

**For discussion on
14 June 2010**

LC Paper No. CB(2)1747/09-10(03)

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Review on the Implementation of
the Integrated Family Service Centre Service Mode

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the findings and recommendations of the Review on the Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre Service Mode (the Review) and the Administration's response to the recommendations made in the Review report.

Background

2. At the meeting of this Panel held on 9 March 2009, Members were briefed on the details and progress of the Review. As set out in the information paper for the meeting (LC Paper No.: CB(2)978/08-09(03)), the Social Welfare Department (SWD) commissioned the University of Hong Kong (HKU) in August 2000 to conduct the "Review of Family Services in Hong Kong", which recommended, among other things, the adoption of the Integrated Family Service Centre (IFSC) service mode to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial family services for meeting the changing needs of families in a holistic manner. Pilot projects were then launched to test out the effectiveness of the IFSC service mode. With the positive findings on the effectiveness of the pilot projects in the "Evaluative Study of the Pilot Projects on IFSCs" conducted by HKU, and having consulted this Panel, the Social Welfare Advisory Committee and the welfare sector, SWD re-engineered the then family service resources to form a total of 61 IFSCs over the territory (of which 40 are run by SWD and 21 by nine non-governmental organisations (NGOs)) in phases in 2004-05.

3. Since the IFSC service mode has been adopted for more than three years, the Administration considered it appropriate to review its implementation to consider whether, and if so, what improvements should

be made to refine the IFSC service mode. SWD has, through open tendering, commissioned HKU to conduct the Review in October 2008, with the following objectives –

- (a) to find out how effective IFSCs are in implementing the four guiding principles of accessibility, early identification, integration and partnership under the broad direction of “child-centred, family-focused and community-based” in strengthening families and meeting the changing needs of the community;
- (b) to examine the effectiveness of IFSC services in serving specific targets such as single parents, new arrivals, ethnic minorities, etc. and reaching out to hard-to-reach at-risk families;
- (c) to identify factors facilitating / hindering the effective delivery of IFSC services, illustrations of practice wisdom on the implementation of the IFSC service mode, as well as ways to develop service specialisation within an integrated service mode and to enhance strategic partnership, collaboration and interfacing with other services;
- (d) to examine the performance standards, including output and outcome indicators and level of attainment, as set out in the Funding and Service Agreement (FSA); and
- (e) to make suggestions for continuous service improvement.

4. The Review made use of a mix of quantitative and qualitative data derived from a variety of sources and stakeholders, including –

- (a) reports from all 61 IFSCs;
- (b) service statistics on user profiles and service output and outcome;
- (c) district focus groups with administrators, supervisors and frontline social workers as well as community stakeholders;
- (d) case studies on the implementation of guiding principles and service directions in selected IFSCs;
- (e) user surveys; and

- (f) illustrations of practice wisdom on the implementation of the IFSC service mode.

5. A Steering Committee (the Steering Committee) comprising representatives from the Labour and Welfare Bureau, SWD, NGOs (including the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)) and an independent member was set up by SWD in October 2008 to advise on the direction of the Review, monitor its progress and examine the Review report submitted by the Consultant Team.

6. With the full support and participation of administrators, supervisors and frontline staff of IFSCs, service users and community stakeholders, the Review was completed smoothly. Upon completion of the Review, the Consultant Team submitted the Review report entitled “Building Effective Family Services: Review on the Implementation of the IFSC Service Mode” to SWD. The Review report, as accepted by the Steering Committee, was released in May 2010 and uploaded onto SWD’s Departmental Homepage. It has been circulated to Members of this Panel vide LC Paper No.: CB(2)1619/09-10(01). An executive summary of the Review report is at Annex.

