

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**Review on the Implementation of
the Integrated Family Service Centre Service Mode:
Progress of Follow-up Action**

Purpose

This paper reports on the progress of follow-up action taken by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to take forward the recommendations of the report on the Review on the Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre Service Mode.

Background

2. As commissioned by SWD, the University of Hong Kong (HKU) conducted a consultancy study on the “Review of Family Services in Hong Kong” in August 2000 which recommended, among others, 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. Upon re-engineering of the then family service resources, a total of 61 IFSCs (40 operated by SWD and 21 by non-governmental organisations (NGOs)) serving the whole territory have been formed in phases in 2004-05.

3. In October 2008, SWD commissioned HKU (the Consultant Team) through open tender to conduct a review and consider whether, and if so, what improvements should be made to refine the service mode. Upon completion of the review, a report entitled “Building Effective Family Services: Review on the Implementation of the IFSC Service Mode” (the Review Report) was released in May 2010. In the Review Report, the Consultant Team concluded that the IFSC service mode is the appropriate service mode for publicly-funded family services in Hong Kong. It is able to address the needs of specific target groups such as single parents, new arrivals, ethnic minorities and deprived families, etc.

and should continue to be adopted.

4. To further improve the implementation of the IFSC service mode, the Consultant Team made a total of 26 recommendations as set out at **Annex**. The Consultant Team further grouped the 26 recommendations under eight major areas in the Review Report, namely –

- (a) the IFSC service mode;
- (b) provisions for IFSC service;
- (c) operations of IFSC service;
- (d) collaboration and interfacing of IFSCs with other government departments, service units and stakeholders;
- (e) management of IFSCs;
- (f) human resource management / development of IFSCs;
- (g) Funding and Service Agreement (FSA) for IFSCs; and
- (h) continuous monitoring and improvement of IFSC service.

5. The Administration agrees with the conclusions of the Consultant Team and accepts in principle all the 26 recommendations. IFSC operators, supervisors and frontline staff generally agree with the findings and welcome the recommendations. At the meeting of this Panel held on 14 June 2010, Members were briefed on the findings and recommendations of the review. Subsequently, a special meeting was held on 26 June 2010 at which views of Members and concerned deputations on the review were heard. The Administration agreed to inform Members about the progress of the follow-up action.

Progress of Follow-up Action on the Recommendations

6. Upon release of the Review Report, SWD has proactively taken forward the 26 recommendations. For recommendations which require collaboration with stakeholders and/or involve cross-departmental / cross-sectoral issues, SWD has set up various working groups or liaison groups comprising management, supervisors and

frontline staff of IFSCs as well as relevant government departments and other stakeholders to carry out necessary follow-up action. The implementation measures in each area are highlighted in the ensuing paragraphs.

(a) *The IFSC service mode (Recommendations 1 – 2)*

7. While considering that the IFSC service mode should continue to be adopted for publicly-funded family services in Hong Kong, the Review Report recommended that the Administration should continue to ensure adequate provision of resources to IFSCs.

8. SWD has been monitoring the manpower situation of IFSCs and, where necessary, has strengthened their manpower and supervision through provision of additional resources. Since the adoption of the IFSC service mode in 2004-05, the total number of frontline social workers at IFSCs has increased from 896 in 2004-05 to 1 056 as at December 2011. The number of supervisory staff has also increased from 62 to 93 during the same period.

9. To further enhance the support and services provided for individuals and families in need, and to alleviate the workload of social workers, as announced in the 2011-12 Policy Address, the Administration will set up four new IFSCs in districts with higher service demand, thereby increasing the number of IFSCs from 61 to 65. One of the four new IFSCs will commence operation in December 2011 in Sham Shui Po. The remaining three are expected to go into service in 2012-13. The locations of these IFSCs will be decided having regard to the social indicators and service demand of individual districts such as the number of new cases handled by each IFSC, the projected population growth and population profiles, etc.

