

## **LEGCO PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES**

### **ENHANCED FUNCTIONS OF DISTRICT SOCIAL WELFARE OFFICERS**

#### **PURPOSE**

This paper recapitulates the re-organisation of the Social Welfare Department (SWD), one main objective of which is to strengthen the functions of the District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs), and examines the impact of the enhanced DSWOs on the Department's responsiveness to meet community needs, efficiency and productivity, and capacity to meet new challenges in the planning and co-ordination of welfare services.

#### **BACKGROUND**

2. The previous three-tiered headquarters, regional and district structure of SWD was no longer conducive to meeting operational requirements and new challenges arising from changing welfare needs of the community, while the Department was also in need of strengthening its planning capability and human resources management. After extensive consultations with staff of the Department, the 18 District Councils (DCs), and the Social Welfare Advisory Committee, the proposal for re-organisation of SWD was discussed at the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services meeting on 14 May 2001 *vide* paper titled "Positioning Social Welfare Department for Greater Challenges"[CB(2) 1462/00-01 (03)]. With support of the LegCo Welfare Panel, and the subsequent endorsement by the Establishment Subcommittee and formal approval by the Finance Committee on 22 June, 2001, the re-organisation took place from September 2001.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RE-ORGANISATION OF SWD**

3. In the past seven months, the re-organisation of SWD has been implemented by phases, involving changes both at the headquarters and the district levels. The five former Regional Offices were disbanded with effect from September 2001 and the five posts of Principal Social Work Officer (D1) were deleted. By the end of March 2002, the re-organisation of SWD has been fully and smoothly implemented. The re-organisation has given rise to a reduction of 27 posts and a full annual staff savings of \$7,080,948, including salaries and staff on-costs. The exercise has not given rise to any staff redundancies. The structure of a typical District Social Welfare Office is at the Annex. The DSWO is responsible for overseeing departmental service units, including the social security field units in the district as well as some central/regional units and specialized professional teams as appropriate, and undertaking service co-ordination, liaison, planning and outreaching functions in the district. On average, each DSWO supervises a staff complement of 340. In practice, the staff establishment varies amongst districts commensurate with their operational requirements.

### **CHANGES AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL**

4. Under the re-organisation, the 13 DSWOs were upgraded from Chief Social Work Officer (MPS 45 to 49) to Principal Social Work Officer (D1) with enhanced responsibility in the following aspects :

- (a) planning welfare services on a district basis to meet local community needs;
- (b) collaborating with DCs, related Government departments and district organisations to facilitate the implementation of social welfare policies in the district;
- (c) co-ordinating with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the district in respect of delivery of services in meeting the welfare needs of the local community;

(d) establishing a more proactive social outreaching network in the district to help the needy and the disadvantaged; and

(e) administering and managing centralised operational units.

5. From January to March 2002, Planning and Co-ordinating Teams (PCTs) and Family Support Networking Teams (FSNTs) were formed in the districts, by pooling resources from the former Youth Offices (YOs), Rehabilitation and Elderly Offices (REOs) and Group Work Units (GWUs) in community centres, to underpin the DSWOs in planning and co-ordinating welfare services and to strengthen proactive outreaching services to vulnerable groups respectively. Relevant training programmes/activities have been organised for DSWOs, members of PCTs and FSNTs to better equip them to carry out their new functions in the new structure.

#### **PARAMETERS FOR DSWOS IN FULFILLING THEIR ENHANCED FUNCTIONS**

6. To guide DSWOs in fulfilling their enhanced functions, the following parameters have been worked out for their reference :

(a) ***Responsiveness towards district welfare needs*** – sensitivity and responsiveness to district welfare needs is a pre-requisite for effective district planning and service delivery. DSWOs should exercise discretion in the deployment, redeployment and optimal use of existing resources to respond to local welfare needs.

(b) ***Evidence-based needs assessment*** – with the assistance of PCTs, and making reference to the Departmental Databank and district databanks, DSWOs should critically examine the validity and volume of needs and demands reflected by various parties through various channels, drawing reference to reliable evidence so as to assess and prioritise needs in the district for deployment of resources to meeting them. In doing so, DSWOs have to consult the Services Branches at the Headquarters which are in a better position to have an overview of the territory-wide welfare needs so as to arrive at a more balanced allocation/re-allocation of resources among the districts to cater for their varying needs.

