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Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 12 November 2007**

**Vocational rehabilitation services and residential services
for people with disabilities**

Purpose

This paper provides an account of the discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services (the Panel) on the recent development of vocational rehabilitation services and residential services for people with disabilities (PWDs).

Vocational rehabilitation services for PWDs

2. At the meeting on 10 February 2003, the Panel was briefed on the Administration's future service direction to support PWDs. The Administration informed the Panel that based on the findings of an internal value for money audit study conducted by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) on sheltered workshop and supported employment services in 2002, it was recommended that in the long run, integrated service delivery model comprising sheltered workshop, supported employment, skills centres, On the Job Training Programme and Small Enterprise Project in vocational rehabilitation services should be adopted. An integrated vocational centre could better meet the vocational needs of PWDs and address the problems of compartmentalization in service delivery. Under the proposed new service delivery mode, trainees could access vocational rehabilitation services at one single service point.

3. With regard to some members' concern about the closing down of all sheltered workshops, the Administration assured members that it had no intention of doing so. The reason for conducting the value for money audits on sheltered workshop and supported employment services was to find out how these two services could be operated in a more cost-effective manner. Owing to the economic downturn and the fading out of small production industries in Hong

Kong, it had become more difficult for sheltered workshops to secure income-generating work for their users.

4. The Administration further advised that non-governmental organization (NGO) operators supported in principle the model of integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres. However, concerned parties considered it necessary to work out a more detailed operational and implementation plan and to test the new model on a pilot basis. SWD would seek the views of the stakeholders on the implementation issues.

Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centres (IVRSCs)

5. The Administration briefed the Panel on the progress on the pilot IVRSCs on 20 April 2005. The Administration advised that it had invited NGOs in August 2003 to re-engineer their subvented vocational rehabilitation services to form IVRSCs on a pilot basis. SWD had approved the formation of 14 IVRSCs through pooling of subventions of 2 043 places of 14 sheltered workshops and 485 supported employment places on 1 April 2004. Taking into account the conversion of two sheltered workshops operated by SWD to IVRSCs after their hiving off to NGOs in April 2004, and a new IVRSC which commenced operation in October 2004, there were 17 IVRSCs in April 2005 providing a total of 2 889 training places.

6. The Administration further advised that a Working Group comprising representatives of SWD, NGO operators, parents of PWDs was formed in June 2004 to review the implementation of IVRSCs and advise on the future development of the service. The Working Group generally recognized that IVRSCs would have many advantages over the traditional sheltered workshops and sheltered employment services. An integrated vocational centre would provide a holistic approach to meet the needs of PWDs by offering a greater variety of training programmes, and allowing flexibility in service delivery and deployment of staff and resources.

7. Members expressed support for providing PWDs with one-stop integrated and seamless vocational services so as to better accommodate the limitations arising from their disabilities. Some members enquired about the timetable for conversion of the existing 36 sheltered workshops into IVRSCs. The Administration responded that it had no fixed timetable for the conversion. It had deliberately not made the re-engineering exercise compulsory, as the success of the exercise must depend on the support of parents of PWDs and the staff concerned. As regards staff members, they would need to undergo special training programmes in order to meet the challenges arising from the implementation of the new service delivery mode.

8. The Administration added that PWDs would continue to be given the choice to join the sheltered workshops, sheltered employment or IVRSC services.

Residential services for PWDs

9. According to the Administration, there are 206 subvented residential care homes for the disabled (RCHDs) and 16 self-financing RCHDs operated by NGOs offering residential care services for handicapped adults, discharged mental patients, and chronic mental patients. As at June 2007, there were 37 private RCHDs known to SWD.

Standardized Assessment Mechanism for Residential Services for PWDs

10. The Administration pledged in the 2000 Policy Address that it would review the admission criteria and improve the admission process for different types of residential services. A steering group was established to identify the need to develop a standardized assessment tool for residential placement, and a consultancy was commissioned to conduct a survey on the profile and service needs of users and waitlistees. In the light of the survey findings, the Administration decided to devise a standardized assessment tool to ascertain the urgency of each referral and match the need for different types of residential services, including admission to residential homes for PWDs.

