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Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

New Initiatives to Strengthen Support for Families

Purpose

The paper informs Members of the Social Welfare Department's (SWD) new initiatives to strengthen support for families.

Background

2. Hong Kong has experienced major economic changes/challenges following the Asian financial turmoil and recent global events. Issues such as rising unemployment, job instability, negative property equity, coupled with weakening of family solidarity and marriages, have resulted in an increase in family tragedies, abuse issues including both child and elder victims, domestic violence and youth problems. Family is the most basic unit in society and the most essential pillar to support individuals. We need to strengthen community and social support under the social welfare portfolio to assist families in handling difficulties and crisis.

Existing Services

3. Various support services for people and families in distress/crisis have been put in place or enhanced over the past years. These include the network of 65 Family Services Centres and 104 Medical Social Service Units over the territory, 64 Integrated Teams on youth services and 462 school social workers each serving one secondary school to help the youth and students, and 35 Support Teams for the Elderly serving the vulnerable elders. Besides, 5 Single Parents Centres, 8 Post-migration Centres for new arrivals from the Mainland and 5 Family Education Pilot Projects have been in place to strengthen support to the vulnerable groups and families in need.

4. Prevention is always better than cure. There are public education and publicity campaigns to promote positive values towards life, strengthen families and enhance people's resilience in coping with stress. Such messages have been reinforced in major publicity and promotional campaigns including the Family Life Education publicity programme series, the prevention of child abuse and spouse battering series. The latest publicity event, "Empowering Families to Face Challenges" Campaign, which was launched on 2 December 2001, features radio series starting from mid-December 2001 till late April 2002 and TV series beginning

in May 2002. We have also secured resources to continue conducting a major publicity campaign to strengthen families and protect children and other victims against abuse and violence in 2002-03.

Review on Existing Services

5. Over the years, the Government has allocated substantial resources to strengthen existing services for meeting families' changing needs. In 2001-02, \$1,747 million, representing 6.7% increase over that of the previous year, has been allocated to family and child welfare services. However, there is a general phenomenon of "patch-work", i.e. creating new services or projects wherever a need arises. As a result, a degree of overlap in the provision of services and resources is inevitable. Given the significant social and economic changes in recent years, it is necessary for the Government to critically examine whether existing resources have been best utilized; whether they can be re-allocated and how services can be re-engineered with a view to filling service gaps and meeting the changing needs of families in a more cost-effective and holistic approach.

6. Following the policy directive stated above, the SWD has conducted reviews of existing services and initiated new service delivery modes with a view to meeting the changing welfare needs of families in Hong Kong and those that are in vulnerable circumstances. The strategy adopted by the SWD in its re-engineering endeavors are three-pronged: -

- (a) to step up publicity and public education and to prevent and minimize the onset of family crisis through a proactive outreaching and networking service model for early identification of vulnerable families for timely intervention;
- (b) to transform the network of family services centres into integrated family service centres providing a package of *integrated* and *easily accessible* services for helping families in need of varying levels of support; and
- (c) to create and enhance specialised services to support family with problems manifested in their severe form such as abuse, violence and suicide.

The above strategy is underpinned by two major strands of change in the welfare sector, namely the use of resources in a more flexible and cost-effective manner with the implementation of the Lump Sum Grant and the increased community-based approach reflected in the SWD re-organisation.

7. A summary of reviews undertaken and new service delivery modes proposed is set out below: -

(a) *Review of Family Services*

In August 2000, the SWD commissioned the University of Hong Kong (HKU) to conduct a review of family welfare services in Hong Kong. The consultancy study completed in May 2001 has recommended, inter alia, a new service delivery model, namely ***Integrated Family Service Centre (IFSC)***. The IFSC will integrate family welfare services with community-based services to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services to meet the changing needs of the families in a holistic manner. The IFSC model has received very good buy-in from the sector during public consultations in the past months. Ten to fifteen pilot projects are being identified to test the effectiveness of the new service delivery model.