- (c) ***Prevalent policy objectives (POs) and key result areas (KRAs)***– while planning services/programmes/activities at the district level, DSWOs should always adhere to the policy directions contained in the prevalent POs and KRAs. A full understanding of the Policy Address and PO Booklets will provide clear guidance and reference for planning.
- (d) ***Resources allocation and pursuance of value-for-money*** – While resource allocation for both new premises-led and non-premises-tied initiatives is done at the headquarters level, more input is now sought from DSWOs to make sure resources are put to the most needy areas, taking into account district characteristics and demographic profiles. In view of the current and foreseeable financial constraints, a new mindset to achieve value-for-money by service re-engineering, process streamlining, and redeployment of resources to meet new emerging needs is being built up to achieve innovative and cost-effective delivery of services.
- (e) ***From fragmentation to integration*** – both at the service planning level and at the service delivery level, integration of services should be explored and encouraged, not only to effect value-for-money, but also for effective and efficient delivery of holistic services to the customers.
- (f) ***From compartmentalisation to cross-sector collaboration*** – in the planning and delivery of services to meeting district needs, DSWOs should strive towards breaking the boundaries and maximising cross-sector collaboration at the district level to achieve synergy and multi-disciplinary co-operation.
- (g) ***Community partnership*** – DSWOs are well-positioned to enhance community partnership with DCs, local personalities, local organisations, subvented and non-subvented NGOs, and other Government departments. DSWOs will serve as facilitators in assisting local communities to develop their social capital and community partnership. In future, DSWOs will offer advice and assistance to these local groups that wish to apply for funding under the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund.

## **THE ENHANCED FUNCTIONS OF THE DSWOS**

7. Since implementation of the re-organisation, DSWOs have taken active steps to strengthen their roles and fulfil their enhanced functions within the context and environment of their respective district. We have seen encouraging progress and some examples are given in the ensuing paragraphs.

### ***District welfare planning***

8. District Co-ordinating Committees/Local Committees on Services for Young People (DCC/LCs)<sup>1</sup> will continue to be the key mechanism whereby the DSWO taps the expertise and opinions from members, including DC members, local leaders, representatives from other Government departments, services providers, local organisations, and service users in district welfare planning through the processes of needs assessment, formulation of service/programme plan, implementation of the plan and subsequent evaluation of outcome. We will continue to keep in view the functioning of the DCC/LCs and take steps to re-engineer the mechanism where necessary.

9. Apart from the DCC/LCs, DSWOs also use other means to identify and prioritize district welfare needs, assess the satisfaction levels of the community on the existing welfare service provision, and analyse service gaps. For example, DSWO(Kwun Tong) and DSWO(Central, Western and Islands) held District Planning Forums in December 2001 and March 2002 respectively, involving academia, DC members, local leaders, services providers and services users; DSWO(Eastern and Wan Chai) held briefing sessions for DC members and services providers on policy objectives and new initiatives on welfare services, set up focus groups to collect views from stakeholders, paid concerned visits to street sleepers and elders living alone to assess their welfare needs, and plans to conduct survey on community needs; DSWO(Sha Tin) networks local people at grass-root level through sending her PCT staff to attend Area Committees and Estate Management Advisory Committees meetings. Through these various means, the DSWOs seek to maximize involvement and participation of various sectors in the local community in district welfare planning.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the chairmanship of the DSWO, each district has four DCCs, DCC on Family and Child Welfare Services, DCC on Elderly Services, DCC on Rehabilitation Services, DCC on Volunteer Movement, and one to two Local Committees on Services for Young People.

### *Planning of premises-tied projects*

10. Before the re-organisation, new premises-tied projects were mainly planned at the headquarters level with comparatively less involvement of the DSWOs until the late stage of local consultation. Since the re-organisation, DSWOs are involved at the very early stages. They are invited to make bid for and give comments to the provision of welfare premises at different types of developments. This new practice enables the headquarters' Project Planning Section to better capture district welfare needs, local sentiments, site conditions, provision and utilization of existing services, need for reprovisioning of under-sized/sub-standard service units, etc. For example, in the development of a project at Phase 4, West Mongkok Public Housing Estate, DSWO(Yau Tsim Mongkok) took up the role of the project co-ordinator and liaised with various stakeholders to assess the priority amongst the district welfare needs, taking note of the district demographic characteristics as well as the expressed interest of local leaders/organisations/residents. This co-ordination and liaison has resulted in a proposal for a combination of services for different target groups to be operated by one agency with an integrated model, forming alliance with another agency running an Integrated Team for Young People. In the Western District, there is demand for service to frail elders while at the same time there is a surplus of social centres for the elderly (S/E). On the advice of DSWO(Central, Western & Islands), a new S/E site was transformed into a mini-day care centre for the elderly (D/E) to meet such changing needs in the local community.

11. DSWOs also play a proactive role in providing input to the redevelopment of NGO sites in the district and the planning of integrated projects. For example, in the proposed redevelopment of the Po Leung Kuk (West Wing) and the Lei Muk Shue Community Hall development, the service needs and service gaps in the districts are examined under the leadership of the respective DSWO in collaboration with the DCs and other stakeholders. With comprehensive and thorough understanding of the district needs as well as the provision of existing welfare services in the district, services tailor-made to meeting such needs or bridging such service-gaps would be designed and developed.