Major Findings and Recommendations of the Review

7. The Consultant Team has made a number of observations and a total of 26 recommendations in the Review report (in Chapters 7 and 8). The Administration accepts in principle all the 26 recommendations. In particular, we note the conclusion of the Consultant Team that –

- (a) the IFSC service mode has received general support from IFSC management and frontline workers, stakeholders and service users as meaningful and appropriate in directing and delivering family services in contemporary Hong Kong (paragraph 7.2) ;
- (b) the IFSC service mode should continue to be adopted for publicly-funded family services in Hong Kong (Recommendation 1); and
- (c) in addressing the needs of specific target groups like single parents, new arrivals, ethnic minorities and deprived families, IFSCs in their places of residence gave them the natural platform for integration with the community (paragraph 8.1.2). In addition to adequately serving single parents, new arrivals,

ethnic minorities and deprived families receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance as priority target groups identified in the earlier reviews, most IFSCs have developed special services should they identify new target groups unique to the communities they serve, such as cross-boundary families. (Paragraph 6, Executive Summary). Specific target groups should continue to be served by IFSCs under the integrated service mode in their own communities. (Paragraph 6, Executive Summary). The existing practice of IFSCs in identifying specific target groups in the communities they serve and providing appropriate services for such groups should continue to be encouraged and supported (Recommendation 2).

8. The above conclusion is in line with the view of the Administration that the IFSC service mode is the preferred mode for the delivery of family services in Hong Kong, and is able to serve the needs of specific target groups. For instance, on single-parent families, the 61 IFSCs over the territory can provide them with more easily accessible, convenient and comprehensive services in a one-stop manner without labelling effect as compared with the then five Single Parent Centres. In IFSCs, they may also have access to services which were unavailable at the Single Parent Centres, such as intensive counselling, assessment on application for compassionate rehousing and referral for clinical psychologist service, etc. We believe that the IFSC service mode should continue to be the backbone of our family welfare services.

9. The Consultant Team has recorded in the Review report the major concerns of frontline staff of IFSCs about the implementation of the IFSC service mode and made recommendations for addressing these concerns. Two major concerns and the corresponding recommendations are highlighted below –

- (a) IFSC social workers have expressed concerns about the handling of housing assistance cases (Paragraphs 7.26 – 7.28). The Consultant Team recommends that the senior management of SWD and the Housing Department (HD) should jointly form a Working Group to enhance coordination in the referral system and to ensure the proper implementation of the agreed operational procedures (Recommendation 14); and
- (b) The FSA for IFSCs, which is considered useful and important contracts to ensure the matching of the services delivered by IFSCs and the funding provisions, should acknowledge duties

performed but not formerly counted. Flexibility should be introduced to make the workload of IFSCs more realistic and reasonable (Paragraph 7.30). The Consultant Team recommends that the FSA for IFSCs be reviewed and revised (Recommendation 22).

Feedback from the Sector

10. Upon the release of the Review report, SWD has, in collaboration with the Consultant Team, briefed administrators, supervisors and frontline staff of IFSCs, HKCSS, community stakeholders and staff unions / representatives on the findings and recommendations of the Review and the follow-up actions taken / to be taken by SWD.

11. IFSC operators, supervisors and frontline staff generally agree with the findings of the Review and welcome the recommendations in the Review report. They hope that the Administration would take timely and appropriate measures to take forward all the recommendations with particular attention to those relating to the collaboration with HD on the handling of housing assistance cases and the review and revision of FSA for IFSCs.

The Administration's Follow-up Actions

12. SWD will take forward all the 26 recommendations in the Review report in collaboration with administrators, supervisors and frontline staff of IFSCs and other relevant parties. Where necessary, it will seek additional resources for the implementation of the recommendations. The implementation of some of the recommendations, such as the identification of appropriate premises for the relocation of inconveniently-located IFSCs (which is indeed an ongoing task of SWD since the implementation of the IFSC service mode) (Recommendation 4), has already commenced. As for recommendations which require consultation with stakeholders and / or involve cross-departmental / cross-sectoral issues, SWD has / will set up working groups or liaison groups comprising administrators, supervisors and frontline staff of IFSCs, relevant government departments and / or other stakeholders to follow up. Some of the working groups / liaison groups set up / to be set up are –

