

Hong Kong Family Welfare Society

Submission for Legislation Council Panel on Welfare Services Meeting on 26 June 2010

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

Hong Kong Family Welfare Society is currently operating five IFSCs. Our senior management and all levels of IFSC staff have actively participated in the study of Review on the Implementation of IFSC Service Mode, and we would like to document our **major views** towards the review as follows:

Overall Impression

In the report of Building Effective Family Services: Review on the Implementation of IFSC Service Mode (the Review), HKU Consultant Team has done a good job in documenting in details **key observations of major concerns like priority focus of IFSC services, realistic public expectation, adequate resources provision for effective realization of the IFSC service mode, and voices on handling other housing assistance cases/ enquiries, etc.**; however, the Review Report has failed to articulate solid recommendations, concrete strategies and clear yardsticks to deal with those crucial issues in a well-defined fashion.

Implementation, Monitoring and Improvement Mechanism

To move the Review forward, we **need a well-structured implementation and monitoring mechanism/ platform to follow up the concretization, strategies formulation as well as putting into practice of the Review recommendations in a time-defined, coordinated and pragmatic manner.** We would expect that such mechanism should **come into place before September 2010 and examine all Review recommendations in details, coming up with and putting into practice of concrete action plans with clear time schedule within one year.** During the period, **quarterly update of implementation progress** should be made available publicly so as to ensure transparency of information and facilitate communication.

As stated in Recommendation 25, the existing Task Group on the Implementation of IFSCs with a properly revised Terms of Reference is recommended to take on this function. Its suitability will all depend on whether it can fully meet the below criteria:

- a) Membership with **balanced representation of operating units from both SWD and NGO sector** to encourage balanced views and minimize conflicts of interest, if any.
- b) Actualization of **genuine partnership between SWD and NGO sector** in the discussion and decision making process even though SWD is carrying the funding role in IFSC service. Adoption of co-chairmanship and other measures to facilitate true partnership is encouraged.
- c) **Rested with suitable level of decision making or veto power** instead of being accorded with pure advisory roles.
- d) Ability in **priority setting to address priority concerns** like defining priority services of IFSC, handling of alternative housing assistance cases, resource reshuffling or injection to deserved communities, review mechanism on service demands and resources implication, etc.

Handling of Increasing Volume of Alternative Housing Assistance Cases

As reflected in the Review Report, we share **grave concern about the serious drainage of IFSC professional manpower by handling the ever-growing number of alternative housing assistance cases/enquires**, which may account up to 20% or 30% of the caseload of most IFSCs. It can hardly be arguable that these housing cases warrant priority attention of IFSCs when comparing to other pressing family problems like mental disorders, marital discord, child care cases, parental divorce, emotional stress, and so on. Taking reference to the practice of Housing Authority in their enforcement of housing policies, we strongly recommended that **Housing Department should directly handle all cases with presenting problems related to public housing tenancy, location preference cases with pure medical reasons, retrieval of PHU tenancy and associated administrative issues** through their enhanced assessment, resource allocation and policy enforcement mechanism. In fact IFSC social workers are well-prepared to take up cases with family and relevant social needs referred from Housing Department when the said housing requests have been properly managed.

Besides, from a management point of view, we opine that the **existing practice of requiring frontline social workers of all 61 IFSCs to handle these alternative housing assistance cases involving multiple and complicated housing policies and guidelines is highly**

inefficient. The need for endorsement from SWD IFSCs on housing requests made by NGO IFSCs adds extra cumbersomeness to existing practice. We recommend **a specialized pool of staff, be they social workers or specially-trained housing staff under the authorizing agency, to take care of these cases for the sake of efficiency, effectiveness and consistency in the handling process** to ensure fairness in the allocation of scarce housing resources to our needy families.

Resource Review, Reshuffling and Allocation Mechanism

We totally agree to the Review observation that effective realization of the IFSC service mode has to depend on how balanced an IFSC can pay attention among preventive, supportive and remedial services, and this is often affected by the absolute increase in the number and urgency of cases and complexity of families under challenge, especially in communities stricken by poverty. Shamshuipo, Yuen Long and Kwun Tong were cited to be districts of high incidents of poverty, with Shamshuipo having the highest number of new/ reactivated cases per social workers. We call for **prompt resource injection to these concerned IFSCs with persistent high caseload, which has far exceeded the FSA requirements in past few years.** This additional resource is to ensure adequate services to these deserved communities and to relieve undue stress of concerned staff.

We echo the Recommendation 19 about the need for review, and where necessary, the enhancement of manpower provision of IFSCs, in particular at the supervisory, frontline and support staff levels, in order to handle growing service demands. To be forward looking, there **should devise a credible, responsive and evidence-based manpower review mechanism that is able to track the changes in service demands at regular intervals and to govern resources allocation and reshuffling.** The review mechanism should **take into account of significant parameters including population size, population mix, geographical size, and socio-economic status, relevant social indicators proven to have correlation to service demands and the like.** It is believed that a good track of the objective data will greatly facilitate forward planning in family service in Hong Kong in the long run.

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