(b) *Review on Group Work Services*

The SWD, at the same time, has also reviewed the services of its Group Work Units (GWUs) in community centres. With a view to paving way for the establishment of the future IFSCs as well as matching with the re-organisation of the SWD whereby service planning and delivery are to be undertaken in accordance with district needs, the 19 SWD GWUs over the territory are refocused and renamed as ***Family Support and Resource Centres (FSRCs)*** for providing resource and support services to vulnerable families.

(c) *Family Support Networking Teams*

In his Policy Address 2000, the Chief Executive pledged that we would enhance our referral and outreaching services to better understand the needs of the disadvantaged and provide them with information on the resources available to help resolve their problems. Following this directive, 14 ***Family Support Networking Teams (FSNTs)*** are set up mainly at FSRCs in each and every administrative district of the SWD¹ for providing outreach and networking services to vulnerable families for early identification of problems and timely intervention. FSNTs will subsume the services of Rural Mobile Service Teams for districts in the New Territories for better synergy and integration of services.

(d) *Three-year Action Plan for Street Sleepers*

With the changing profile of street sleepers and to address the growing concern that more younger unemployed persons in financial hardship turn to street sleeping, a ***Three-year Action Plan to help Street Sleepers*** jointly operated by 3 NGOs specialising in street sleeper services has been put in place since April

¹ SWD is organised into 13 administrative Districts, with five each serving two District Council districts. In view of growing population of the Tseung Kwan O New Town, an additional FSNT is set up within the Wong Tai Sin/Sai Kung District of SWD.

2001 with an allocation of \$8.73M from the Lotteries Fund. A package of integrated services is tailor-made to tackle the special needs of street sleepers. These include midnight outreaching visits, immediate shelter/hostel placement, counselling on social/life skills and interpersonal relationship, advice on employment and arrangement of job placement, emergency fund to meet immediate maintenance and work-related expenses, arrangement of long-term accommodation and follow-up support to sustain efforts to re-integrate them into the community. The action plan also includes an evaluative research conducted by the City University of Hong Kong to assess the effectiveness of the new package of services and existing services in tackling the street sleeper problem.

(e) *Family Crisis Support Centre*

To strengthen services for families in crisis, the SWD has plans for the first of its kind *Family Crisis Support Centre (FCSC)*. The setting up of this Centre will fill the service gap in the form of a time-out facility in helping users under extreme stress or facing crisis to manage their emotions and seek positive solution to family problems. The Centre can also be utilised as a resource and early intervention point to tackle family tensions or crisis at an early stage with a goal to help families overcome difficulties and prevent family problems from deteriorating into tragedy. The management of this Centre has been entrusted to Caritas-Hong Kong through a quality-based competitive process.

(f) *Suicidal Crisis Centre*

There is growing concern over the number of attempted suicide cases and those that ended up in death. To further enhance measures to address the problem of suicide, the SWD sought funding allocation of \$10.6M from the Lotteries Fund in October 2001 for the Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong to set up a *Suicidal Crisis Centre* on a three year pilot basis to provide round-the-clock outreaching service and crisis intervention/intensive counselling to those who are in crisis situation and at high suicidal risk. An in-built evaluation will be conducted by the HKU.

(g) *Specialized and Co-ordinated Effort in Combating Violence*

To tackle the problem of violence, the SWD has taken steps to develop service specialty in the work related to domestic violence under a dedicated team headed by a Chief Social Work Officer since September 2001. The service coverage includes child abuse, elder abuse, sexual violence and domestic violence. This initiative signifies the development of specialized services in the social work profession and an integrated approach to tackle the violence problem. Separately, the SWD had conducted a review on the effectiveness of the multi-disciplinary infrastructure to combat violence earlier this year. In consultation with members of the Committee on Child Abuse, the Working

Group on Battered Spouse and the Working Group on Sexual Violence, it was concluded that while the Committee on Child Abuse should remain as a separate entity, the other two Working Groups be amalgamated to form the Working Group on Combating Violence. The amalgamation has taken place to streamline practice, maximize use of resources and generate synergy. The Working Group on Combating Violence will continue to look into the issues and concerns of violence and advise the Government as appropriate. Additional NGO representatives have been invited to become members of this new Working Group to enhance better co-ordination and synergy in mapping out strategies and improving existing services.

