

**Motion Debate on “Comprehensively improving the effectiveness of
Integrated Family Service Centres”
at the Legislative Council Meeting of 4 March 2009**

Progress Report

Purpose

In response to the motion on “Comprehensively improving the effectiveness of Integrated Family Service Centres” carried at the Legislative Council (LegCo) meeting on 4 March 2009, this note briefs Members on the progress of the “Review on the Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre (IFSC) Service Mode” commissioned by the Administration (the Review). It also provides updated information on the support services the Administration provides to multi-stressed and potentially high-risk families and the work of the Family Council.

The IFSC Service Mode

2. In 2004-05, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) set up a total of 61 IFSCs covering the whole territory through re-engineering publicly-funded family welfare services in Hong Kong. IFSCs provide one-stop and diversified family services to families in need. They follow the service direction of ‘child-centred, family-focused and community-based’ and adopt the service principles of accessibility, early identification, integration and partnership to provide a continuum of services with preventive, developmental, educational, supportive, empowerment and remedial functions.

3. At present, there are one or more centre-in-charges / supervisors and at least 13 social workers at each IFSCs. In planning for staff establishment, SWD has considered not only the population of each district but also their specific needs as reflected by various indicators and figures including the seriousness of family problems, the number of spouse / child abuse cases, suicide cases, new arrivals, elderly, young offenders, unemployed and low-income persons, etc. SWD has been monitoring the manpower situation of IFSCs and, where necessary, has strengthened their manpower and supervision through provision of additional resources. In fact, the total number of frontline social workers at IFSCs has increased from 896 in 2004-05 to 1 010 in 2008-09.

The number of centre-in-charges / supervisors has also increased from 62 to 91 during the same period. The total number of frontline social workers and centre-in-charges / supervisors has increased by 15%.

4. As regards salary levels, since the introduction of the Lump Sum Grant Subvention System, the remuneration and recruitment policies of staff in subvented non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have become independent of the civil service pay system. Many NGOs have also devised their own pay and recruitment policies. The Government is generally not involved in, and will not interfere with, the pay level and recruitment standard of NGOs.

The Review

5. The re-engineering of family services has been completed for more than three years. Both SWD and the welfare sector agree that it is now an appropriate time to review the implementation of the IFSC service mode. SWD therefore commissioned a consultant (the Consultant Team) in October last year to conduct a Review and find out whether IFSCs could effectively implement the service principles and direction, and identify room for improvement under the existing model. The Review covers a number of issues, including:

- **Effectiveness of service** (especially the effectiveness in proactively approaching multi-stressed and potentially high-risk families) – The Review will study the operation of IFSCs in detail, and will also consider ways to develop specialised services in the context of the integrated services mode and enhance strategic partnership, collaboration and interfacing with other services, etc.
- **Staff arrangement** – The Review will study if the current staff arrangement of IFSCs can effectively support the service mode and operation of IFSCs.
- **The population served by each IFSC** – At present, there is a clear geographical boundary for service provision for each IFSC. Each of them serves a population of around 100 000 to 150 000 people. The Review will study whether IFSCs can effectively implement its service direction and principles under this population to IFSC ratio.

- **Division of labour between SWD and NGOs** –At present, the biggest difference in the division of labour between the IFSCs run by SWD and NGOs is that IFSCs run by SWD need to handle statutory cases and cases which are more appropriately be handled by public officers (including the management of the Director of Social Welfare Incorporated Accounts, assessment on medical fee waiving, etc.). The Review will also study this topic.
- **Performance pledge** – The existing output and outcome indicators for IFSCs were drawn up after detailed discussion with relevant stakeholders when SWD and NGOs signed the Funding and Service Agreement in 2004. There is flexibility in measuring service outputs. IFSCs can adjust the number of groups and activities within a prescribed scope having regard to the number of new and re-opened cases for the purpose of reducing the work pressure on their staff. The Review will consider if adjustment to the standards is required.

6. In the process of the Review, the responsible Consultant Team will collect the views of relevant stakeholders, including frontline social workers and other frontline staff of IFSCs, centre-in-charges / supervisors, management of NGOs and service users, etc. Upon completion of the Review and subject to privacy protection requirements, the Consultant Team will publish the information and data collected during the Review.

Progress of the Review

7. The Review formally commenced in the October 2008 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2009. So far, work has been on schedule.