(b) *Provisions for IFSC service (Recommendations 3 – 5)*

10. The Review Report recommended that 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”. In this regard, SWD has successfully identified premises which are larger in size and/or more conveniently located for six IFSCs to relocate their centres in 2010-11 and 2011-12. Concerning the service catchment of IFSCs, SWD has, as recommended by the Review Report, adhered to the principle of drawing service boundaries with regard to the relevant social indicators and district service demand when setting up the new IFSC in

Sham Shui Po. SWD will continue to uphold this principle in future.

(c) *Operation of IFSC service (Recommendations 6 – 11)*

11. It was recommended in the Review Report that IFSCs should continue to optimise efficiency in service operation through streamlining their service procedures and better use of information technology, etc. Two working groups, namely, the “Working Group on Review on the Operation of IFSC Services” (the Working Group on Operation) and the “Working Group on Streamlining of Procedures for Handling Director of Social Welfare Incorporated – Specified Person (DSWI – SP) Accounts Cases¹” (the Working Group on DSWI-SP Account), were set up to take forward the recommendations. The Working Group on Operation comprised representatives of the management, supervisors and frontline social workers of IFSCs operated by both SWD and NGOs as well as the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS). It has reviewed and revised the operational guidelines for IFSCs and the assessment forms or tools used in IFSCs with a view to further enhancing their services, and will continue to review the service procedures of IFSCs and explore ways to optimise efficiency, including the practices and procedures of IFSCs in collaborating with other service units. As for the Working Group on DSWI-SP Account, it has completed the review of the existing practices / procedures in handling DSWI-SP account cases and identification of enhanced measures for streamlining the procedures. All the enhanced measures have been put into effect.

12. Concerning the use of information technology, SWD has introduced the Client Information System for use in its IFSCs since June 2010 with a view to improving their service efficiency. For IFSCs operated by NGOs, SWD has been examining the feasibility of enhancing their information technology systems.

¹ Pursuant to section 4 of the Director of Social Welfare Incorporation Ordinance (Cap. 1096), the Director of Social Welfare Incorporated (DSWI) has the power to act as trustee of any trust created for the benefit of persons in the care of SWD. Where it is found that because of age, health or other reasons the person is unlikely to be able to manage his / her money, the money may be held by DSWI on behalf of the person in accordance with the Ordinance. Under these circumstances, a DSWI-SP account has to be opened.

(d) Collaboration and interfacing with other government departments, service units and stakeholders (Recommendations 12 – 16)

13. To address IFSC colleagues' concern over the handling of housing assistance cases, the Review Report recommended that senior managements of SWD and Housing Department (HD) should jointly work together to enhance coordination in the referral system and ensure the proper implementation of the agreed operational procedures in actual operation. A Liaison Group at headquarters level and five Local Liaison Groups at district level were set up to implement this recommendation. The Liaison Groups have already developed mechanisms to enhance collaboration and communication between SWD / NGOs and HD. They have also reviewed and streamlined the work procedures on handling housing assistance cases. The Liaison Groups will continue with their work with a view to further streamlining the work procedures on handling housing assistance cases.

(e) Management of IFSCs (Recommendations 17 – 18)

14. Concerning the management of IFSCs, the Review Report recommended that SWD should take the lead and work with HKCSS, NGOs and other stakeholders to continue to enhance family services in Hong Kong. SWD has, as mentioned in paragraph 6 above, set up various working groups and liaison groups comprising representatives of HKCSS, management, supervisors and frontline staff of IFSCs operated by both SWD and NGOs, relevant government departments and other stakeholders to follow up the recommendations made in the Review Report. SWD has also set up the Committee on IFSCs with members from SWD, NGOs and HKCSS as a standing establishment to identify and prioritise common issues of concern of IFSCs, etc. More details about the Committee on IFSCs are provided in paragraph 17 below.