- (a) a liaison mechanism with HD to enhance the collaboration and communication at both the headquarters and district levels with

a view to addressing issues relating to the handling of housing assistance cases, which include the review and streamlining of the existing work procedures and strengthening of communication channels. The liaison group at the headquarters level, namely the Liaison Group on Issues relating to Housing Assistance Cases, has already been set up. Its first meeting was held on 30 April 2010. The liaison groups at the district level will be set up in July 2010;

- (b) a working group comprising administrators, supervisors and frontline staff of IFSCs operated by SWD and NGOs to review the FSA for IFSCs with a view to updating and adjusting the performance indicators and encouraging IFSCs to develop service initiatives beyond the FSA requirements. SWD plans to set up this working group in August 2010; and
- (c) a working group to review and streamline the procedures for handling Director of Social Welfare Incorporated – Specified Person account cases, which was set up in March 2010.

13. SWD will regularly report the progress of its follow up of the recommendations to the Task Group on the Implementation of IFSCs (the Task Group), which was set up in 2004 to deliberate on the operational issues and common areas of concern arising from the implementation of IFSCs. The Task Group comprises members from the 11 District Social Welfare Offices of SWD and the nine NGOs operating IFSCs. Since the minutes of meetings of the Task Group are available at SWD's Departmental Homepage, interested parties can easily keep track of the progress of the follow-up actions on the recommendations of the Review.

Advice Sought

14. Members are invited to note the findings and recommendations of the Review and the follow-up actions taken / to be taken by the Administration.

Social Welfare Department
June 2010

Review on the Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre Service Mode

Executive Summary

Review background and objectives

1. Concerted efforts have been made to bring Hong Kong family service from strength to strength, starting with the Review of Family Services in 2000. It was followed by the testing of pilot projects on the proposed service mode of Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs), and the subsequent establishment of 61 IFSCs (40 run by Social Welfare Department [SWD], and 21 operated by nine non-governmental organisations [NGOs]) since 2004/05 to provide publicly-funded family services in Hong Kong.

2. With the ongoing spirit to advance the effectiveness and efficiency of family services, SWD commissioned a Consultant Team from the University of Hong Kong (HKU) in October 2008 to conduct a Review on the Implementation of the IFSC Service Mode. The following are the review objectives:

- a) To find out how effective IFSCs are in implementing the four guiding principles of accessibility, early identification, integration and partnership under the direction of ‘child-centred, family-focused and community-based’ in strengthening families and meeting the changing needs of the community;
- b) To examine the effectiveness of IFSC services in serving specific targets such as single parents, new arrivals, ethnic minorities, etc. and reaching out to the hard-to-reach at-risk families;
- c) To identify factors facilitating / hindering the effective delivery of IFSC services, illustrations of practice wisdom on the implementation of the IFSC service mode, as well as ways to develop service specialisation within an integrated service mode and to enhance strategic partnership, collaboration and interfacing with other services;
- d) To examine the performance standards, including output and outcome indicators and level of attainment, as set out in the Funding and Service Agreement (FSA); and
- e) To make suggestions for continuous service improvement.

Review methodology

3. In view of the variety of stakeholders connected with the services, the Study adopted a multi-method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to collect data from different sources covering the period from April 2005 to October 2009. The report findings were based on the information aggregated from centre reports from all the IFSCs, statistics on service output and outcome, content analysis of transcriptions of district focus group discussions with key stakeholders from selected IFSCs in the 11 SWD districts, case studies on selected centres, user survey with 1 502 respondents, illustrations of practice wisdom on the implementation of the IFSC service mode (reported separately in the Practice Wisdom Reference), views on the implementation of the IFSC service mode received through letters and electronic messages via the website set up to collect comments, as well as review of relevant literature, reports and submissions from stakeholders to the Consultant Team.

