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Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 11 May 2009**

The establishment and work progress of the Family Council

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the establishment and work progress of the Family Council, and summarises the deliberations of the Panel on Welfare Services (the Panel) on the subject.

Background

2. In the 2006-2007 Policy Address, the Chief Executive (CE) announced that the Administration would study the feasibility of the establishment of an integrated, holistic and high-level Family Commission to be responsible for policies and initiatives relating to family support. The Commission would bring under one roof the various commissions and committees in operation for handling issues covering different age groups and genders.

3. CE subsequently announced in the 2007-2008 Policy Address that the Family Council, to be chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS), would be set up. The Administration announced the appointment of members to the Family Council on 3 December 2007. It comprises five Government officials, namely CS, Secretary for Education, Secretary for Home Affairs (SHA), Secretary for Labour and Welfare, and Head of the Central Policy Unit, and 16 members from the social welfare, professional, commercial and industrial, and academic sectors, and its secretariat is serviced by the Home Affairs Bureau. The membership and terms of reference of the Family Council are set out respectively in **Appendices I and II**.

Deliberations of the Panel

Establishment of the Family Council

4. When the Panel was first briefed on the proposed establishment of a Family Commission by the former Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food at the meeting on 13 October 2006, members were advised that the proposed Family Commission would study and address problems from a family, instead of individual perspective, with a view to taking a more holistic approach in supporting families. It would also address family problems from a cross-policy perspective.

5. Members were further advised that the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau would take the lead in the study, with a view to examining the relationship between the proposed Family Commission and the Commission on Youth (CoY)¹, Women's Commission (WC)², Elderly Commission (EC)³ and other bodies which were also handling family-related issues. The Administration would first study whether the establishment of a Family Commission could enhance the implementation of social policy and be conducive to building a harmonious community. It would also examine the need for re-organisation and re-allocation of resources of existing commissions and committees.

6. Members were in support of the policy initiative to promote family harmony and considered that the Administration was on the right track to facilitate better coordination of cross-sectoral efforts on family matters. Some members, however, pointed out that the Administration should adopt a wider definition of family having regard to the fact that the types of family units were much more diversified nowadays and included, for example, single-parent families. They considered that the Administration should pay more attention to the needs of these non-traditional families in formulating family policies.

7. Members were also advised that the report on the study was expected to be finished by mid-2007, and a final decision would be made by the Third Term Government.

8. At the briefing by SHA on the 2007-2008 Policy Address at the Panel meeting on 15 October 2007, members were advised that the Family Council would be established before the end of 2007-2008, and the policy purview had since been placed under SHA. The Administration announced the appointment of members to the Family Council on 3 December 2007.

¹ CoY was set up in February 1990 to help Hong Kong meet the needs of youth and respond to their aspirations.

² WC was set up in January 2001 as a central mechanism to promote the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong as well as advise the Government on the policy direction on women issues.

³ EC was established in 1997, and its main task is to provide advice to the Government in the formulation of a comprehensive policy in caring for elders.

Work progress of the Family Council

9. Following the coming into operation of the Family Council, the Panel was briefed on the work progress of the Family Council at the meeting on 14 February 2008. Members were advised that in view of the broad range of issues involved, the Family Council agreed at its first meeting in December 2007 to accord priority to the following areas of work –

- (a) identification of core family values;
- (b) identification of ways to create a pro-family environment including work environment, implant a family perspective in service professionals and workers, promote family-friendly employment practices, and promote better work-life balance;
- (c) identification of ways to enhance the effectiveness and co-ordination of family education, strengthen parental education, and map out the respective roles of women and men in family lives;
- (d) fostering a family perspective among policy-makers, for example, by introducing family impact assessment in policy formulation in the long run;
- (e) mapping out the future structure of the Family Council and EC, WC and CoY; and
- (f) making reference to family-related studies done by other organisations and initiating research on such studies as necessary.

10. The Administration further advised that the Family Council would seek to rationalise the work of EC, WC and CoY under the Council by March 2009.

11. Members and deputations giving views to the Panel expressed general support for the establishment of the Family Council. However, they pointed out that EC, WC and CoY were performing different roles to meet the specific needs of different age groups and genders, and should not be brought under the Family Council. Some members considered it unacceptable for the Family Council to assume the overall responsibility of rationalisation of the work of various commissions currently responsible for handling issues regarding different age groups and genders.

