

**For discussion
on 15 October 2007**

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**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Policy Initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau for 2007-08**

Purpose

The Chief Executive announced his 2007-08 Policy Address on 10 October 2007. This note elaborates on the new welfare and poverty alleviation initiatives in the 2007-08 Policy Address and Policy Agenda. It also gives an account of the latest position of the major initiatives relating to welfare services in the 2006-07 Policy Agenda.

2007-08 Policy Address and Policy Agenda

Alleviating poverty

2. Poverty alleviation is a priority for the Administration in the next five years. A major poverty alleviation strategy recommended by the Commission on Poverty (CoP) is to promote self-reliance through employment. While our Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme will continue to provide a safety net for those who are unable to support themselves financially, we will strengthen training and retraining and facilitate those who have the ability to work to join the labour market in support of our economic development.

Family and social harmony

3. We cherish the family as a basic unit of our society. We believe that the well-being of the family is fundamental to the stability and prosperity of our society. The provision of welfare services should therefore seek to empower families to help their members. We are firmly committed to preserving and strengthening family units and nurturing harmonious interpersonal relationships amongst family members, so that individuals can enjoy their family life and look to their core and extended families for support in times of need.

4. The Government's elderly services are also premised on the fact that elders are important members of families, and that family members play a major role in taking care of the elderly. We look to strengthen mutual support among family members and improve their ability to look after the elderly.

New Initiatives

Welfare planning

Study the long-term development planning for social welfare through the Social Welfare Advisory Committee

5. The Chief Executive has undertaken in his Election Manifesto to study the long-term social welfare development plan for Hong Kong through the Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC). We will consult SWAC on how to take this forward towards the end of this year.

Elderly Care

Enhancing elderly centres' outreaching efforts to singleton and hidden elders and strengthening referral, counselling and support services to elders in need

6. The 2007-08 Budget has earmarked \$38 million for the elderly centres to increase manpower provision to enhance their outreaching efforts to singleton and hidden elders. After locating the singleton/hidden elders, the elderly centres will try to establish rapport with them, identify their needs, help them get out of isolation and provide the support and services they need. Such enhanced efforts will commence by the end of 2007.

7. It is expected that the enhanced outreaching efforts to singleton and hidden elders will lead to greater demand for services directly provided by the District Elderly Community Centres (DECCs), in particular counselling services and the handling of applications for subsidised long-term care (LTC) services. To help DECCs cope with the increased workload, we will provide additional resources to the DECCs to strengthen their services in these areas.

Providing additional subsidised day care places and launching a district-based trial scheme on carer training

8. To support elders to age in the community and meet growing demand for elderly day care, we will provide 80 additional day care places in Kwun Tong, Yuen Long and Eastern District in early 2008, bringing the total number of day care places to 2,055. In 2008-09, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) plans to invite Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to operate three new Day Care Centres/ Units providing another 160 additional places.

9. To equip individuals with basic elderly care skills and a caring mindset and develop “elderly sitter” services to provide relief to carers, we have launched a trial scheme in the Eastern and Wan Chai, Wong Tai Sin and Sai Kung, as well as Kowloon City and Yau Tsim Mong districts. The scheme provides funding for DECCs, in collaboration with community organisations, to run carer training courses and to recruit those who have completed the courses to serve as “elderly sitters”. Eleven projects have been funded, each receiving a seed capital of \$50,000. Training will commence in October 2007.

Providing integrated support to elderly hospital discharges

10. Some elderly hospital discharges require transitional rehabilitation and intensive home care services upon discharge from hospitals. The 2007-08 Budget has earmarked \$96 million to implement a trial scheme to provide integrated support to elderly hospital discharges who have difficulty taking care of themselves, with a view to enhancing the quality of life of the elders and reducing unplanned re-admission to hospitals. The support will be in the form of discharge planning, transitional rehabilitation at the geriatric day hospitals, home-based community care services, and carers’ training and support. The first pilot will commence in Kwun Tong in early 2008.

Providing additional subsidised residential care places for the elderly

11. There are at present about 26,000 subsidised residential care places for the elderly. In 2007-08, we have awarded contracts for three new contract homes which will provide an additional 212 subsidised residential care places. We will also purchase a total of 531 residential care places from private residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) in 2007-08. In the coming year, we will further increase the supply of subsidised residential care places.

Upgrading residential care places in subvented RCHEs to provide infirmary care

12. To enhance the quality of life of medically stable infirm elders and further the principle of “continuum of care”, we will upgrade some of the existing residential care places in subvented RCHEs to provide infirmary care.

Study the long-term planning for subsidised welfare services for the elderly

13. Faced with an ageing population, any support system for the elderly in Hong Kong has to be financially sustainable in the long run. Increasing continuously the supply of subsidised community care and residential care services alone will not be sufficient to meet the wide range of growing needs. We will continue to promote shared responsibility of individuals, their families and the society in meeting the needs of elders, and encourage a balanced mix of public and private elderly care services to widen the choices for quality self-financing and private residential care places providing differential services. In consultation with the Elderly Commission, we will consider the long term planning of elderly services, with a view to responding to the challenges of an ageing population effectively.