Key findings

Effectiveness of the IFSC service mode

IFSC service mode

4. Review findings indicate that the IFSC service mode under the direction of ‘child-centred, family-focused and community-based’ and the four guiding principles of ‘accessibility’, ‘early identification’, ‘integration’ and ‘partnership’ has received general support from IFSC management and frontline workers, stakeholders and service users as meaningful and appropriate in directing and delivering family services in contemporary Hong Kong.

IFSC service focus

5. There is a general consensus that the main objectives of an IFSC is to serve as a ‘community-based integrated service centre focusing on supporting and strengthening families’. IFSC is unique in that it calls for professional expertise in dealing with the social and emotional needs of families in the community. There should be a balanced provision of preventive, supportive and remedial services. Necessary professional manpower must be available and deployed to ensure a balanced delivery of all three services. Enhancement of community partnership for better

collaboration and interfacing should also be in place.

IFSC priority target groups

6. In addition to adequately serving single parents, new arrivals, ethnic minorities and deprived families receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) as priority target groups identified in the earlier reviews, most IFSCs have developed special services should they identify new target groups unique to the communities they serve, such as cross-boundary families. These groups should remain the priority target groups and should continue to be served by IFSCs under the integrated service mode in their own communities. These new specialised services should be commended and supported with adequate resources.

Expectation on the aim and scope of IFSC services

7. IFSC social workers were found to be encountering difficulties managing the high and sometimes unrealistic expectations of service users and community stakeholders. At times, they were requested to provide services which fall outside the scope of IFSC services. Efforts should be made at the case, centre, district, headquarters and community levels to inform service users and stakeholders of the objectives and priorities of IFSC services to properly manage their expectations.

Provisions for IFSC services in terms of space and manpower according to population-based service boundaries

8. The current provisions for service boundaries were found to be reasonable and appropriate for IFSCs that serve a population size of 100 000 to 150 000. Adjustment to the service boundaries of IFSCs should only be considered when there is clear projection of new population intake or evidence of adverse social challenges that warrants the setting up of a new centre or injection of additional manpower into a particular IFSC.

IFSC opening hours

9. All stakeholders appreciated that IFSCs operate on a 13 or 14-session-per-week extended-hour mode, which enables some users working full-time to use the service after normal office hours.

IFSC case assessment and referral forms

10. The existing screening form used for intake was considered useful

but could be further simplified. Development of necessary assessment tools and forms can be considered to sharpen case assessment, record user information and track service interfacing with community stakeholders.

IFSC management

11. There were notable innovations at the IFSC operator, district and centre levels in improving the management systems and strategies of IFSCs. Appropriate resource provision and other suitable measures are needed to ensure adequate administrative and clinical supervision in the IFSCs.

Support services to complement IFSC services

12. Adequate support services are essential for IFSC social workers to provide effective and comprehensive assistance to services users. District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) had made notable contributions in achieving district-based service and resource synergy. SWD and service providers in the NGO sector should work closely in ensuring the optimal use of existing support services and in developing and expanding necessary ones.

Facilitating and hindering factors

Factors reported by stakeholders to be facilitating the delivery of IFSC services

13. The expertise and dedication of the IFSC staff force and its ownership to advance family services in Hong Kong were pivotal in facilitating the effective implementation of the IFSC service mode. The ‘child-centred, family-focused and community-based’ direction, and ‘accessibility’, ‘early identification’, ‘integration’ and ‘partnership’ were all useful guiding principles to lead the advancement of family services in Hong Kong. The delineation of specific service boundary, the provision of user-friendly premises, the provision of staff teams with a profile of expertise, the establishment of case intake, screening, management and referral systems, the provision of administrative and clinical supervision support at the centre, operator, district and central levels were all facilitating factors that should be protected for the continuous productive functioning of IFSCs. It is important to ensure that they remain facilitative to IFSC service delivery and development.