8. The Consultant Team has started work on data collection and analysis. It has been collecting information from IFSCs through various means, including “centre reports” setting out the views of each IFSC on the implementation of the IFSC service mode; “case studies” which examine in detail how the service principles and direction are implemented in 11 IFSCs; and “district focus groups” conducted in each of the administrative districts of SWD to collect in-depth views from stakeholders. Besides, the Consultant Team has also been conducting “user surveys” in 33 IFSCs selected through random sampling since March 2009.

9. At the same time, the Consultant Team is inviting IFSC operators to identify practice wisdoms for the purpose of understanding what factors are conducive / impedimental to the effective delivery of service. A Practice Wisdom Forum will be held in July 2009, and a Practice Wisdom Reference will be compiled to facilitate the sharing of experience within the sector.

10. We will continue to monitor the progress of the Review and will brief members of the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services of the findings of the Review upon its completion.

Services to Multi-stressed and Potentially High-risk Families

11. The core values of family services provided by the Government have all along been to support and consolidate the family and foster the welfare of family members. We will continue to provide one-stop and diversified family services to needy families through the 61 IFSCs across the territory. We will also strengthen the existing welfare services tailored for individual family members including children and the elderly, and assist their families in discharging their family duties. For example, we have extended, since March this year, the coverage of the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Programme from six locations to all 11 administrative districts of SWD.

12. In addition, we are providing new resources to strength the support to the multi-stressed and potentially high-risk families. Specifically, we have increased the recurrent provision by around \$25 million each year from 2009-10 onwards to further strengthen the direct support to victims of domestic violence. This will enable us to increase a total of 12 Social Workers and two Clinical Psychologists for SWD's Family and Child Protective Service Units and Clinical Psychology Units; enhance the counseling service for batterers; maintain the operation of the Multi-purpose Crises Intervention and Support Centre; and strengthen the manpower of the Family Crisis Support Centre, the Suicide Crisis Intervention, the four refuge centres for women and the Po Leung Kuk New Comers Ward. In addition, SWD will continue its publicity and education programmes to raise the awareness of the public on domestic violence. It will also strengthen the training for relevant frontline professionals.

13. In view of the fact that some people may face emotional problems because of the global financial tsunami which may affect their relationship with their family members, SWD has allocated an additional \$2.17 million in total to two NGOs to set up the Financial Crisis Emotional Support Hotlines. The hotlines are manned by registered social workers and provide 24-hour counselling service to persons in need. Social workers responsible for the hotlines will also provide face-to-face counselling services to persons seeking assistance and organise support groups with a view to strengthening their skills in coping with stress and assisting them in facing their problems in a positive way. Where necessary, social workers will refer their cases to appropriate welfare services for follow-up. More than 7 300 calls have been received since the two hotlines came into operation on 13 October 2008, and some 22% of the callers required follow up services.

Family Council

14. As an advisory body to the Government, the Family Council provides a high-level platform for discussion of major issues from the family perspective and strategic directions and priorities on family-related policies. Provision of services to support families will continue to be financed and delivered by different relevant service providers and delivery agents.

15. According to the Home Affairs Bureau, the Family Council has identified family core values¹, discussed ways to achieve a pro-family environment and made recommendations on better synergy of work between the Council and the Elderly Commission, Women's Commission and Commission on Youth (the Commissions). Should the Council wish to initiate collaborative projects to foster family-related support and education measures, the Government and the Commissions would render full support to the Council and devise relevant projects where resources permit.

16. The Family Council will continue to work with relevant stakeholders to further promote and publicize family core values in a sustainable manner, identify ways to enhance effectiveness and

¹ The Council recognized that family is the cornerstone for social harmony. Toward this end, the Council has identified the following as the family core values as the key elements to a healthy and happy family life - Love and Care (愛與關懷); Respect and Responsibility (責任與尊重); and Communication and Harmony (溝通與和諧).

co-ordination of family education in particular parental education, and ways to foster pro-family measures. To facilitate the work of the Council, consideration will be given to setting up sub-committees and co-opting talents and advice from experts and professionals outside the Council on need basis to conduct more in-depth deliberations on the above areas.

17. The Government and the Family Council will continue to work closely with relevant stakeholders to promote pro-family environment, and enhance public awareness and promote better public understanding and culture in cherishing families as a main driver for social harmony.

Conclusion

18. IFSCs are the backbone for the provision of family welfare services and we attach great importance to maintaining their effectiveness in service delivery. We will, through the Review, identify room for improvement, as part of our continued effort to enhance the operation of the IFSCs.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
May 2009