Details on the above initiatives are set out in the Annex.

Evaluation and Monitoring

8. The new service initiatives are unique, innovative yet inter-related in terms of the overall objective, service design and delivery mode. They serve all families, in particular those in difficulties and crisis including new arrival families, single parent families on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, low income families and families with child care difficulty, child neglect/abuse record, etc. It is important to put in place in-built evaluation to assess their respective effectiveness.

9. For IFSC service, a Working Group on the Implementation of the Review of Family Service has been set up in September 2001, among others, to advise on the implementation of the review and monitor the progress of the implementation of the pilot projects. The SWD has invited the HKU team who had successfully conducted the FSC review to carry out an evaluative study on all the pilot projects. The consultancy team will also develop a framework to assess the effectiveness of the different modes of transformation into IFSC and recommend the most cost-effective mode(s) for future practice.

10. The pilots on street sleepers action plan and the suicidal crisis centre will be followed closely and monitored by academics from two tertiary institutions. The performance of the services of FSRC, FSNT and FCSC will be closely monitored and assessed through service units' compliance with the Service Quality Standards and agreed levels of outcome and output indicators stipulated in the Service Document for the Department and Funding and Service Agreements for NGOs.

Shared Responsibility – the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund

11. To assist families in need is the overall responsibility of the community at large. The SWD has steered the development of a comprehensive welfare network including both tangible and non-tangible services to assist those families who, for various reasons, cannot solve their problems/difficulties through their own means.

After all, the provision of welfare services has to keep pace with changing community needs. It will take some time for the complete transformation of existing services as needed but such changes will take place in an overall framework, instead of in a haphazard manner.

12. However, we need more than the Government, and more than social workers, to tackle the social and family problems exacerbated by the economic restructuring. In his 2001 Policy Address, the Chief Executive said that while the Government resolutely assumes responsibility for welfare services, we also encourage the community to come together, and pool the wisdom and strength of individuals, non-profit-making organisations and businesses to support our people to develop their spirit of self-help and mutual aid. To support and promote this concept of social service development, the Chief Executive has announced the setting up of a Community Investment and Inclusion Fund with an initial grant of \$300 million. The objective of the Fund is to encourage mutual concern and aid among people, and to promote community participation in district and cross-sector programmes. Details on the operation of the Fund are being worked out.

Way Forward

13. The Government will work closely with the sector and the community on the new service initiatives introduced in this paper and further develop appropriate strategies to meet the changing needs and aspirations of the community.

Social Welfare Department
November 2001

Integrated Family Service Centre (IFSC)

IFSC comprises three major components, each with strategic functions as stated below:

(a) *Family Resource Unit (FRU)*

FRU provides open and universal services to all families with drop-in services, information provision, family life education, developmental mutual help groups, volunteer development, social networking and outreaching etc. The main objective is to disseminate family resources to enhance the functioning of families.

(b) *Family Support Unit (FSU)*

FSU provides service support to families at risk or disadvantaged families. Support services include parenting and family management training, caregiver support, referrals for assistance and brief counselling etc. The main objective is to render timely family support services to prevent further deterioration of family strategies/problems.

(c) *Family Counselling Unit (FCU)*

FCU provides intensive and clinical counseling to families in crisis to preserve family solidarity and occurrence of family breakdown and traumatic tragedies.

Pilot implementation of IFSC

IFSC is a brand new model and pilot projects will be carried out in selected districts for consolidation of experiences and test-run of different service integration models before across-the-board implementation. Through exploratory process of IFSCs, we hope to ascertain the cost-effectiveness and implementation arrangements of the different modes recommended by the consultants of transforming existing Family Services Centres (FSCs) into the IFSCs.

(a) *Implementation Schedule*

- District Social Welfare Officers of the SWD, in consultation with relevant stakeholders in the respective districts, will put up viable proposals on pilot projects by mid December 2001.