Factors reported by stakeholders to be hindering the delivery of IFSC services

14. Reported hindering factors included the unfavourable location and set-up of some IFSCs, resource issues (e.g. manpower provision in handling family cases escalating in quantity, complexity and urgency, flexibility in the FSA, manpower arrangements due to staff turnover), policy issues (e.g. aim and scope of IFSC services) as well as staff mindset issues (some IFSC social workers still identified themselves as caseworkers instead of multi-skilled, all-rounded social workers, thus hampering their generic consideration of user and community needs).

Performance standards and the FSA

15. The performance standards stipulated in the current FSA for IFSCs limit the ability of IFSCs to respond with sensitivity to the growing number and complications in family cases, crises and social problems.

Other observations and suggestions

Staff training and continuous development

16. Centre, district, and sector-based staff orientation, supervision, training, knowledge documentation and sharing are considered important and necessary to sustain the professional expertise in the family service sector.

The Task Group on Implementation of IFSCs

17. The Task Group, which has been a useful platform to iron out some of the operational issues in IFSC services, should continue and be empowered.

IFSC service improvement

18. The sector is dedicated to uphold family service standard. SWD should provide the leadership and work jointly with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS), NGO IFSC operators and other stakeholders to seek continuous service advancement where appropriate.

Recommendations

IFSC service mode

Recommendation 1: The IFSC service mode should continue to be adopted for publicly-funded family services in Hong Kong. To ensure its continued success, individual IFSCs should continue their efforts in the effective deployment of resources. The Administration should also continue to ensure adequate provision of resources to support the work of IFSCs.

Recommendation 2: The existing practice of IFSCs in identifying specific target groups in the communities they serve and providing appropriate services for such groups should continue to be encouraged and supported.

Provisions for IFSC service

Recommendation 3: The current principles in making financial and human resource provisions for IFSCs, which are reasonable and appropriate for communities with 100 000 to 150 000 residents, should be maintained. The service boundaries for IFSCs have been carefully set and adjustment should only be considered when there is a clear projection of new population intake or evidence of adverse social challenges that warrants the setting up of a new centre or injection of additional manpower into a particular IFSC.

Recommendation 4: SWD should continue to make it a priority to seek appropriate premises for the relocation of IFSCs that are inconveniently located or set up at different locations. The management of individual IFSCs should maintain the centres in good conditions to make them physically and psychologically approachable for community users.

Recommendation 5: The principle that users should use IFSC services according to their residential districts should be upheld. Flexibility should only be provided for special cases, e.g. children with parents in prison, and working adults who can find easier access to IFSCs in dealing with their personal problems near their work place rather than their residence.

Operations of IFSC service

Service hours

Recommendation 6: The current practice of IFSCs' extended-hour service, which has been commended by many users and stakeholders as being very considerate towards their needs, should be maintained.

Screening and assessment

Recommendation 7: The existing enquiry / intake cum screening form should be kept and, where applicable, simplified. Development of other assessment forms or tools needed for sharpening the assessment of specific types of cases should be considered.

Recommendation 8: Forms to record necessary information for and accurately track referrals and follow-up actions, especially when cross-department / sector / service interfacing needs to be carefully monitored, should be developed.

Service priorities

Recommendation 9: IFSCs should continue to function as community-based integrated service centres focusing on supporting and strengthening families. IFSCs need to observe the specific and changing characteristics of the respective communities they serve and adjust their service priorities accordingly.

Efficiency in service operation

Recommendation 10: IFSCs should continue to optimise their efficiency in service operation. Useful strategies to be considered include streamlining and enhancing service procedures, seeking optimal management of complicated cases (involving, where appropriate, more than one social worker and / or other staff / professionals) and cases which consume a lot of manpower to complete certain logistics, and leveraging on community resources to provide preventive family services.