11. The Administration informed the Panel at the meeting on 5 January 2004 of the development of a standardized needs assessment tool by SWD for admission to residential homes for PWDs. With effect from 1 January 2005, all applicants for subvented residential services for PWDs must be assessed by the Standardized Assessment Mechanism for Residential Services for PWDs (the Mechanism) to ascertain their residential service needs before they are put on the central waiting list or admitted to their required service units. The Panel further discussed the implementation progress of the Mechanism on two subsequent occasions, i.e. the meetings on 14 June 2004 and 21 March 2006.

12. Members generally welcomed the idea of a standardized assessment tool to identify the needs of PWDs for residential service with a view to matching their needs with the appropriate levels and categories of service. Some members were concerned that the introduction of the Mechanism with its stringent assessment standards might turn PWDs away from residential services and make them rely on community services.

13. Responding to members' concern, the Administration advised that it did not consider the assessment tool too stringent. Adequate safeguards and flexibility have been built in the Mechanism to cater for those applicants whose

circumstances might warrant special consideration in determining the exact type of residential service. The Administration stressed that the assessment tool was intended for streaming purpose only and was not meant to replace the in-depth assessments conducted by professionals for the training and care of PWDs. Appropriate day training and community support services would be arranged if the PWDs concerned had no need for residential services or if residential placement was not immediately available.

Provision of residential services for PWDs

14. During the discussions on the progress of implementation and the review of the Mechanism, some members considered that the Mechanism would not help in addressing the shortage of residential places. These members raised concern about the inadequacy of residential homes for PWDs to meet the needs of PWDs, and the long waiting time of an average of four to six years for the services. They requested the Administration to set out the performance pledge of providing residential places to eligible PWDs so as to shorten the waiting time. Deputations attending the meeting shared members' views and considered that the Administration should ensure the adequacy of residential places for PWDs with genuine needs.

15. The Administration advised that it would continue its efforts to bid for more resources to increase the supply of subvented residential places for PWDs. However, the provision of additional RCHDs would depend on the availability of suitable sites/premises.

16. Members considered that notwithstanding the difficulty of identifying suitable sites for new RCHDs, the Administration should come up with a plan on the target number of additional residential places for PWDs to be provided each year. To address the shortage of suitable premises, the Administration should include the provision of residential care services for PWDs in its town planning.

17. The Administration explained that attempts had been made by SWD to turn vacant premises in public housing estates into residential homes for PWDs, but such proposals were often met with local opposition. As such, SWD had to look for idle properties, such as unused schools and staff quarters, located in the remote areas for constructing homes for PWDs.

18. At the Panel meeting on 9 July 2007, members discussed the 2007 Rehabilitation Programme Plan (RPP) which set out the strategic directions and key suggestions in each programme area of rehabilitation services. Members generally expressed disappointment at the absence of concrete implementation details about the RPP recommendations, and requested the Administration to map out concrete measures to enhance the rehabilitation services for PWDs, including residential care services.

19. At the Panel's request, the Administration provided supplementary information on the 2007 RPP after the meeting. On the rehabilitation care services, the Administration advised that a three-prong-approach had been adopted to encourage participation from different sectors and to provide diversified residential care services for PWDs with genuine needs. An additional funding of \$3.3 million would be made available in 2007-2008 for providing 490 additional residential places. In parallel, the Administration was bidding for more resources and identifying suitable venues for additional residential places for 2008-2009, and had liaised with the relevant authorities in town planning and housing to strive for suitable medium-term and long-term venues for hostels and rehabilitation facilities for PWDs. The Administration would also continue to support the development of self-financing RCHDs operated by NGOs, including assisting NGOs to identify suitable sites/premises and apply for funding for alteration and renovation.

Latest development

20. The Administration will seek the Panel's views on the funding proposal relating to projects for new integrated rehabilitation service centres for PWDs on 12 November 2007.

Relevant papers

21. Members are invited to access the LegCo website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk> to view the minutes and relevant papers of the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services on 19 February 2003, 5 January and 14 June 2004, 20 April 2005, 21 March 2006 and 9 July 2007.

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