(f) Human resource management / development of IFSCs (Recommendations 19 – 21)

15. In addition to providing additional manpower support and setting up new IFSCs as mentioned in paragraphs 8 - 9 above, SWD has also sought to strengthen the human resources of IFSCs through tailor-made training programmes for IFSC staff, most of which are open to staff of both SWD and NGO IFSCs. Regular programmes include induction training for staff newly recruited or posted to IFSCs. Other training programmes include those enhancing the knowledge and skills of IFSC

staff in working with specific target groups such as cross-boundary families, ethnic minorities, single parent families and new arrivals. There are other topical training courses on issues like working with clienteles facing different kinds of addictions such as gambling, alcoholic, etc. as well as those on clinical skills, e.g. bereavement counselling and marital therapy. SWD will continue to identify and organise suitable training programmes to develop the staff of IFSCs.

(g) *Funding and Service Agreement (FSA) (Recommendations 22 – 24)*

16. While recognising that FSA is a “reasonable device to ensure the basic performance of each IFSC”, the Review Report concluded that certain adjustments to FSA might be needed. The “Working Group on Review on the FSA for IFSC” (Working Group on FSA) comprising representatives of management, supervisors and frontline social workers of IFSCs operated by both SWD and NGOs as well as HKCSS was set up to review and propose revisions to FSA for IFSC. Having thoroughly examined FSA, the Working Group on FSA has revised the service definitions and output standards for better recognising the professional input of IFSC staff. In addition, to provide more flexibility for IFSCs to better respond to the changing community needs while meeting the agreed level of output standards set out in FSA, the mechanism for assessing the service outputs has been adjusted. The revised FSA has come into effect in 2011-12.

(h) *Continuous monitoring and improvement of IFSC service (Recommendations 25 – 26)*

17. As recommended by the Review Report, the Committee on IFSCs was formed to replace the then Task Group on Implementation of IFSCs². The Committee on IFSCs was empowered with a properly devised Terms of Reference to give it the mandate to identify and prioritise common issues of concern about IFSCs and monitor the progress of the follow-up action on the recommendations of the Review Report. It comprised representatives of the management of SWD, all NGOs operating IFSCs and integrated service centres (ISCs), and

² The Task Group on Implementation of IFSCs was set up in 2004 to deliberate on operational issues and common areas of concern arising from the implementation of the IFSC service mode. It was composed of members from SWD, NGOs operating IFSCs and ISCs as well as HKCSS. The Review Report concluded that it was a useful platform to iron out operational issues in IFSC services. It should be continued and provided with a properly devised terms of reference.

HKCSS.

Dissemination of Information about the Progress in Following Up the Recommendations of the Review

18. To facilitate stakeholders in keeping track of the progress of the follow-up action on the recommendations of the review and the work of the Committee, SWD has set up a webpage in the Departmental Homepage. Minutes of meetings of the Committee and other relevant information relating to the review are regularly uploaded onto the webpage. The address of the webpage is provided as follows –

http://www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_family/sub_listofserv/id_ifscsm/

Way Forward

19. SWD will continue to follow up the recommendations of the Review Report in collaboration with stakeholders and further improve the implementation of the IFSC service mode on a continuous basis.

Advice Sought

20. Members are invited to note the follow-up action taken / to be taken by SWD on the recommendations of the Review Report.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
December 2011**

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

(i) 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.

(ii) 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.

(iii) Operations of IFSC service

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.

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.

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.

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.

(iv) Collaboration and interfacing of IFSCs with other government departments, service units and stakeholders

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 effort made by District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) in this aspect is 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.

(v) *Management of IFSCs*

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.

(vi) *Human resource management / development of IFSCs*

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.

(vii) *Funding and Service Agreement (FSA) for IFSCs*

Recommendation 22

FSA should be reviewed and revised.

Recommendation 23

Output Standards (OSs) 2, 3 and 4 of 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.

(viii) Continuous monitoring and improvement of IFSC service.

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.