Recommendation 11: IFSCs should explore service enhancement through appropriate use and sharing of information technology.

Collaboration and interfacing

Recommendation 12: Collaboration and interfacing at the Centre level -

Individual IFSCs should further enhance the interfacing amongst the Family Resource Unit (FRU), Family Support Unit (FSU) and Family Counselling Unit (FCU) and make it easy for users to benefit from the preventive, supportive and remedial services provided by these units.

Recommendation 13: Collaboration and interfacing at the District level - IFSCs should leverage on the services and resources within their service boundary to optimise the impact of such synergy. The efforts made by DSWOs in this aspect are recognised, and they are encouraged to continue to play the important roles of coordination and facilitation of resources to address service needs and achieve service advancement.

Recommendation 14: Collaboration and interfacing at the Headquarters level – To address IFSC workers’ priority concern in the proper handling of housing assistance cases, the senior management of SWD and Housing Department (HD) should jointly form a Working Group to enhance coordination in the referral system and to ensure the proper implementation of agreed procedures in actual operation. Likewise, there should be more initiatives to streamline administrative procedures to shorten the processing time for necessary services (e.g. The Working Group on Streamlining Procedures for Processing Referrals for Residential Placements for Children is recognised to have worked to achieve this goal). Users’ needed support services (e.g. residential placement for children and adult users with long term care needs), as assessed by IFSC workers, should be backed up by service policies and resource provision where necessary and appropriate.

Recommendation 15: Efforts should be made at the case, centre, district, headquarters and community levels to inform service users and stakeholders of the objectives and priorities of IFSC services to properly manage their expectations. They should learn about and approach different appropriate social services, government departments and sectors for their needs or requests which fall under the jurisdiction of those departments and sectors.

Recommendation 16: The contributions of non-publicly-funded family services should be acknowledged and encouraged. IFSCs are encouraged to collaborate with these family services for knowledge transfer and to achieve synergy.

Management of IFSC

Recommendation 17: SWD should take the lead and work with HKCSS and NGO IFSC operators and other stakeholders to continue to enhance family services in Hong Kong where appropriate.

Recommendation 18: The efforts by many IFSCs in conducting operator-based or centre-based management innovations, including cross-service synergy within some multi-service agencies, or amongst different social services within the service districts should be recognised, encouraged and actively shared within the sector.

Human resource management / development

Recommendation 19: The Administration should continue to keep under review and, where necessary, enhance the manpower provision of IFSCs, in particular at the supervisory, frontline and support staff levels, in order to handle increasingly complicated cases, and address emerging new service demand, including serving the needs of specific target groups.

Recommendation 20: IFSC operators should continue to ensure that there is suitable orientation for new staff, as well as proper supervision and support for staff at all levels. The professional documentation of practice wisdom in preventive, supportive and remedial services to facilitate knowledge retention and transfer should be encouraged and supported.

Recommendation 21: The IFSC sector should conduct regular sharing sessions to achieve mutual stimulation and enlightenment.

Funding and Service Agreement

Recommendation 22: The FSA should be reviewed and revised.

Recommendation 23: Output Standards (OS) 2, 3 and 4 of the FSA should be merged to allow more flexibility in running groups beyond the planned ones to better respond to changing community needs.

Recommendation 24: IFSCs should continue to support and develop service initiatives. This has been a cherished demonstration of professionalism and the dedication and expertise of the sector in making such contributions should be recognised and encouraged.

Continuous monitoring and improvement

Recommendation 25: The Task Group on the Implementation of IFSCs should be continued and empowered with a properly devised Terms of Reference to give it the necessary mandate to identify and follow-up issues of concern and to bring major issues to the attention of the SWD senior management for timely management.

Recommendation 26: SWD should provide the leadership and work with HKCSS, NGO IFSC operators and other stakeholders to seek continuous improvement of the service through examining service demand and addressing service needs.