Improving the homes of elderly people living in poor conditions

14. Some elderly people live in relatively poor communities without family support. Their dilapidated homes imply poor quality of life and domestic safety problems. To further support elders in need, we will earmark one-off funding of \$200 million to help improve their homes in the next five years. We hope that this initiative will encourage our citizens to care more about the elderly in need, enabling the culture of caring for the elderly to take root in our community.

Enhancing the dissemination of information on elderly services

15. Information on carer training courses and elderly services is useful to family members and carers of elders in making informed decisions on the training they require and the types of services which suit the needs of their elders. The elderly service agencies, including the DECCs, the Neighbourhood Elderly Centres, the Support Teams for the Elderly, the Integrated Home Care Service (IHCS) Teams and the Enhanced Home and Community Care Service (EHCCS) Teams, have

been useful sources of information on elderly care and carer support. Various NGOs have also been running information services for elderly care and carer support through call centre and resource centre. There is also an initiative of setting up an electronic databank on elderly services with a view to providing one-stop information on social and recreational, health and medical, welfare, long-term care and housing services/information relevant to elders. We will help publicise the key information service providers through pamphlets and electronic link so that elders and carers will know where to seek help when they wish to have access to such information.

Rehabilitation

Strengthening services and support for persons with disabilities and their families/ carers

16. In accordance with the directions set out in the 2007 Rehabilitation Programme Plan, we will continue to enhance support and services to facilitate the integration of persons with disabilities into the community. For persons with disabilities living in the community, we will strengthen and streamline community support services to meet their varying needs, and enhance flexibility by adopting a district-based approach under which one-stop community support services will be provided to persons with disabilities living in the locality as well as their carers.

17. Bearing in mind the importance of early intervention in enhancing the development of children with disabilities and those at risk of becoming disabled and the concern over the long waiting time for various rehabilitation residential services, we will continue to provide additional places for day training, vocational rehabilitation, pre-school and residential services to meet service demands in the coming year.

Family

Extend the Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) in phases

18. Since 2005, we have launched in phases a pilot CCDS in four communities (i.e. Sham Shui Po, Tin Shui Wai, Tuen Mun and Tseung Kwan O). The service was extended to Tung Chung and the whole of Yuen Long in the first half of 2007 and will be further extended to Kwun Tong within 2007-08. In the coming year, we will extend the

CCDS further to serve more young children and families in need.

Enhance child care support for families and children in need

19. To assist families and children in need of out-of-home care, we will increase the number of residential places in children's homes and in boys' and girls' homes in the coming year.

20. Some parents are unable to look after their young children after the regular operating hours of kindergartens or child care centres. To meet their needs, we will strengthen the provision of day foster care services and promote different forms of child care services. Forty day foster care places will be introduced by the end of 2007. Community-based organisations will be invited to set up mutual help child care centres which offer more convenient and flexible services to the neighbourhood. We will provide financial incentives to the operators and fee subsidy to families with financial need.

Tackling Domestic Violence

Intensify direct support for victims of domestic violence and vulnerable families

21. The Government is committed to combating domestic violence. In the coming year, we plan to devote additional resources to intensify direct support to victims of domestic violence and vulnerable families, which include increasing the number of placements in refuge centres for women and enhancing SWD's hotline service.

Strengthen public education and training for professionals

22. The SWD will continue to launch publicity campaign and public education initiatives to enhance public awareness of the problem of domestic violence, to build up social capital and create a caring and more resilient community. To enhance the frontline professionals' knowledge and skills in handling different types of domestic violence and further promote multi-disciplinary collaboration, the Department will strengthen the training programmes for related frontline professionals.

Batterer intervention

23. To break the cycle of violence, an institutional mechanism with a new anti-violence programme has been introduced under the

Domestic Violence (Amendment) Bill. Under the Bill, the Court may, in granting a non-molestation order under the Domestic Violence Ordinance (DVO), require the abuser to attend an approved programme seeking to change his / her abusive attitude and behaviour. This new anti-violence programme will be educational in nature and suitable for different types of abusers. Non-governmental organisations will be engaged in delivering the programme.

Pilot Child Fatality Review Mechanism

24. The SWD plans to pilot a review mechanism for child death cases resulting from unnatural causes. The review mechanism aims to examine the practice and service issues pertaining to child death cases, identify patterns and trends for formulation of prevention strategies, and promote multi-disciplinary and inter-agency cooperation in the prevention of child death. It will commence operation in early 2008 and a review will be conducted after the two-year pilot period.

Poverty Alleviation

Task Force on Poverty and Child Development Fund

25. We have set up a Task Force on Poverty within the Administration. Led by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare and comprising representatives of relevant bureaux and departments, the Task Force will monitor the progress of implementing the recommendations of the CoP, coordinate efforts across the Government in tackling poverty, promote community engagement, promote self-reliance, and consider studies, research and analyses necessary to enhance the understanding of poverty, assess the impact of poverty alleviation measures and provide input for policy formulation.

