

Review Report on the Implementation of Recommendations of the

Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai

Background

1. In light of the occurrence of the family tragedy happened on 11 April 2004 in Tin Shui Wai and the great public concern, the Director of Social Welfare set up a 3-person Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai (the Review Panel) to review the provision and service delivery process of family services in Tin Shui Wai and to see what improvements could be made. The Report of the Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai (the TSW Report) was completed and released in November 2004. Further to that, the Review Panel has conducted a review on the implementation of the recommendations made in the TSW Report in the past nine months.

Progress of Follow-up on Recommendations of the Report of the Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai

2. After the release of the TSW Report, a series of briefings on the recommendations of the report were held for the LegCo Welfare Panel, Social Welfare Advisory Committee, other relevant committees, working groups, and district stakeholders. The Review Panel also conducted meetings with the key government departments concerned, relevant committees, working groups at district level to further obtain their views and suggestions on improvement measures regarding community building, tackling domestic violence and child abuse, and services to support the family.

3. In reviewing the implementation of the recommendations made in the TSW Report, the Review Panel is glad to observe that much concerted effort and commitment has been shown by parties concerned in making effective improvements in community building and services to help families in need. A detailed review of the implementation of the recommendations is given in the following paragraphs:

District Co-ordination and Collaboration

(i) Government's Role in Community Building

4. The Review Panel notes that in response to the TSW Report, the Yuen Long

District Council, in addition to its existing committees responsible for different aspects of community development, has established a Working Group on Tin Shui Wai Planning and Community Building (the Working Group) since December 2004. The Working Group is chaired by the Vice-chairman of Yuen Long District Council (YLDC), attended by the District Officer (Yuen Long), the District Social Welfare Officer (Yuen Long), YLDC members and representatives from all concerned government departments. It has regular meetings to discuss and closely monitor progress of improvements in the provision of services and facilities in Tin Shui Wai. Through the joint effort of the Working Group, local stakeholders and concerned government departments, including HAD, SWD, Education and Manpower Bureau, Leisure and Cultural Services Department, and Housing Department, measures have been made to bring out improvements to the community services and facilities in Tin Shui Wai. These include strengthening the library service, speeding up the construction of the community hall and local open space projects, use of school premises and under-utilised car parks for organising leisure and cultural activities and community programmes. Through the effort of the District Officer (Yuen Long), the process of establishing the Mutual Aid Committee (MAC) for the residents of housing estates in Tin Shui Wai (North) has been speeded up and a total of 30 MACs were set up in the period of November 2004 and July 2005. Through this MAC network, the Yuen Long District Office has launched in this year large-scale community building project aiming at promoting social harmony and neighbourhood mutual help.

5. The Review Panel encourages similar working groups to be set up in other districts where necessary. At the same time, the Review Panel also supports the Commission on Poverty adopting a district-based approach in alleviating poverty with the help of the District Offices of HAD in strengthening district co-ordination and network. This will facilitate community building and in turn should help to build up mutual support in the community and hopefully reduce domestic violence.

(ii) District Welfare Planning Mechanism

6. The Review Panel notes that SWD has worked out a draft District Welfare Planning Protocol (the Protocol) which sets out a standardised planning framework and common approach for District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) to follow. A set of social indicators are also incorporated as part of the Protocol to provide consistent measurements of the multi-dimensional societal conditions at the districts and to serve as one of the means to map out district welfare needs and identify service gaps. The Protocol has been developed based on the good practices currently exercised by the DSWOs. Social indicators such as population and other socio-economic demographic data are included. It also provides for more mutual understanding and communication

between DSWOs and the central administration of the Department through internal forums and channels. The Protocol has been finalised after external consultation conducted during the period from April to June 2005. The Department has also advised that the Protocol will be kept under review and adjustment may be made in the light of changing circumstances.

(iii) Review of the District Co-ordinating Committees

7. SWD has taken note of the Review Panel's recommendation on the need for a review of the roles, functions and structures of the existing District Co-ordinating Committees (DCCs). A pilot project is being conducted in Kwun Tong District, namely "Kwun Tong District Concourse", involving community representatives from various government departments, Non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local dignitaries and service users. The pilot project has identified family violence as a specific issue to work on and it will be completed by the end of 2005.