- Selection of no more than 15 pilot projects will be completed in January 2002.
- Implementation of these projects will take effect in April 2002.

(b) Resource Implication

- The implementation of IFSC model, being a restructuring exercise of existing service delivery, is basically cost neutral.
- A Lotteries Fund (LF) grant of \$4.71 million has been sought to provide support for non-recurrent expenses, e.g. publicity, staff orientation, programme expenses etc. and to conduct an in-built evaluative study to those units included in the pilot projects.
- Expenditure on necessary renovation and fitting out works will also be applied and supported through LF grants in due course.

Family Support and Resource Centre (FSRC)

Details of the FSRC service are as follows:

Service Provision and Delivery Model

- FSRC is a community-based service discharging the roles both of a FSU and FRU of the IFSC model.
- It re-engineers from provision of social and recreational services to the general public in the main to a variety of informative, tangible, supportive and brief counselling services to vulnerable families and groups.
- It is anticipated that FSRC will merge with FSC of the SWD to form an IFSC in the long run.

Implementation Schedule

- The refocusing of GWUs to FSRCs has taken place since September 2001 and will be completed by phase in about six months' time.

Resource Implication

- The refocusing of GWUs to FSRCs is implemented through redeploying existing resources within the SWD.

Family Support Networking Team

Details of the FSNT service are as follows:

Service Provision and Delivery Mode

- Mainly attaching to FSRC, FSNT reaches out to the vulnerable families in the districts proactively through concern visits, setting up of mobile counters etc.
- The team will assess problems of those vulnerable families, provide information on the resources available and refer them to appropriate service units for assistance and mutual support.
- Additional resources have been allocated to 13 community centres of NGOs for strengthening their outreaching service for the vulnerable families.

Implementation Schedule

- 14 FSNTs are being formed over the territory since September 2001. It is expected that individual FSNT will be set up and commence operation by end of 2001.

Resource Implication

- A total of \$7.8 million (i.e. \$6.2 million under the 2000 Policy Address for creation of additional posts and \$1.6 million from 2001 Budget Speech for creation of additional posts and redeployment of existing resources from the SWD's reorganisation exercise) have been allocated for the formation of 14 FSNTs;
- \$3.4 million from the 2000 Policy Address for creation of additional posts from 2000/01 to 2002/03 are allocated to the community centres of the NGOs to assist them to render outreaching services to the same target groups.

The 3-Year Action Plan to help Street Sleepers

Details of the 3-year Action Plan are as follows:

Service Provision and Delivery Mode

- The SWD, in consultation with three non-governmental organisations (NGOs) specializing in street sleeper services, namely St. James' Settlement, Salvation Army and Christian Concern for the Homeless Association, has worked out a three-year action plan to tackle the street sleeper problem on a territory-wide basis.
- The three-year action plan comprises (a) midnight outreaching and other integrated supportive services for street sleepers provided by the three NGOs; (b) an emergency shelter in Wan Chai run by St. James' Settlement; and (c) an evaluative research conducted by City University of Hong Kong to assess the effectiveness of the three projects and existing services in tackling the street sleeper problem.
- Through adopting an integrated approach, the three projects will be able to cater for the accommodation, social, psychological, employment and financial needs of street sleepers in a holistic and co-ordinated manner.
- The three projects also build up close network and interface with other NGOs providing street sleeper services so that a continuum of care can be provided to street sleepers to meet their changing needs.

Implementation Schedule

- The action plan already commenced operation in April 2001.

Resource Implication

- A LF grant of \$8.73 million has been allocated for carrying out the three-year action plan.

Family Crisis Support Centre (FCSC)

Details of the FCSC service are as follows:

Service Provision and Delivery Mode

- With at least one registered social worker on duty at any point of time, the Centre will provide round-the-clock service and admit users in crisis on a 24-hour basis.
- An integrated package of services of 24-hour hotline, outreach and prompt intervention services, short-term overnight accommodation, groups and programmes, resource corner and self-learning facilities, referral for follow-up, training of ex-residents as volunteer or peer counsellors and community educational programmes etc. will be provided.