12. The Administration responded that it was open-minded on the issues of concern raised by members. According to the Administration, the Family

Council would advise the Government on the integration of family policies and related programmes across different bureaux and departments for different age and gender sectors, including the work of EC, WC and CoY. The Family Council would consider carefully how to rationalise the work of EC, WC and CoY and achieve more collaboration between the Family Council and the three commissions.

13. Members expressed particular concern about absence of a work plan and targets for the Family Council. Members considered that the Family Council should draw up its targets, especially on how to foster the collaboration among different bureaux and departments on family support work. Some deputations expressed disappointment at the Family Council's failure to give due attention to the specific needs of different age groups and members in the family, in particular children and the disabled. They strongly urged the early setting up of a Children's Commission to safeguard the well-being of children, and the introduction of family impact assessment in policy formulation.

14. The Administration advised that the setting up of the Family Council aimed to establish a family-based support network and forge closer and harmonious relationships among family members. The Family Council would advise the Government on the integration of family policies and strategies for supporting and strengthening the family as well as the development of related programmes and activities across different bureaux and departments, and monitor their implementation. The Administration further advised that the Family Council had agreed that the priority issues to be considered should include identification of core family values; ways to create a pro-family environment including work environment; and ways to enhance the effectiveness and co-ordination of family education in the months ahead. The Family Council also considered that one of its priority tasks was to foster a family perspective among policy makers. The introduction of family impact assessment in policy formulation in the long run was one of the options for consideration. On matters relating to children's rights, the Administration advised that the Children's Rights Forum formed under the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau served to provide a platform for exchanging views on matters concerning children's rights amongst non-governmental organisations, children's representatives and the Government.

15. Some members took the view that the Administration should expand the membership of the Family Council to include representatives from the frontline social workers, the labour sector and the disabled with a view to coming up with concrete recommendations to meet the needs of individual groups. The Administration explained that members of the Council had different expertise, knowledge and experience from their professions, including social welfare, professional, business and academic, and would be able to provide advice to the Government from different perspective. Moreover, one of the terms of

reference of the Family Council was to take into account the needs of different age and gender sectors. As such, groups in need would be duly considered in formulating policy recommendations.

16. At the briefing by SHA on the 2008-2009 Policy Address at the Panel meeting on 23 October 2008, members were advised that the Administration was mapping out a promotion campaign to encourage different sectors of the community to actively participate in the promotion of family core values and a harmonious relationship amongst family members. On the advice of the Family Council, the Government was looking into ways to include the family as a factor to consider in its policy-making process.

Relevant papers

17. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk> to view the Administration's papers for the meetings of the Panel on 13 October 2006, 15 October 2007, and 14 February and 23 October 2008, and the relevant minutes of meetings.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 May 2009

Appendix I

Membership of the Family Council (2007 to 2009) :

Chairman: Chief Secretary for Administration

Non-official Members:

1. Ms CHAU Chuen-heung
2. Mr CHOW Yung, Robert
3. Ms KAO Ching-chi, Sophia
4. Mrs KWAN HO Shiu-fong, Cecilia
5. Ms LAI Fung-yee, Angelina
6. Mr LEE Chung-tak, Joseph
7. Dr LEE Wai-yung
8. Dr the Hon LEONG Che-hung
9. Mr LEONG Kwok-kuen, Lincoln
10. Mrs LEUNG NGAI Mou-yin, Justina
11. Dr PANG King-chee
12. Prof SHEK Tan-lei, Daniel
13. Ms TAO Chee-ying, Theresa
14. Dr WONG Chung-kwong
15. Prof WONG Po-choi
16. Mr WONG Ying-wai, Wilfred

Official Members:

Secretary for Education, or his representative
Secretary for Home Affairs, or his representative
Secretary for Labour and Welfare, or his representative
Head, Central Policy Unit, or his representative

Appendix II

Terms of Reference of the Family Council

- (a) To advocate for cherishing the family as a main driver for social harmony; and to promote a family-based support network to forge closer and harmonious relationships amongst family members;
- (b) To advise the Government on the formulation of policies and strategies for supporting and strengthening the family and on development of related programmes/activities; and to monitor their implementation;
- (c) To advise the Government on the integration of family policies and related programmes across different bureaux and departments for individual age and gender sectors to ensure effective coordination;
- (d) To plan/implement programmes and activities for particular age and/or gender sectors; and rationalize the work of the Elderly Commission, the Women's Commission and the Commission on Youth; and
- (e) To initiate research to promote better understanding of matters related to the family as necessary.