(iv) Greater Flexibility in Mobilising District Resources Under Crisis

8. The Review Panel observes that with their enhanced roles and functions, DSWOs stand ready to promote closer partnership and collaboration with NGOs at the district level. Considering the vision and core business of individual NGOs, DSWOs may have practical difficulty in actually mobilising or deploying the resources of the NGOs in their district as this will affect the overall operation and service objectives of the NGOs concerned. Yet, DSWOs can play a leading role in building up consensus among NGOs in the districts regarding the district needs, service priorities and strategies in addressing the needs so that there is a co-ordinated approach in the use of resources to tackle the most pressing welfare issues in the districts. In this regard, the initiative of the District Social Welfare Officer (Yuen Long) (DSWO(YL)) in establishing the Yuen Long Welfare Services Planning and Co-ordinating Advisory Committee since February 2005 is a move in the right direction. This committee promotes the collaboration of NGOs in the district and co-ordinates the district resources and work plans conducted under the auspices of the existing five DCCs as well as supporting the DSWO(YL) in developing the annual district welfare plan to address the district's welfare needs. The Review Panel considers that SWD should draw experiences from this exercise together with the review conducted in the Kwun Tong District Concourse in reviewing the district co-ordination mechanism.

(v) District Support to Setting Up New Welfare Services

9. The District Management Committees, chaired by the District Officers of the HAD and attended by the Chairmen and Vice-chairmen of District Councils (DCs) and representatives from related sub-committees of DCs and government departments, provide a forum where departments could seek co-ordination for the launch of new services if they consider appropriate. Alternatively, inter-departmental discussion at district level could always be arranged whenever necessary. As recommended by the Review Panel, cooperation among concerned government departments should be enhanced in setting up new welfare services, including securing suitable premises. It is noted that in Yuen Long district, regular meetings/dialogue between SWD and the Housing Department are in place to review work progress and exchange views on district needs, in particular securing suitable premises for setting up welfare services. For instance, the process in securing suitable premises for setting up a new Integrated Family Service Centre (IFSC), a newly formed Family & Child Protective Services Unit (FCPSU) in TSW, and a new office for splitting the Tin Shui Wai Social Security Field Unit has been speeded up. To ensure that the process is transparent and open, local consultation with the community members and residents in finalising the locality of welfare service unit is conducted. In this connection, the Review Panel notes that understanding and support from local residents and organisations are crucial to facilitate the needed welfare service facilities to be set up in the district in a timely manner.

Service Enhancement and Improvement to Support the Family at Marco Level

(vi) Proactive Inter-bureau and Inter-sector Collaboration to Support the Family

10. The Review Panel takes note that the SWD has adopted a three-pronged approach to promote inter-bureau and inter-sector collaboration to support the family. At the central level, the Committee on Child Abuse and the Working Group on Combating Violence both chaired by the Director of Social Welfare and attended by representatives from various policy bureaus, government departments, and NGOs, are responsible for promoting and co-ordinating strategies and approaches to prevent and handle the problem of child abuse and spouse battering. SWD is reviewing the roles, functions and structures of these two working groups. At the district level, the DCC mechanism, led by the DSWOs, continues to forge cross-sector and multi-disciplinary collaboration to support the family.

11. There are 13 District Co-ordinating Committees on Family and Child Welfare comprising representatives from government departments, local NGOs, community leaders, etc. to co-ordinate service delivery related to family and child welfare services, including family violence and child abuse. Whenever possible and

appropriate, the business sector has also been involved in promoting programmes for helping families in the districts. The Review Panel also notes that to further strengthen district liaison relating to family violence, as undertaken in the 2005 Policy Address, District Liaison Groups, convened by the District Social Welfare Offices concerned, have been formed with participation of FCPSUs, IFSCs, the Police and other relevant service units. A total of 14 District Liaison Groups have been formed to strengthen multi-disciplinary collaboration in handling family violence.

(vii) Proper Media Coverage of Family Disasters

12. The Information and Public Relations Unit of SWD has been working closely with the mass media to encourage proper media reporting on family tragedies with a view to encouraging the victims to seek help as early as possible and to holding the abusers responsible for the violent behaviour. At the same time, a publicity campaign namely “Strengthening Families and Combating Violence” continues to be launched with involvement and representatives from SWD, the Information Services Department and NGOs. The publicity campaign includes series of on-going publicity activities such as exhibition, radio series, television announcement of public interest, slogan promotion, etc. The Review Panel appreciates all the concerted effort and expects that continuous commitment and extensive collaboration will be necessary in the public education to campaign against domestic violence.

