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Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 11 January 2010**

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 Commission¹ 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 members from the social welfare, professional, commercial and industrial, and academic sectors; its secretariat is serviced by the Home Affairs Bureau. The terms of reference and the current membership of the Family Council are set out respectively in **Appendices I and II**.

¹ The Administration changed the name of the Family Commission to Family Council when its establishment was announced in the 2007-2008 Policy Address.

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)², Women's Commission (WC)³, Elderly Commission (EC)⁴ 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.

² CoY was set up in February 1990 to help Hong Kong meet the needs of youth and respond to their aspirations.

³ 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.

⁴ 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 meetings on 14 February 2008 and 11 May 2009.

10. 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 conducted by other organisations and initiating research on such studies as necessary.

11. 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.

12. 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.

13. 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.

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. At the meeting on 11 May 2009, members were advised that the Family Council had been tasked to foster closer and harmonious relationships among family members. It would continue to work with the relevant stakeholders to further promote and publicise family core values in a sustainable manner, identify ways to enhance effectiveness and coordination of family education, and ways to foster pro-family measures.

17. Members were also advised that on the working relationships with EC, WC and CoY, the Family Council recommended that while they should continue to perform their roles in relevant sector-specific areas, they could form a closer alliance with the Family Council and make more concerted efforts to help enhance support services for families. To facilitate communication and co-operation between the three Commissions and the Council, the Chairpersons of EC, WC and CoY were appointed as ex-officio members of the Family Council with effect from 1 April 2009.

18. Some members considered that the Family Council should formulate strategic directions on family-related policies, instead of launching promotional activities. The Administration advised that the Family Council provided a high-level platform for discussion of major issues from the family perspective and strategic directions and priorities on family-related policies. To facilitate the work of the Family Council, it had set up three subcommittees to conduct in-depth deliberation on the strategic directions on promotion of family core values, family support and family education, in particular parental education.

19. The Family Council would continue to study policy initiatives and conduct in-depth deliberations on its areas of work. While acknowledging the public expectation on the work of the Family Council, the Administration stressed that the Family Council was an advisory body to the Government. Provision of services to support families would continue to be delivered by different relevant service providers and delivery agents.

20. At the meeting on 22 October 2009, members were advised that the main task to be carried out by the Family Council in the coming year was to continue to promote the family core values with the emphasis on building "Happy Families". The Administration was also collaborating with the business sector and the stakeholders to create a pro-family environment and family friendly employment practices.

Membership of the Family Council

21. 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.

Relevant papers

22. A list of relevant papers is at the **Appendix III**. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk/> for details.

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.
- (e) To initiate research to promote better understanding of matters related to the family as necessary.

Membership of the Family Council (2009 to 2011)

Chairman: Chief Secretary for Administration

Ex-officio Members:

Ms KAO Ching-chi, Sophia, SBS, JP, Chairperson of the Women's Commission
Dr LEONG Che-hung, Edward, GBS, JP, Chairperson of the Elderly Commission
Mr CHAN Chung-bun, Bunny, SBS, JP, Chairperson of the Commission on Youth

Non-official Members:

Ms CHAU Chuen-heung, MH, JP
Mr CHOW Yung, Robert, BBS
Mrs KWAN HO Shiu-fong, Cecilia
Dr KOONG May-kay, Maggie
Ms LAI Fung-ye, Angelina
Dr LEE Wai-yung
Mr LEONG Kwok-kuen, Lincoln, JP
Mrs LEUNG NGAI Mou-yin, Justina, JP
Dr PANG King-chee, MH
Prof SHEK Tan-lei, Daniel, BBS, JP
Ms TAO Chee-ying, Theresa, JP
Dr WONG Chung-kwong
Prof WONG Po-choi, MH
Mr WONG Ying-wai, Wilfred, SBS, JP

Official Members:

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

Secretary: Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (2)

Relevant Papers/Documents

<u>Meeting</u>	<u>Meeting Date</u>	<u>Papers</u>
Panel on Welfare Services	13 October 2006	Administration's Paper LC Paper No. CB(2)27/06-07(01) Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)262/06-07
	15 October 2007	Administration's Paper LC Paper No. CB(2)3/07-08(02) Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)358/07-08
	14 February 2008	Administration's Paper LC Paper No. CB(2)977/07-08(03) Reply from the Home Affairs Bureau to the Clerk to Panel dated 18 July 2008 LC Paper No. CB(2)2661/07-08(01) Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)1296/07-08
	23 October 2008	Administration's Paper LC Paper No. CB(2)15/08-09(03) Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)321/08-09
	11 May 2009	Administration's Paper LC Paper No. CB(2)1451/08-09(05) Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)1710/08-09
	22 October 2009	Administration's Paper LC Paper No. CB(2)6/09-10(03) Minutes of meeting LC Paper No. CB(2)379/09-10