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Subcommittee on Residential and Community Care Services for Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly under the Panel on Welfare Services

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 28 June 2010

Provision of community care services for the elderly

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") and its Subcommittee on Elderly Services on the provision of community care services for the elderly.

Background

2. According to the Administration, the primary objective of the Government's elderly care policy is to help elders age in place. To this end, the Government provides a range of subsidised supporting services, including centre-based day care services provided by the 59 Day Care Centres/Units for the Elderly and home-based services provided by 85 service teams. They cover personal care, nursing care, rehabilitation exercises, meal delivery and escort services, etc. Users include both elders who wish to stay in the community and those who are on the waiting list for subsidised residential care places.

Deliberations by members

Community care and support services

3. Members were advised that to facilitate elders to age in the community, a wide range of services were provided to meet the multifarious needs of elders and enhance the support for carers. These included the following –

- (a) home-based services were provided through the 60 Integrated Home Care Service Teams operated by subvented non-governmental organisations ("NGOs"). Elders were provided with meal delivery, household cleaning and escort services. Elders who used the services did not have to go through the Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services ("SCNAMES");
- (b) home-based community care services were provided for elders with long-term care needs including personal care, nursing care, physiotherapy, meal delivery, household cleaning and escort;
- (c) centre-based day care services were provided by subsidised day care centres/units for elders who had long-term care needs; and
- (d) elders ageing at home and required care during the temporary absence of their carers (e.g. carers taking a break) might receive respite care at subvented residential care places (for those staying overnight) or at day care centres/units (for those not staying overnight).

4. Members were further advised that a number of new initiatives had been introduced to support elders ageing in the community. The launch of the District-based Scheme on Carer Training in October 2007 aimed to enhance carers' capability through training so as to alleviate their stress resulting from caring for the elders. This apart, the Government had earmarked \$96 million in the 2007-2008 Budget for implementing a three-year Integrated Discharge Support Trial Programme for the Elderly Patients with the collaboration of the Hospital Authority, with the aim of enhancing the support to elderly hospital discharges and their carers so as to help them stay in the community. In the 2008-2009 Policy Address, the Government had earmarked an one-off funding of \$200 million for launching a five-year Home Environment Improvement Scheme for the Elderly to help elders without family support, living in dilapidated homes and lacking financial means to improve their home conditions.

5. While members welcomed the initiatives implemented by the Administration to facilitate elders to age in the community, members considered that the number of elders using the service was on the low side as compared with the size of the elderly population. Some members also expressed concern about the service quality, especially the meal delivery services. These members considered that the Administration should allocate more resources to further enhance the community care and support services and to monitor the quality of these services.

6. Members took the view that the provision of community care and support services for the elderly was by no means a substitute for the provision of residential care places for elders with long-term care needs as the older population would require some form of long-term care services eventually. The demand for residential care places would increase as a result of the ageing population.

Members remained of the view that it was the Government's responsibility to formulate a long-term planning for the provision of residential care services for the elderly, to shorten the waiting time for subsidised residential care places, and to speed up the provision of adequate places to meet the huge demand.

7. In the light of the waitlisting situation, members had time and again expressed concern about the pressure faced by family carers in taking care of severely impaired elders, and urged the Administration to provide family carers with an allowance to relieve their financial burden. The Administration advised that the various types of support services provided by the Government to family carers were aimed at helping them discharge their family responsibilities and alleviating their stress, rather than substituting family functions. As severely impaired elders required various kinds of care services which would better be met by care professionals of residential and community care services, the Administration was of the view that the existing support services could better address the needs of family carers.

8. At the meetings on 11 January and 6 February 2010 when members were briefed on the Consultancy Study initiated by the Elderly Commission ("EC"), the Administration advised that it would work with EC to examine how home care services for the elderly could be strengthened through a more flexible and diverse mode of service delivery, thereby encouraging social enterprises and the private market to develop related services.

Pilot scheme on home care services for frail elders

9. At the meeting on 8 March 2010, the Panel noted that about 29% of elders on the waiting list for subsidised nursing homes ("NH") places were staying at home. Among them, about 36% were using community care services subsidised by the Government. Considering that the majority of elders waiting for NH places were severely impaired, the Administration advised that, as announced in the 2010-2011 Budget, a one-off funding of \$55 million would be sought under the Lotteries Fund for implementing a three-year pilot scheme on home care services for frail elders waiting for subsidised NH places. The new services would be tried out in six regions namely Wong Tai Sin, Sai Kung, Kwun Tong, Yau Tsim Mong, Kowloon City and Sham Shui Po districts, where relatively large number of elders were waiting for NH places. The three-year pilot scheme was expected to commence in 2010-2011 and serve a total of 550 elders.

10. While welcoming the pilot scheme, some members cautioned that the pilot home care services could not cater for the specific needs of elders according to their different kinds of caring needs nor relieve the burden and pressure faced by the family carers in taking care of those elders who required very intensive care at home. Members took a strong view that the pilot home care services should not be regarded as a substitute for the provision of additional residential care places.

11. The Administration advised members that the impairment level and care needs of elders who were on the waiting list for subsidised residential care services were assessed under SCNAMES. Under the pilot scheme, personalised home care services with greater emphasis on the rehabilitation and nursing care elements would be provided to frail elders. The services would be delivered through NGOs or social enterprises with experience in elderly care and established service networks in the districts concerned, and would be subsidised by the Government according to a fee-charging scale to be set by the Social Welfare Department ("SWD"). Members were further advised that elders who joined the pilot scheme would remain on the waiting list for subsidised residential care services. As undertaken in the Chief Executive's 2009-2010 Policy Address, the Government would provide some 1 000 subsidised residential care places for the elderly, including about 800 NH places, in the 2010-2011 Budget. In addition, some 1 000 residential care places for the elderly would be provided upon completion of the 12 development projects for the construction of new contract residential care homes for the elderly.

12. Some members were concerned about the long-term commitment of the Government in providing the enhanced home care services given that one-off funding was provided for the services. The Administration advised that there would be an interim review to be followed by a final review upon the completion of the pilot scheme. Should the review findings of the pilot scheme be encouraging, the Administration would consider financing the projects under the recurrent funding and extending the scheme to other districts after the three-year pilot period. The Administration further advised that in order to allow potential service operators to make suggestions on the service content and delivery mode for the pilot scheme, SWD would invite service proposals through a non-committal Expression of Interest exercise. In the light of the proposals received, SWD would finalise the detailed service specifications and invite qualified operators to submit formal service proposals. The Administration would revert to the Panel on the service content and delivery mode for the pilot scheme.

Relevant papers

13. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk/> to view the Administration's papers for and the relevant minutes of meetings of the Subcommittee on Elderly Services on 6 May 2008, and the Panel on 11 January, 9 February and 8 March 2010.