(viii) Strengthening Professional Training on Managing Family Violence

13. SWD is developing a training package comprising three levels on the core subjects of family violence for 2005-06, i.e. child abuse, spouse battering and elder abuse. The first level of training consists of training on basic understanding of family violence for all related professionals and district personnel to promote sensitivity and early detection of families in crisis. The second level of training is on risk assessment and intervention skills on various family problems for related professionals. The third level of training focuses on advanced skills and refresher training for frontline practitioners on specialised issues in family violence. In addition, the recommendation of the TSW Report on professional training on managing family violence has also been brought to the attention of training institutes via the Advisory Committee on Social Work Training and Manpower Planning.

(ix) Strengthening Service Outcome Research on Family and Child Protective Services

14. It is noted that a set of output requirements (such as number of cases served) and outcome standards (such as percentage of recurrence of child abuse, satisfaction rate of victims of battered spouse cases) has been in place for service monitoring in FCPSUs since April 2003. Both FCPSUs and IFSCs are serving to support and help families in need, including those encountering or being under the risk of suffering from family violence and there are close working relationship and collaboration between these two types of services. In view that FCPSUs have been further strengthened with an additional team serving Yuen Long area and IFSCs have been just fully implemented since April 2005, SWD will consider a more systematic review of the services after all IFSCs have been in operation for at least one year. The Review Panel agrees with this approach and expects a systematic and evaluative review.

(x) Review on Legal Provisions for Handling Domestic Violence

15. The Review Panel understands that the Government has in place a comprehensive legal framework to tackle domestic violence. It is noted that the Administration will review the Domestic Violence Ordinance with a view to examining whether and if so, how the existing legislative framework may be further strengthened. Key issues under examination include definition of domestic violence, injunction order, mandatory counselling for batterers as a sentencing option, etc. The Review Panel expects that the Government will examine these issues carefully, taking into account the suggestions made by related stakeholders as well as overseas experiences, findings and recommendations of the study on child abuse and spouse battering the University of Hong Kong commissioned to conduct, and will introduce legislature amendments, if necessary, in accordance with normal procedures.

(xi) Standing Review Mechanism on Fatal and Serious Cases

16. SWD has proposed developing a mechanism to conduct post-event multi-disciplinary review on fatal child abuse cases for the purpose of identifying improvements, and the related technicalities. Such a mechanism may be extended to cover other fatal family violence cases after gaining some experience in reviewing fatal child abuse cases. The initial draft proposal was discussed in the Child Abuse Committee and the Working Group on Combating Violence. SWD is now consulting related government departments including the Police, the Department of Justice before taking this further.

(xii) Police Intervention in Handling Domestic Violence Cases

17. As noted in the TSW Report, the Police have made efforts to improve their intervention procedures and cooperation with other concerned service units in handling domestic violence cases. Since December 2004, a new acknowledgement system has been introduced so as to strengthen communication between frontline officers of the Police and SWD during the case referral process. To enhance availability of information for frontline officers, the Police have developed a database known as the Central Domestic Violence Database (CDVD) to allow officers to be made aware of previous reports of domestic violence and related reports involving the complainant or complainee in the preceding two years. Information gathered under the aforementioned acknowledgement system can also be accessed. This may include contact details of the responsible social workers and if services have been provided. This mechanism enables frontline officers to have more knowledge about the background of the reported cases and hence to take more effective and appropriate intervention at scene.

18. The Review Panel notes that the Police have been providing training on the handling of domestic violence for the police officers throughout various stages of their career including basic and on-the-job training during their first five years of service, refresher training upon promotion, and other on-going training programmes and seminars delivered by overseas experts and experienced social workers, etc. Related topics on “Victim Psychology” and “Empathetic Listening” have newly been introduced at these courses. In early 2004, domestic violence was scheduled as training topic for the officers again. The revised training package with emphasis on the dynamics and dilemmas of domestic violence has been uploaded onto the Police’s internal computer system for the officers’ easy access. Discussion seminars with divisional supervisory officers have also been held as part and parcel of the training drive to foster understanding.

(xiii) Support and Consultation to Non-governmental Organisations in Handling Child Abuse and Family Violence Cases

19. As mentioned in para. 11 above, to further strengthen district liaison and co-ordination and to provide better support to NGOs in handling domestic violence, SWD has established since March 2005 a total of 14 District Liaison Groups which are convened by the concerned District Social Welfare Offices, with participation of FCPSUs, IFCSs, the Police and other relevant service units in the district. At the same time, FCPSUs continue to provide support and consultative services to NGOs handling child abuse and battered spouse cases whereas the District Co-ordinating Committee on Family and Child Welfare also co-ordinates, among other family and child welfare services, service provision and specific programmes relating to family violence to meet the

specific needs of each district.