### ***Planning of non-premises-tied initiatives and integrated projects***

12. DSWOs have all along been heavily involved in the planning and launching of non-premises-tied initiatives, for example, the launching of Understanding the Adolescents Project in schools, and other promotional/public education initiatives like Healthy Ageing. DSWOs will continue to be involved in the process of invitation and vetting of proposals for specific services in their respective district, which may or may not be premises-tied. Importance of their enhanced planning role is recognised as exemplified by the Department's adoption of DSWO(Sha Tin)'s recommendation to set up two teams to working with young night drifters (YND) in the Ma On Shan area – where there is a rapid growth of youth population – while most other districts are provided with only one YND team. Such proactive move to meet the needs of the community was welcomed by the DC, NGOs as well as the residents.

13. The recent implementation of the recommendations of the Family Services Review [cf: LC Paper No.CB(2) 587/01-02 (06)] viz the formation of integrated family services centre (IFSC) has taken advantage of this new district welfare planning mechanism. Under the leadership of DSWOs, NGOs providing family services and those providing other services, as well as other stakeholders in the districts worked out, through discussions, negotiations and synergy, proposals to collaborate strategically with one another to form IFSCs. As a result, very encouraging response involving 38 proposals, most of which involve strategic alliance and collaboration among SWD and NGO services units with value-added service items, were received. Among them, 15 have been selected as funded pilot projects.

### ***Inter-sectoral collaboration***

14. To achieve organisational efficiency and effectiveness, DSWOs strive towards seamless services to the needy and the vulnerable, cutting across boundaries and maximising cross-sector synergy and collaboration. An example is the “Kwun Tong Community Support Networking Scheme”, which comprises representatives from the five DCC/LCs, DC members, service providers, school personnels, local personalities and various Government departments, was launched to pool efforts and resources together to provide timely assistance to elders and needy families affected by a series of

redevelopment programmes underway in a number of public housing estates extending till 2006. Another example is the formation of a regular forum by DSWO(Sham Shui Po) with Caritas Medical Centre, Kwai Chung Hospital, Department of Health, and relevant welfare services units to explore means of collaboration between the medical/health and welfare sectors, and examine the possibility of process re-engineering in relations to admission and discharge, follow-up of patients, provision of outreaching medical services and tele-medical clinic etc.

15. In youth work, many DSWOs have, through their LCs which comprise representatives from the Education Department, the Hong Kong Police Force, the Independent Commission Against Corruption and NGOs, school principals, teachers, parents, and youths, launched various joint programmes towards the primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention of youth problems. These collaboration efforts facilitate the implementation of welfare policies in the districts.

#### *Co-ordination of service delivery to meet district welfare needs*

16. One of the major objectives for enhancing DSWO's functions is to increase sensitivity and responsiveness to district welfare needs. Towards this end, the DSWOs exercise flexibility and discretion in the mobilization of existing resources and the co-ordination of service delivery. For example, DSWO(Yuen Long) has made full use of her discretion in redeploying manpower and resources within the district to set up a Family Support and Resources Centre (FSRC) in Yuen Long Town to serve customers living in Yuen Long and rural area, to whom the services and facilities of the FSRC in Tin Shui Wai are not easily accessible. Similarly, DSWO(Tsuen Wan/Kwai Tsing) has redeployed manpower and resources to set up a rural mobile service for residents of the remote rural areas in the district.

17. Not only do DSWOs respond to the district welfare needs through redeployment of the resources within SWD, they also make full use of the available services provided by NGOs or other organisations. For example, in response to a family tragedy that occurred earlier in a public housing estate, DSWO(Tai Po/North) organised a programme with exhibition and games to help residents face family crisis and to promote the necessity to seek professional help. Social workers from SWD and NGO services units were

mobilized to highlight the messages, introduce relevant services, and to provide brief counselling services on site.

18. DSWOs also play a useful role in the mediation of service delivery by different services providers, so as to avoid duplication of services and to fill service gaps. For example, DSWO(Central, Western and Islands) had initiated a service sharing and co-ordinating meeting among all NGOs serving the Tung Chung area to discuss how resources should be maximized in the district.

### ***Proactive outreaching***

19. To implement the initiative in the CE's 2000 Policy Address to enhance outreaching services for those hard-to-reach target groups and to build up social networks to support the disadvantaged, ie the elderly, families and youth at risk, single parents and new arrivals etc., 14 FSNTs have been set up in the 13 districts. Moreover, DSWOs have also employed other means to establish proactive outreaching network, e.g. DSWO (Kowloon City) has set up a network with 100 churches in the Kowloon City District and initiated joint programmes with them to reach out to the vulnerable groups. The first programme jointly organised with 20 churches was attended by about 4,000 participants, some of those were identified by social workers as in need of welfare services. With early identification of problems through outreaching programmes, early intervention by professional social workers will prevent further deterioration of problems.

