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**Panel on Welfare Services**

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the meeting on 14 January 2013**

**Services to support families at-risk**

**Purpose**

This paper gives a brief account of past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") and its Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Family Violence ("the Subcommittee") on the provision of services to support families at-risk and tackle domestic violence.

**Background**

2. Under the guiding principle of family as the vital component of the society, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") has developed a network of services to cater for family needs, including crisis intervention and support services for individuals/families facing domestic violence or in crisis and measures to prevent abusers from repeating abusive acts.

3. According to the Administration, it has adopted a three-pronged approach to combat domestic violence and strengthen support for families as follows -

- (a) specialized services and crisis intervention (such as Family and Child Protective Services Units ("FCPSUs"), Family Crisis Support Centre and refuge centres);
- (b) supportive services (such as family services, housing assistance, financial assistance and child care services); and
- (c) preventive measures (such as publicity and community education, and enhancing social capital).

## **Members' deliberations**

### Support measures for high-risk families

4. The Panel held two meetings in October 2007 and January 2008 respectively to discuss the provision of support services for high-risk families in Tin Shui Wai ("TSW") arising from a family tragedy occurred in October 2007, which had sparked off wide public concern. Members generally considered that tackling family problems at source required holistic and integrated social and economic policies. A motion urging the Administration to strengthen the support services for TSW was passed at the meeting on 30 October 2007.

5. According to the Administration, a series of district-based crisis intervention services and community building initiatives had been implemented since 2004 to follow through the recommendations made in the "Report of Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai" to improve family services in the district. These recommendations were put forward by a three-member Review Panel which was appointed by the Government following the occurrence of the TSW domestic violence case in April 2004.

6. The Administration stressed that it was always concerned with the well-being of TSW residents, and had introduced a number of measures to strengthen support for TSW. These included creating more local job opportunities in the area by further developing and promoting more tourist attractions and encouraging more companies to set up business in the area; enhancing employment services and vocational training/retraining for TSW residents, and organizing more large-scale job fairs in the district; advancing the timing of the review of the Transport Support Scheme; promoting mutual help and support; and strengthening neighbourhood network in the community.

7. Members urged the Administration to adopt measures to facilitate early intervention of high-risk cases through outreach services and hotline support, as well as adopt a holistic approach spanning different policy areas from employment, housing to town planning to tackle family problems expeditiously. The Administration advised that to strengthen the services for high-risk families, a district inter-departmental co-ordination and community building approach had been adopted. In addition, a holistic approach had been adopted to prevent family problems caused by unemployment and poverty through the provision of assistance to help unemployed Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients to become self-reliant.

8. Members also noted that to meet the changing needs of families at large, SWD had strengthened social work manpower in FCPSUs and Integrated Family Service Centres ("IFSCs"). The number of FCPSUs had been increased from five units in 2004-2005 to 11 in 2007 across the territory and there were a total of 62 IFSCs run by SWD and non-governmental organizations as at July 2012. Three additional IFSCs would be set up in 2012-2013, bringing the total number to 65. Additional resources had also been allocated to enhance shelter services for women, childcare services, and clinical psychological services for victims and families in need, as well as to strengthen multi-disciplinary collaboration and co-ordination. Specifically, a new family support and crisis intervention centre was set up in March 2007 to provide round-the-clock service to individuals and families affected by domestic violence, hotline services manned by social workers and short-term accommodation for those in need. On case management, social workers had already adopted the principle of "one family one worker" to serve the whole family in need. If more than one social worker was involved in the case, one of them would take up the role as the key worker who would be responsible for liaising with all other social workers concerned and co-ordinating the services provided.

#### Tackling domestic violence

9. The Panel had been following up closely on the Administration's strategy and measures to prevent and tackle domestic violence. The Subcommittee was appointed by the Panel in the Third Legislative Council to study the subject matter.

#### *Implementation of Batterer Intervention Programme*

10. Members of the Subcommittee urged the early introduction of court-ordered Batterer Intervention Programme ("BIP"), as the arrangements of putting batterers on probation order to join the counselling programme under the arrangement of the probation officers were far from effective, as evidenced by only a handful of such probation orders made by the court in a year. The Panel was advised that upon completion of the two-year pilot project on BIP in March 2008, SWD would continue to implement BIP for suitable abusers mainly involved in spouse battering as a component of their counselling service. To cater for the needs of different types of batterers, suitable treatment models would further be developed. In 2010-2011, SWD had started providing BIP for women on a pilot basis.

11. Members of the Panel also noted that SWD had separately launched an anti-violence programme ("AVP") in August 2008 as provided for under the

Domestic Violence (Amendment) Ordinance<sup>1</sup>. Specifically, the court might, in granting a non-molestation order, require the abuser to attend a programme approved by the Director of Social Welfare that sought to change the abusers' attitude and behaviour. With the enactment of the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance (Cap. 189), AVP had been extended to same-sex cohabitants involved in violence cases since January 2010.

*Implementation of the Victim Support Programme for Victims of Family Violence ("VSP")*

12. Members of the Panel were advised that VSP, which was run by a non-governmental organization with funding provided by SWD, was launched in June 2010 to enhance support services to victims of domestic violence including those undergoing the judicial process. Services provided by VSP included legal aid service, accommodation, treatment and childcare support for the victims. It was expected that through close collaboration with case workers, the victims would be empowered and supported to resume normal life and functioning. As at October 2011, VSP had provided support services for about 600 victims of domestic violence.