(xiv) Strengthening Network to Support Family in the Neighbourhood

20. As noted in the TSW Report, the formation of IFSCs can further strengthen support network for the families in the community. The Review Panel supports the direction of IFSCs by adopting the principles of “accessibility”, “early identification”, “integration” and “partnership” in giving support and assistance to the families in the community. It is noted that the IFSCs are taking a proactive approach to strengthen cooperation, collaboration and partnership with the neighbourhood stakeholders including government departments, social welfare organisations, professionals, community entities (schools, churches), etc. At the same time, joint attention and targeted intervention can be mobilised to address the special needs of individuals and families of different cultural and social backgrounds including new arrivals and ethnic minority groups. In addition, a variety of funding in the community such as the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund, the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged, are accessible to help needy individuals and families in the community through projects developing parent network, mentorship for children and youths, etc. aiming to build up personal capacity and social capital.

(xv) Strengthening Operation of Integrated Family Service Centre

21. The Review Panel notes that to facilitate the implementation and collaboration of IFSCs, SWD has been in place since May 2004 a special task group on IFSCs comprising representatives of all NGO IFSC operators and the 13 District Social Welfare Offices, and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service. The task group has assisted to monitor progress and iron out operational and other related issues in the service delivery of IFSCs as well as to promote mutual sharing and discussion in division of work, co-ordination of services, etc. with other service units like FCPSUs, Housing Department, etc.

22. The Review Panel appreciates that to prepare social workers better for the work and duties in IFSCs, SWD has organised a series of training courses, workshops, and briefings. These training activities aim at mind-set change, multi-skill development, familiarisation of assessment tools and handling procedures, case experience sharing, etc. for staff working in IFSCs and other family service settings for better preparation of the full implementation of IFSCs. To strengthen the operation of integrated service delivery model of IFSCs, SWD will encourage and assist social workers to develop specialty through continuous training and development as well as promote effective

communication among staff and flexibility in deploying staff among the three different units in meeting the changing community needs.

(xvi) Advancement in Information Systems on Battered Spouse and Child Abuse Cases

23. The Review Panel appreciates the closer co-ordination between the Police and SWD in handling battered spouse cases and child abuse cases in setting up a new acknowledgement system and the setting up of the enhanced information system with a data bank on domestic violence cases reported to the Police as described in para. 17 above. It is understood that SWD will further work on the feasibility of expanding information sharing for inter-sector collaboration and sort out the issues involving personal data privacy.

(xvii) Adherence to the Handling Procedures on Child Abuse and Battered Spouse Cases

24. The Review Panel notes that SWD has set up a task group to review the Procedures for Handling Child Abuse comprising representatives of SWD, Health, Welfare and Food Bureau, Department of Health, the Police, Hospital Authority, Education and Manpower Bureau and NGOs. The review is expected to be completed in 2006. SWD has also commenced review on the procedures for handling sexual violence cases involving mentally incapacitated persons covered in the Procedural Guidelines for Handling Sexual Violence Cases issued in 2002. Review of the Procedural Guidelines for Handling Battered Spouse Cases, which was put to implementation since May 2004 will be followed after the completion of the other two reviews. To facilitate frontline workers in working more effectively in handling child abuse and battered spouse cases, ongoing training and sharing on implementation of the guidelines are organised.

(xviii) Review on the Guidelines for Handling Child Abuse and Battered Spouse Cases

25. The work on review of concerned guidelines has been noted by the Review Panel as stipulated in para. 24 above.

(xix) Shelter Service for Victims of Domestic Violence

26. In line with recommendation in the TSW Report, SWD has been conducting discussion sessions with the operators of refuge centres for women with a view to

reviewing the services and facilities of the centres since February 2005. In parallel, SWD has proceeded with the plan in contracting out the service of Wai On Home for Women for operation and management by a NGO. The new shelter which will be re-located to a larger premise will have the total capacity increased to 50 places and accommodate boys over the age of 12 with their mothers. The new shelter is expected to commence operation in early 2006.

Service Enhancement and Improvement to Support the Family at Micro Level

(xx) Safety First Principle on Case Management

27. SWD agrees with the recommendation of the TSW Report and has repeatedly advised frontline workers to accord priority to the safety of the clients and workers through training and sharing sessions. Regarding risk assessment and management, SWD will also make use of the assessment tool(s) being developed by the study on child abuse and spouse battering the University of Hong Kong was commissioned to conduct.

