noted that the consultancy team was examining how the existing mode of service delivery should be restructured to strengthen the capability and competence of families and individuals to detect and cope with problems.

7. As regards making early identification of problems faced by individuals and families, the consultancy team was looking at how family services could be effectively integrated with the preventive work of other community-based programmes and repositioned in relation to the work provided by other sectors. These sectors included health and educational services, where there were wide access points to parents and children in delivering preventive work. There would be easy accessibility of such services to all families to enable them to use the services at an early stage of problems so that damage to families could be kept to the minimum.

#### Support for families in crisis

8. In the wake of a number of family tragedies since the beginning of the year, the Panel requested the Administration to brief members on the supportive services for families in crisis in March 2001. Members supported the Social Welfare Department (SWD)'s plan to encourage the development of district-based services and programmes with the participation of non-government organisations (NGO), residents and local organisations to promote networking, volunteerism and formation of mutual help groups targeted at local needs to assist families in crisis.

9. Members were particularly concerned about the increasing number of extra-marital affairs cases causing the break-up of families and, in some cases, even casualties. In this connection, they noted that SWD would commission an NGO to set up a Family Crisis Support Centre in 2001-02 to act as a focal point for tackling family crises at an early stage. Open at all hours, the Centre would provide a hotline service as well as crisis intervention, including short-term emergency intervention with overnight accommodation, and temporary retreat. Social workers of the Centre would provide focused counselling service and organise programmes for managing stress and enhancing problem-solving skills. The Administration would also launch a publicity campaign to encourage families in distress to seek early professional advice and promote positive ways to cope with adversity as part of its efforts to help families in distress face challenges.

10. Members considered that more help should be given to new arrival families such as by organising orientation programmes for people who had been granted permits to settle in Hong Kong. The Administration informed the Panel that resources had been allocated to SWD for setting up four offices in the Guangdong Province for the purpose and discussion was being held with

the Mainland authorities concerned.

11. As the common problems of these new arrival families could not easily be tackled by SWD alone, the Administration agreed to provide more information in the future on the involvement of other government departments in helping families in crisis.

Care services for the elderly

12. Services for the elderly was another issue of concern to the Panel. During the year, the Administration briefed the Panel on the implementation of the Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Service, regulation of residential care homes for the elderly as well as the development of integrated services for elders. It also reported on the progress of the pilot scheme for contracting out home care and meal services.

13. Members noted that the Administration had been closely monitoring the adequacy of the provision of elderly services and significant resources had been put in over the past several years to improve such services. Over 2 000 residential care places had been added in the previous financial year and more intensive home and community care and support services for frail elders living at home had been introduced in March 2001. Members welcomed the Standardised Care Need Assessment for Elderly Services as it would significantly reduce the time required for completing each assessment. They noted that the Mechanism did not end at finding a service that could match the need of the elderly. The service provider had the responsibility to monitor the health condition of the elderly persons under its care and to arrange for another assessment if the health condition of the elderly persons was found to have changed.

14. Members pointed out that staff of many private residential care homes for the elderly under the Bought Place Scheme and the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme had been working long hours far exceeding the eight-hour requirement under both schemes. Members agreed that there was a need for further initiatives to improve service standards of these homes. They noted that SWD would enhance training for staff of these homes, align the 19 Service Quality Standards, which had been introduced to all subvented welfare services by phases since April 1999, with licensing standards and step up prosecution against non-compliance with licensing conditions. As consumer choice and market force were effective tools to keep the homes on their toes to ensure quality, the Administration would provide more information on all licensed homes to the public to facilitate consumer choice. In response to a Panel member's suggestion that an accreditation system be introduced, the Administration explained that as such a system would more appropriately be undertaken by an independent body to ensure impartiality, it would take some time to implement the proposal.

15. As regards home care and meal services, members were of the view that there was a need to integrate the existing fragmented home care and meal services provided under different service modes. The Administration explained that it was its objective to make such services more integrated and pointed out that the enhanced home care and community care service introduced in March 2001 was an integrated form of service for frail elders.

#### Services for the disabled

16. The Administration briefed the Panel in June 2001 on its implementation plan for the new initiatives to assist people with the disabilities. To strengthen services for the disabled, the Financial Secretary had earmarked \$219 million in the 2001-02 Budget to implement a package of measures to address their basic needs, improve their employment prospects and help them realise their potential. Members expressed support for the proposed expenditure initiatives and noted that in the long term, the Government would provide annual recurrent funding amounting to over \$240 million a year for this package of measures.

17. The Panel was consulted on the Government's plans to construct two rehabilitation complexes at the Lai King Headland and the ex-staff quarter site of the Castle Peak Hospital and to provide, on a temporary basis, 400 long stay care places at the Lai Chi Kok Hospital. Members noted that the plan to convert the Lai Chi Kok Hospital into a temporary long stay care home was to facilitate early provision of rehabilitation services to chronic mentally ill persons pending the completion of the two purpose-built rehabilitation complexes. After discussion of the proposed operational arrangements to ensure a smooth transition, members agreed that an early submission of the proposals should be made to the Finance Committee to seek its approval to implement the two projects.

18. The Administration also updated members on the assistance rendered to the blind or visually impaired persons in accessing and processing information on computers as requested by members. Members noted that the Administration would continue to closely monitor the special needs of people with disabilities in order to facilitate their access to computers and their enhancement of information technology (IT) skills. In the process, the Administration would also encourage IT service providers to incorporate the special needs of the disabled into their overall development strategies.