26. One of the key recommendations of the CoP is to set up a Child Development Fund (CDF) to provide more development opportunities for children from a disadvantaged background, with a view to reducing inter-generational poverty. The CDF will seek to encourage these children to cultivate positive attitudes and plan for the future. To this end, the Government has earmarked \$300 million for the Fund and is working on the proposal for a pilot scheme, which will be available by the end of 2007.

Progress of Ongoing Initiatives

CSSA

Reviewing measures under the CSSA Scheme to encourage and help able-bodied CSSA recipients to become self-reliant

27. Following the completion of the review on disregarded earnings (DE), the arrangements would be improved by raising the “no deduction limit” for DE from \$600 to \$800 and relaxing the criteria for allowing CSSA recipients to be eligible for DE from not less than three months on CSSA to not less than two months. It is estimated that 19 800 recipients will benefit from the new arrangements which will take effect on 1 December 2007.

28. We will also continue with the New Dawn Project in its existing mode of operation for 30 months to assist the single parents and child carers to integrate into the community and move towards self-reliance through engagement in work.

Welfare Planning

Strengthening district welfare planning and co-ordination

29. We have implemented the protocol for district welfare planning since August 2005 to standardise the procedures adopted by the District Social Welfare Officers of SWD in developing their annual district welfare plans.

Family

Family Support Programme

30. Some families are either socially isolated or are reluctant to approach our welfare units despite their need for support services. The SWD has launched a Family Support Programme (FSP) since early 2007 to maintain regular contacts with these vulnerable families through home visitation, telephone contacts, outreaching work, etc., in order to connect them to appropriate support services and prevent further deterioration of their problems. The SWD will closely monitor the implementation and outcomes of the FSP.

Tackling Domestic Violence

Legislative Amendments to Domestic Violence Ordinance

31. We have completed a comprehensive review of the DVO. Taking into account the views of the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services, various advisory boards and concerned stakeholders, an amendment bill was prepared to enhance prevention of domestic violence and render better protection for victims of domestic violence. The Bill was introduced into the Legislative Council (LegCo) on 27 June 2007, and we will follow through the scrutiny of the Bill with the LegCo Bills Committee.

Rehabilitation

Enhancing transport services for persons with disabilities

32. In tandem with the Government's on-going efforts to improve the accessibility of public transport for persons with disabilities, Rehabus provides point-to-point scheduled and dial-a-ride transport services for persons with disabilities who have difficulties in using public transport. By early 2008, the Rehabus fleet will increase to 101 vehicles, running a total of 63 scheduled and feeder routes.

Transitional residential services and community rehabilitation day services

33. To facilitate the early integration of discharged patients with various disabilities into the community, we are setting up a transitional care and support centre (TCSC) for tetraplegic patients to prepare them for their return to community living, and five community rehabilitation day centres (CRDCs) for discharged patients with mental, neurological or physical impairment as well as those with severe disabilities. Two of the CRDCs have already come into operation since October 2006, while the TCSC and the remaining three CRDCs will come on stream in early 2008.

Elderly Care

Promoting active ageing to encourage elders to lead a fruitful life

34. We have been working with the Elderly Commission to promote active ageing. From April to July 2007, programmes organised

include the “Story of Hong Kong” competition, the “Elder Community Works Competition”, the promotion of Senior Citizen Card, “The Media Award on Active Ageing” and a variety show engaging both elderly and young performers. In addition, we have started to broadcast the “Golden Age Series V”, and are producing two Announcements of Public Interest to promote active ageing.

35. The SWD will also continue to promote active ageing through the Opportunities for the Elderly Project. This Project has provided subsidies to various community organisations for implementing innovative programmes which promote a sense of worthiness among elders and create a spirit of care for elders in the community.

Converting subvented residential care places into LTC places

36. Following the principle of “continuum of care”, the SWD started a conversion programme in June 2005 to gradually upgrade subvented residential care places (i.e. all the 7 400 self-care hostel (S/C) places and home for the aged (H/A) places which do not have LTC element, and another 3 300 subvented care and attention (C&A) places which do not provide continuum of care) into LTC places providing continuum of care. As at end-September 2007, 6 461 S/C, H/A and C&A places without continuum of care have been converted into 3 325 LTC places providing continuum of care.

Enhancing the service capacity of the subsidised home-based services for vulnerable elders in the community

37. Making use of the \$20 million provided in the 2006-07 Budget, the SWD has increased the service capacity of home-based community support services for non-frail elders. About 643 additional new cases have been served. The home-based community care services for frail elders will also be further enhanced in districts with growing demand.

Training additional enrolled nurses

38. To alleviate the shortage of nurses in the welfare sector, the SWD, with the assistance of the Hospital Authority, launched two classes of a two-year full-time training programme in 2006 to train Enrolled Nurses for the welfare sector. The third class will commence in December 2007. Two more classes will be launched in 2008 and 2009.

These five classes will together provide a total of 550 training places. Tuition fees are subsidised by the Government. Graduates are required to work in the sector for at least two years after graduation.

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