(xxi) Staff Safety and Support in Handling Family Violence Cases

28. SWD treats staff safety seriously. Measures are put in place to ensure staff safety and support in handling family violence cases. A set of “Guidelines for Handling Customers with Aggressive or Violent Behaviour” is available for the reference of staff. It is now under review. Training courses are also regularly held to enhance staff members’ sensitivity to safety and to equip them with the skills in handling aggressive or violent behaviour. Classes relating to mental health of social workers and stress management are also available. In addition, individual or group psychological intervention is provided by SWD clinical psychologists for staff who have gone through critical incidents. The intervention includes assessment and evaluation of feedback, individual crisis intervention, follow-up intensive psychotherapy and group crisis intervention programmes such as Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) or Crisis Management Briefing. Starting July 2005, post critical incident intervention for staff is made a standard practice to be initiated by the management. If necessary, post incident psychological support will also be extended to NGOs without their own clinical psychologists.

(xxii) Consolidation of Expertise in Family and Child Protective Services Unit

29. As described at para. 13 above, SWD has put in place a series of training package comprising three levels on the core subjects of family violence for 2005-06, i.e. child abuse, spouse battering and elder abuse, for frontline workers and officers working with families in need. Under the existing departmental posting policy and principles, postings are normally arranged for SWD staff once every three to four years. Given the highly specialised nature of the services of FCPSUs, the duration of posting of FCPSU staff may be extended beyond the normal period if necessary. SWD has taken note of the recommendation of the TSW Report on “trainer track” option for staff of FCPSUs and will consider the feasibility of the proposal having regard to its long-term implications on the departmental human resource management policy and development of the service. Nevertheless, to retain the professional knowledge, skills and valuable work experience of Social Work Officer Grade staff in this specific subject, a specialised pool comprising nine officers who were former FCPSU workers has been formed since April 2003. This pool is tasked to give views on service development and evaluation, share professional knowledge and experiences through e-learning environment, and conduct /assist in training courses, etc.

(xxiii) Strengthening the Mechanism of Multi-disciplinary Case Conference

30. The Review Panel notes that SWD fully agrees with the view that the multi-disciplinary case conference is a useful mechanism for handling both child abuse cases and battered spouse cases, and will address the recommendation of the Review Panel about this mechanism when reviewing the concerned procedural guidelines is conducted.

(xxiv) Flexible Assignment of Caseworker in Child Abuse and Family Violence Cases

31. To facilitate the supervisors of casework units and social workers to decide when to serve one family with one worker or more than one worker, the Review Panel notes that SWD has started developing relevant key principles for their reference based on the experience of FCPSUs and in consultation with concerned parties. The reference material will be available by the end of 2005. The Review Panel agrees with SWD that instead of just relying on the guidelines or reference document, professional assessment and judgement must be exercised according to the individual case situation.

(xxv) Use of Conjoint Interview in Handling Domestic Violence Cases

32. In parallel to the follow-up work for the recommendation (xxiv) above, the Review Panel notes that SWD is developing reference material to facilitate the decision on when and how to use conjoint interview in handling domestic violence cases. Again, the Review Panel agrees that such materials will only serve as a reference. Professional assessment and judgement is still required to provide appropriate intervention and assistance to the cases.

Conclusion

33. The Review Panel appreciates that most of the recommendations in the TSW Report have been followed up. Many of the follow-up actions have been considered prompt and effective in bringing improvement to support families in the community, and tackle the problem of domestic violence and child abuse. They include review of the shelter service for battered women, review of procedure in handling child abuse cases, strengthened district collaboration and co-ordination in community building, enhanced co-ordination and collaboration between the Police and SWD in handling battered spouse cases and child abuse cases, setting up of the enhanced information system with a data bank on domestic violence cases reported to the Police, strengthened services for staff safety and support in case handling, etc.

34. The Review Panel also notes that in 2005-06, additional resources have been allocated to improve family and child welfare services. With these resources, there will be additional foster care places and places in children's homes, increase in the provision of clinical psychologists, as well as social workers of the Family and Child Protective Services Units and Integrated Family Service Centres. There will also be enhanced support to the Refuge Centres for Women and the hotline services of the Family Crisis Support Centre. Pilot projects on batterers' treatment will also be run, more training programmes on family violence be organised, and more publicity programmes launched under the publicity campaign on 'Strengthening Families and Combating Violence'. Despite all these achievements, the Review Panel is aware that for some items, such as public education, training for professionals, etc., on-going activities and a longer period of time is required to effect greater change and improvement as family violence is such a complex problem as ever especially when individuals and families are under great stress.