Implementation Schedule

- The SWD has signed the Service Agreement with the operating NGO, i.e. Caritas-Hong Kong, in mid-October 2001.
- Non-premises-tied services (such as 24-hour hotline, public education programmes, publicity etc) have commenced operation since November 2001. Renovation and fitting-out works are carried out on schedule.
- It is expected that full implementation of services will take place in March 2002.

Resource Implication

- An annual recurrent subvention of \$5 million will be provided for regular service operation.
- In addition to a capital grant of \$16.7 million allocated from LF for fitting-out works, a LF grant of not exceeding \$0.822 million will be made available for the purchase of furniture and equipment for the Centre.

The Suicidal Crisis Centre and related initiatives on Suicide Prevention

Details of the Suicidal Crisis Centre are as follows:

Service Provision and Delivery Mode

- The Centre provides outreaching service and immediate crisis intervention/intensive counselling to those who are in crisis situation and at high suicidal risk on a round-the-clock basis.
- The Centre will also build up networks with related services and agencies that are in contact with those having suicidal intent or attempts in order to identify and reach the service targets as early as practicable.

Implementation Schedule

- The Centre will commence operation once minimal staff is recruited.
- Implementation will be divided into three phases: (1) networking and publicity of services in the first three months; (2) provision of outreaching and counselling services from the fourth month; (3) full implementation starting from the seventh month onwards.

Resource Implication

- A LF grant of \$10.615 million has been allocated to the operating NGO, i.e. The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong to set up the Suicidal Crisis Centre.

Other related Dedicated Suicide-prevention Services

- Elderly Suicide Prevention Project operated by Suicide Prevention Services was funded by a LF grant of \$5.9 million from May 1998 to April 2002; and funding support from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust till March 2003.
- A 3-year Joint Project on Prevention of Elderly Suicide is operated by the SWD, Hong Kong Council of Social Service and Hong Kong Psycho-geriatric Association, with funding support of \$7.96 million from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust.
- The Youthline is operated by the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups with an annual subvention of \$5.3 million.
- An Education and Resource Centre proposed by the Samaritan Befrienders

Hong Kong is now under the active funding consideration by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust.

Specialized and Co-ordinated Effort in Combating Violence

Details of the Domestic Violence Team headed by the Chief Social Work Officer and the related Working Groups on Combating Violence are as follows:

Major Work of the Domestic Violence Team

- The Team is responsible for the policy, development and operation of the specialist service tackling domestic violence. The service covers child abuse, elder abuse, sexual violence and violence at home or in the family.
- The Team co-ordinates the efforts from various parties concerned in order to deal with the domestic violence problem more effectively.

Resource Implication

- The creation of the Chief Social Work Officer is through redeployment of resources arising from the re-organisation of SWD in September 2001.

Related Working Groups/Committee

- SWD chairs three working groups/committee on combating violence, child abuse and elder abuse respectively. Members of these working groups/committee include representatives from policy bureaus and government departments concerned, Hong Kong Council of Social Service and NGOs etc. The major tasks undertaken by the working groups/committee are as follows:

Working Group on Combating Violence

- (a) mapping out strategies and approaches in handling violence;
- (b) examining existing procedures and recommending improvement measures;
- (c) strengthening co-ordination and co-operation among parties concerned in handling and combating violence; and
- (d) co-ordinating statistics and facilitating research studies.

Committee on Child Abuse

- (a) examining the child abuse problem in view of current social circumstances;
- (b) mapping out strategies to address the problem of child abuse including prevention, public education and community participation;
- (c) examining ways to facilitate multi-disciplinary collaboration;
- (d) formulating new approaches for the handling of child abuse cases;

- (e) facilitating and coordinating research studies on child abuse and related subjects; and
- (f) monitoring the implementation of recommendations.

Working Group on Elder Abuse

- (a) examining the issue of elder abuse in Hong Kong;
- (b) proposing strategies, practical measures and action plan to combat the problem of elder abuse; and
- (c) drawing up a frame work to implement proposed action plans.