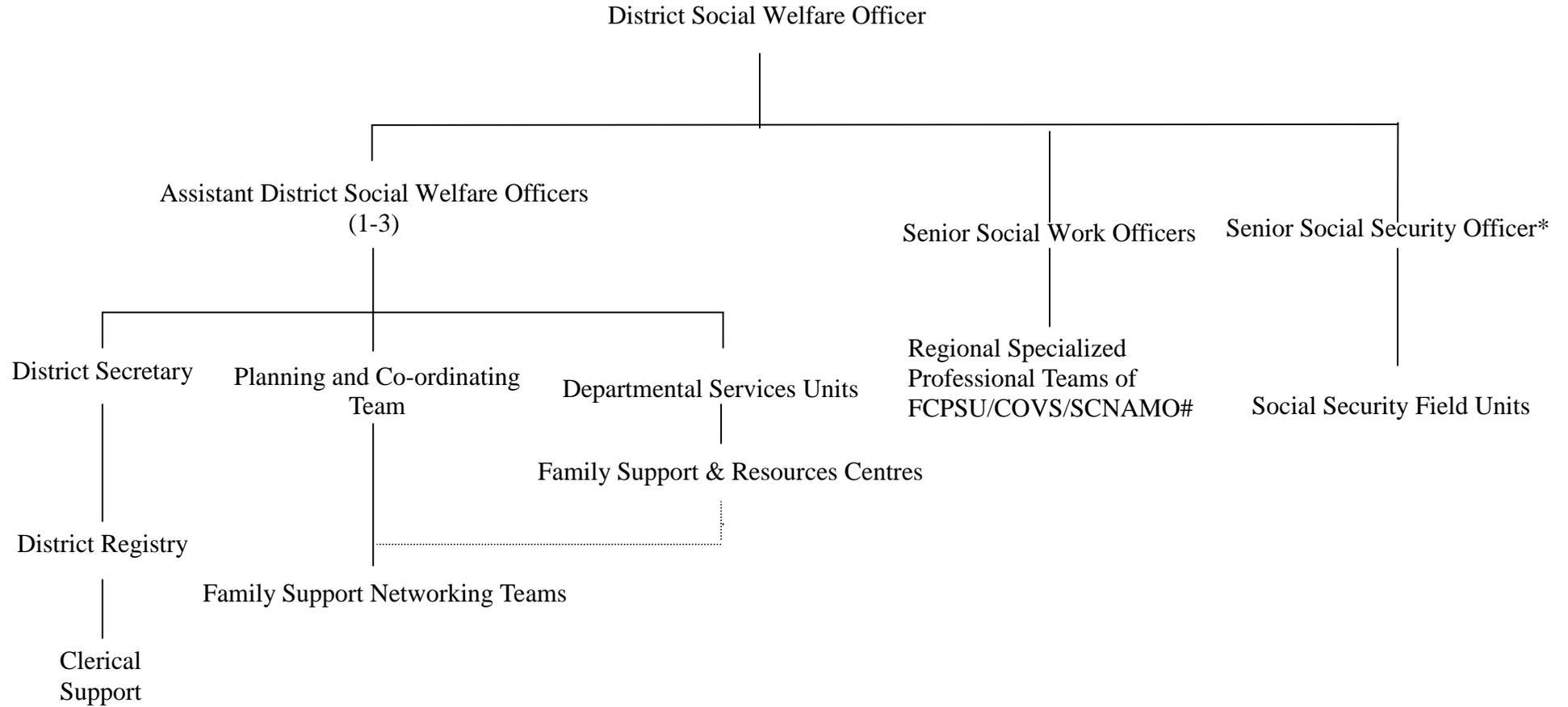
### **THE WAY FORWARD**

20. The initial achievement of DSWOs in delivering their enhanced functions, as reflected above, has been very encouraging. So far, comments from DC members, other stakeholders including staff unions, subvented and non-subvented NGOs, have all been positive. With the delayering, the headquarters and senior management are now closely in touch with district matters. DSWOs are members of DSW's regular meetings to keep themselves abreast of the Department's service directions and developments and to alert senior staff to sensitive matters at the district level. We expect our DSWOs to develop into a focal point at district level to ensure accessibility of

welfare services to those in need and to help build up a more caring community through mutual support.

Social Welfare Department  
April 2002

**STRUCTURE OF A TYPICAL DISTRICT SOCIAL WELFARE OFFICE**



\* A total of 7 Senior Social Security Officers to oversee Social Security Field Units in 13 Districts

# FCPSU: Family and Child Protective Services Unit

COVS : Central Office for Volunteer Service

SCNAMO: Standardized Care Need Assessment Management Offices (Elderly Services)