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Panel on Welfare Services

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 5 June 2010

Social welfare planning mechanism

Purpose

This paper summarises the deliberations of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") on issues relating to social welfare planning mechanism.

Background

2. Following the discussions on the broad strategic direction of the welfare development in the context of the Strategic Framework for the Social Welfare conducted in 2004, the Administration adopted the following broad approaches in planning for future welfare services and programmes –

- (a) *social investment* : it would invest in strategies that focus on building the capacity of individuals, families and the communities so as to help the disadvantaged groups to be self-reliant as far as possible; and
- (b) *tripartite partnerships* : it would encourage various forms of partnerships among the Government, the third sector and the business community to work together to solve social problems and build a harmonious society.

3. In 2005-2006, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") introduced the annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector on the priorities in the coming years, and the District Welfare Planning Protocol to set out a standardised planning framework and workflow on how to assess and prioritise district welfare needs and formulate strategies in the districts to meet such needs.

4. In 2007, the Chief Executive undertook in his Election Manifesto to study the long-term social welfare development plan for Hong Kong through the Social Welfare Advisory Committee ("SWAC").

Deliberations by the Panel

Social welfare planning mechanism

5. At the Panel meeting on 8 May 2006, members were advised that under the broad direction set out in paragraph 2 above, the Administration introduced the annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector in 2005 by discussion with the sector and members of the welfare-related advisory committees on the priorities of the coming years. The first consultation session was held in June 2005 to gather the views of the sector on their proposed priorities for 2006-2007 and beyond. The second one was held in September 2005 for the Administration to debrief the sector on the new initiatives likely to be announced in the Policy Address in October 2005. According to the Administration, the new annual consultation mechanism was useful in exchanging views and setting the priorities to tie in with the Government's policy and resource planning cycle. The views gathered had been reflected in the Policy Address where appropriate. It would continue with the mechanism in 2006.

6. Deputations told the Panel that while the Administration had engaged the welfare sector in the discussions on the Strategic Framework for the Social Welfare in 2004, it failed to put in place an integrated and forward-looking planning framework comprising long-term strategic directions, medium-term plans for individual programme areas and service development and delivery of annual plans by SWD and non-governmental organisations ("NGOs"), as undertaken by the Administration when it introduced the Lump Sum Grant subvention system in 2000. More importantly, the Administration had not yet come up with a blueprint in guiding the long-term development of social welfare services in Hong Kong.

7. The Administration advised that it had adopted a flexible planning approach comprising mainly an annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector and the District Welfare Planning Protocol. The new arrangement allowed the Administration and NGOs to be responsive to the latest requests and changing circumstances. While discussions were primarily focused on the immediate priorities for the coming year, there were also exchanges with the sector on the longer-term development. The mechanism could be regarded as an annual rollover exercise to plan for the coming years.

8. Noting that the Administration had abandoned the previous planning mechanism in the form of a five-year plan, members were of the view that the Administration should work out a long-term plan to guide the long-term development of welfare services, instead of merely responding to changing circumstances in a piecemeal manner. Some members suggested that the Administration should

reinstate the five-year plan, or the practice of preparing a 10-year White Paper on social welfare policies.

9. The Administration responded that it had adopted different planning mechanisms for different service areas, having regard to the individual needs and situation of each service area. Apart from frequent exchanges with the relevant NGOs, it would also engage in regular dialogues with the relevant advisory bodies, such as the Elderly Commission for services to the elderly and the Commission on Youth in respect of youth services, to map out the long-term plan for each service area.

10. At the request of the Panel, the Administration reported to the Panel on 10 July 2006 on the outcome of the annual consultation session for 2006. Members remained concerned that the Administration had failed to accede to the numerous requests from the welfare sector for a blueprint on the long-term development of social welfare services. Members reiterated that the Administration should map out a long-term plan for social welfare services.

11. The Administration advised that welfare planning was a long and complex process involving many parties. The Administration had introduced new philosophy and strategies, such as cross-sectoral collaboration and community involvement to tackle the increasingly complex social issues. It was of the view that social welfare planning in the form of service projection in detailed figures was no longer suitable to the present situation of Hong Kong. Where justified, a longer-term plan would still be developed for a specific service area, whereas for other areas, the Administration would adopt a more flexible planning approach. The consultation approach in the form of Green Paper and White Paper would be considered if the policy issue was of great significance to the society as a whole. The Administration stressed that the annual consultation sessions were just part of the process, and they were not the only occasion to solicit views from the welfare sector. It would continue to use other channels to collect views from the sector.

Long-term social welfare planning

12. At the Panel meeting on 23 October 2008 when members were briefed on the welfare initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2008-2009 Policy Address, the Administration advised that as undertaken in the 2007-2008 Policy Agenda to study the long-term development planning for social welfare in Hong Kong through SWAC, the latter commenced initial consultation in April 2008 by seeking initial views from various stakeholder groups on a number of key issues which were fundamental to the review. The initial consultation period ended on 30 September 2008. Taking into account the comments received, SWAC would proceed with the next stage of the study.

13. The Panel was further advised at the meeting on 22 October 2009 that SWAC had invited stakeholders in the sector to offer their initial views on a number of key

issues pertinent to the study. A Task Group on Welfare Planning was formed under SWAC in 2009 to take forward the study. As part of the study process, SWAC would conduct another round of consultation with the sector and stakeholders and was working out the details.

Latest development

14. SWAC released a consultation paper on 14 April 2010 to seek views from the social welfare sector and relevant stakeholders on the long-term social welfare planning in Hong Kong. The consultation paper is available on the SWAC website : www.swac.org.hk. The consultation exercise will end on 31 July 2010.

Relevant papers

15. Members may wish to refer to the Administration's papers for the meetings of the Panel on 8 May and 10 July 2006, 23 October 2008 and 22 October 2009, and the relevant minutes of meetings for details.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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