Setting up of the standing Child Fatality Review Panel

13. The Subcommittee had examined the feasibility of setting up a mechanism for convening an independent review committee to examine fatal and serious injury cases to identify ways to prevent recurrence of similar tragedies, as recommended by the three-member Review Panel on the TSW family tragedy in 2004. Members of the Subcommittee noted the Administration's proposal of launching a two-year pilot project to examine cases of children aged below 18 who died of non-natural causes in 2006 and 2007. Members considered that the Review Panel should have statutory backing and its scope of work should be expanded in the long run to cover all domestic violence cases which had caused deaths or serious injuries. The Administration advised that subject to the experience gained and outcome of the evaluation of the child fatality review mechanism after the two-year pilot period, it would not rule out the possibility of making it a statutory mechanism and expanding its scope of work in the long run to cover all domestic violence cases which had caused deaths or serious injuries. SWD launched, in February 2008, the pilot project to review cases of children who died of natural or non-natural causes.

14. At its meeting on 14 February 2011, the Panel was briefed on the review findings of the two-year pilot scheme. According to the Administration,

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<sup>1</sup> Following the passage of the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Bill 2009, the amended Domestic Violence Ordinance had been renamed as the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance.

the pilot project had met its objectives and was effective in facilitating inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary exchange and collaboration in the prevention of avoidable child deaths. In view of the successful experience and positive feedback received, SWD accepted the recommendation of the review panel of the pilot project and set up a standing Child Fatality Review Panel in June 2011 to continue to review child death cases.

#### Promoting family harmony

15. During the discussions of the measures in place to support families at-risk at the Panel meeting on 10 July 2012, some members were of the view that newly arrived families in face of family problems were families at risk. The Administration should step up preventive measures and public education to promote family harmony.

16. The Administration advised that the territory-wide IFSCs provided needy individuals and families, including newly arrived families, with a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial services. These services aimed to assist newly arrived families to adjust to Hong Kong and deal with problems such as child care and mental health problems. Child care services under the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project had since October 2011 been regularized and extended to all 18 districts to provide needy families with flexible and enhanced child care services during late evenings, weekends and public holidays. The Administration would continue to organize territory-wide and district-based publicity and public education programmes to arouse public awareness on the importance of family solidarity and encourage those in need to seek early assistance.

#### Support for single-parent families and early intervention

17. Members expressed concern about the support services in place for single-parent families, especially on counseling services and early intervention measures to prevent family tragedies.

18. According to the Administration, services for single-parent families had been enhanced through collaboration with schools and voluntary organizations in the district. Through the network of IFSCs, various services, including counselling services and housing assistance, had been provided to single-parent families in need. Support groups were formed in the district to provide these families with mutual support from peers. As at end-March 2012, 5 000 cases handled by IFSCs were relating to single-parent families, and more services to single-parent families would be provided in high-risk districts.

19. As regards early intervention, the Administration advised that under the Comprehensive Child Development Service ("CCDS"), the Labour and Welfare Bureau, Education Bureau, SWD, Department of Health and Hospital Authority had collaborated to identify and meet, at an early stage, various health and social needs of children (aged 0 to five) and their families so as to foster healthy development of children. By the end of 2011, CCDS had covered around half of the target clientele. The service would be fully extended to all 18 districts in phases within 2012-2013. Through group activities and case work of IFSCs, social workers would follow up on potential at-risk families and provide assistance as appropriate.

20. Some Panel members were concerned about the effectiveness of early identification of at-risk families. In their view, social workers should station at pre-primary institutions as well as Maternal and Child Health Centres ("MCHCs") for the purpose of CCDS to provide early intervention and timely support for at-risk families.

21. The Administration explained that IFSCs had been providing services to individual and families according to their assessed needs in a well-defined geographical service boundary throughout 11 SWD administrative districts. IFSCs would follow up with needy families upon receiving referrals from pre-primary institutions. Under CCDS, social workers would provide proactive out-reach service and visit persons in need at MCHCs to assist at-risk pregnant women, mothers with postnatal depression, and families with psychosocial needs and children with developmental and behavioural problems. CCDS also made use of other service units, such as IFSCs and pre-primary institutions, to identify needy children and families, and who would be referred to the appropriate health and/or social services for follow-up. With a view to facilitating early identification and referral of cases, the Administration would maintain close collaboration and enhance the interface among government departments, welfare service units, schools, etc.

### **Relevant papers**

22. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

## Appendix

### Relevant papers on services to support families at-risk

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Panel on Welfare Services	8 November 2004 (Item VI)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	8 January 2007 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	30 October 2007 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	14 January 2008 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a> <a href="#">CB(2)1039/07-08(01)</a> <a href="#">CB(2)1184/07-08(01)</a>
Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Family Violence	-	<a href="#">Report</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	22 October 2009 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	12 July 2010 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a> <a href="#">IN05/10-11</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	20 October 2010 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	14 February 2011 (Item VI)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	21 October 2011 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Panel on Welfare Services	10 July 2012 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>

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