#### Lump Sum Grant subvention in the social welfare sector

19. Representatives of three staff associations and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service were invited to give their views at the Panel meeting in November 2000 to discuss the implementation of the Lump Sum Grant (LSG)

subvention system with the Administration. The staff associations expressed concern that since NGOs would be given the flexibility to determine their staffing structure and staff remuneration, some of them might unilaterally change the conditions of service of their staff thereby damaging staff relations and morale. To promote healthy staff movement, they considered that the one employer policy should continue to be adopted by NGOs under the new funding system so that staff salaries and the employers' contributions to their provident fund would not be reduced on change of employment within the welfare sector. They also urged the Administration to continue to assist NGOs to meet their contractual obligations to existing staff beyond the five-year Tide-Over-Grant period where necessary and give an assurance that it would provide adequate funding to enable NGOs to meet their provident fund contributions for existing staff.

20. In response to the above concerns, the Administration said that it had agreed to reimburse the employer's provident fund contributions for existing staff on an actual basis. As regards the so-called one employer policy referred to in paragraph 19 above, the Administration pointed out that it was not a Government policy for NGOs in the welfare sector per se but only a practice in administering the rigid subvention system with full control over staff engaged. For NGOs joining the LSG system, it was up to them to decide how they would remunerate their staff. If the Administration forced NGOs to follow a prescribed set of conditions of service, it would defeat the purpose of implementing the new funding arrangement. The Administration assured members that it was confident that the formula for calculating the lump sum grant coupled with the Tide-Over Grant should provide NGOs with sufficient funds to meet their contractual commitments to exiting staff.

21. Members noted that as part of the subvention reform implementation strategy, a Lump Sum Grant Steering Committee would be set up to monitor the progress of the implementation. At the same time, SWD would continue to render advice, support and assistance to all NGOs in their transition to the new funding environment. SWD would also in consultation with the sector enhance the current Service Performance Monitoring System through the Funding and Service Agreements and Service Quality Standards.

#### Policy and procedures for allocating new social welfare services

22. The Administration briefed the Panel in March 2001 on its plans for the future allocation of new welfare service units in furtherance of the objective of improving the quality, efficiency, responsiveness and planning of welfare services. In the light of its recent contracting out experiences with the meal and home care services, the Administration believed that all elderly services, from home care to residential care, were suitable for private sector participation. It therefore intended that competitive bidding should be applied to these services. The Administration stressed that the objective of competitive

bidding was to introduce a transparent and fair system to secure innovative and value-added services, to enhance quality of service, and to achieve cost-effectiveness. Since the objective was not to cut cost, SWD would award higher weighting to quality as against price in the tender process. Successful bidders would be closely monitored to ensure full compliance with contract terms in meeting the agreed performance standards.

23. Representatives from the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, staff associations, elderly rights groups and an academic from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University attended the Panel meeting in March 2001 to voice their concerns and suggestions. They pointed out that overseas experiences in contracting out services through competitive bidding had been mixed and there was a lack of evidence that price competitive bidding saved costs and improved quality. They shared the view that there was a need to consolidate and to review the quality issues as well as the vetting process to bring about improvements, particularly in regard to the transparency of the process. Two representatives suggested adopting a quality-based fixed-price model instead.

24. Members generally shared the concerns expressed by the representatives. Most members did not support private sector participation in the provision of elderly care services as they were worried that the quality of such services would be compromised. The Panel passed a motion opposing the participation of profit-making bodies in the provision of subsidised elderly care services.

#### Support for Self-reliance Scheme

25. The Administration presented two evaluation reports to the Panel on the above Scheme, which was aimed at encouraging and assisting unemployed Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) recipients to regain employment and move towards self-reliance. Members noted that the findings of the evaluation reports showed that the Scheme was well received by the participants generally and had played a useful role in assisting the unemployed CSSA recipients in job search. In view of the different initiatives launched by various policy bureaux, government departments and other bodies to help the unemployed find employment, members agreed to hold a joint meeting with the Panel on Manpower to discuss the issue to ensure cost effectiveness of the various initiatives.

#### Other issues/items discussed

26. Other issues/items discussed by the Panel included implementation of the policy of one social worker for each secondary school, the Comprehensive Social Protection Scheme proposed by the Hong Kong Social Security Society, IT development in the social welfare sector, proposed amendments to the Adoption Ordinance, re-organisation of SWD, services for young night drifters

and upsurge of street sleepers.

27. The Panel held a total of 13 meetings from October 2000 to June 2001, one of which was a joint meeting with the Panel on Manpower.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
22 June 2001

## **Appendix I**

### **Legislative Council**

#### **Panel on Welfare Services**

#### **Terms of Reference**

1. To monitor and examine Government policies and issues of public concern relating to welfare and rehabilitation services matters.
2. To provide a forum for the exchange and dissemination of views on the above policy matters.
3. To receive briefings and to formulate views on any major legislative or financial proposals in respect of the above policy areas prior to their formal introduction to the Council or Finance Committee.
4. To monitor and examine, to the extent it considers necessary, the above policy matters referred to it by a member of the Panel or by the House Committee.
5. To make reports to the Council or to the House Committee as required by the Rules of Procedure.

## Appendix II

### Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

#### Membership list

<b>Chairman</b>	Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
<b>Deputy Chairman</b>	Hon CHAN Yuen-han
<b>Members</b>	Hon David CHU Yu-lin Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan Hon LEE Cheuk-yan Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP Dr Hon YEUNG Sum Hon CHOY So-yuk Hon LI Fung-ying, JP Hon Henry WU King-cheong, BBS Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung Hon WONG Sing-chi Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee
(Total : 15 Members)	
<b>Clerk</b>	Ms Doris CHAN
<b>Legal Adviser</b>	Mr LEE Yu-sung
<b>Date</b>	28 October 2000