

立法會 *Legislative Council*

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Panel on Welfare Services

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 19 February 2013

Long-term social welfare planning

Purpose

This paper summarizes the deliberations of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") on issues relating to social welfare planning.

Background

2. Following the discussions on the broad strategic direction of the welfare development in the context of the Strategic Framework for the Social Welfare conducted in 2004, the Administration adopted the following broad approaches in planning for future welfare services and programmes –

- (a) *social investment* : it would invest in strategies that focused on building the capacity of individuals, families and the communities so as to help the disadvantaged groups to be self-reliant as far as possible; and
- (b) *tripartite partnerships* : it would encourage various forms of partnerships among the Government, the third sector (i.e. groups which are non-government and non-business) and the business community to work together to solve social problems and build a harmonious society.

3. In 2005-2006, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") introduced the annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector on the priorities in the coming years, and the District Welfare Planning Protocol to set out a

standardized planning framework and workflow on how to assess and prioritise district welfare needs and formulate strategies in the districts to meet such needs.

4. As undertaken in the 2007-2008 Policy Agenda, the Administration commissioned the Social Welfare Advisory Committee ("SWAC") to study the long-term social welfare development plan for Hong Kong.

5. After consultation with the welfare sector, stakeholders and the public, as well as consideration of the views collected, SWAC released in July 2011 its Report on Long-term Social Welfare Planning in Hong Kong ("SWAC Report"). In the Report, SWAC suggested several guiding principles which would provide a directional basis for social welfare planning and future welfare service development in Hong Kong. SWAC also recommended the formulation of a series of strategic directions having regard to the prevailing social circumstances and development, so as to establish a framework for the overall long-term social welfare planning in Hong Kong. By improving the existing planning arrangements, the enhanced mechanism proposed by SWAC sought to ensure consultation and planning for the future development and delivery of services. The mechanism aimed to collect views at three levels (namely, district, central and advisory committees). The SWAC's recommendations were accepted by the Administration in 2012.

6. In his 2013 Policy Address, the Chief Executive said that to meet the current and future needs of welfare services, the Government would adopt a multi-pronged approach to identify suitable sites and facilitate provision of necessary manpower resources in a pragmatic and flexible manner.

Deliberations by the Panel

Social welfare planning mechanism

7. At the Panel meeting on 8 May 2006, members were advised that under the broad direction set out in paragraph 2 above, the Administration introduced in 2005 the annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector under which it would discuss with the sector and members of the welfare-related advisory committees the priorities of the coming years. The first consultation session was held in June 2005 to gather the views of the sector on their proposed priorities for 2006-2007 and beyond. The second one was held in September 2005 for the Administration to debrief the sector on the new initiatives likely to be announced in the Policy

Address in October 2005. According to the Administration, the new annual consultation mechanism was useful in exchanging views and setting the priorities to tie in with the Government's policy and resource planning cycle. The views gathered had been reflected in the Policy Address where appropriate. It would continue with the mechanism in 2006.

8. The deputations attending the meeting expressed that while the Administration had engaged the welfare sector in the discussions on the Strategic Framework for the Social Welfare in 2004, it failed to put in place an integrated and forward-looking planning framework comprising long-term strategic directions, medium-term plans for individual programme areas and service development and delivery of annual plans by SWD and non-governmental organizations ("NGOs"), as undertaken by the Administration when it introduced the Lump Sum Grant subvention system in 2000. More importantly, the Administration had yet to come up with a blueprint in guiding the long-term development of social welfare services in Hong Kong.

9. According to the Administration, it had adopted a flexible planning approach comprising mainly an annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector and the District Welfare Planning Protocol. The new arrangement allowed the Administration and NGOs to be responsive to the latest requests and changing circumstances. While discussions were primarily focused on the immediate priorities for the coming year, there were also exchanges with the sector on the longer-term development. The mechanism could be regarded as an annual rollover exercise to plan for the coming years.

10. Noting that the Administration had abandoned the previous planning mechanism in the form of a five-year plan, members were of the view that the Administration should work out a long-term plan to guide the long-term development of welfare services, instead of merely responding to changing circumstances in a piecemeal manner. Some members suggested that the Administration should reinstate the five-year plan, or the practice of preparing a 10-year White Paper on social welfare policies.

11. The Administration responded that it had adopted different planning mechanisms for different service areas, having regard to the individual needs and situation of each service area. Apart from frequent exchanges with the relevant NGOs, it would also engage in regular dialogues with the relevant advisory bodies, such as the Elderly Commission for services to the elderly and the Commission on Youth in respect of youth services, to map out the long-term plan for each service area.

12. At the request of the Panel, the Administration reported to the Panel on 10 July 2006 on the outcome of the annual consultation session for 2006. Members reiterated their view that the Administration should map out a long-term plan for social welfare services.

13. In the view of the Administration, welfare planning was a long and complex process involving many parties. The Administration had introduced new philosophy and strategies, such as cross-sectoral collaboration and community involvement to tackle the increasingly complex social issues. Social welfare planning in the form of service projection in detailed figures was no longer suitable to the present situation of Hong Kong. Where justified, a longer-term plan would still be developed for a specific service area, whereas for other areas, the Administration would adopt a more flexible planning approach. The consultation approach in the form of Green Paper and White Paper would be considered if the policy issue was of great significance to the society as a whole. The Administration stressed that the annual consultation sessions were just part of the process and were not the only occasion to solicit views from the welfare sector. It would continue to use other channels to collect views from the sector.

Study on long-term social welfare planning by SWAC

14. Commissioned by the Administration to conduct a study on long-term social welfare planning in Hong Kong, SWAC released a consultation paper on 14 April 2010 to seek views from the social welfare sector and relevant stakeholders. The Panel held two special meetings on 5 and 26 June 2010 to receive views from 58 deputations on the subject; the meetings were also attended by members of SWAC.

15. According to SWAC, the consultation paper examined the subject of long-term welfare planning at a macro level. It set out the guiding principles for social welfare planning and the strategic directions for providing welfare services to address welfare-related issues at a macro level, instead of focusing on service provision in individual areas. SWAC hoped that the consultation document would help align objectives for developing more concrete proposals on service provision in specific areas. SWAC would analyse the views received during the consultation with a view to formulating its views and recommendations on welfare planning for consideration by the Administration.

16. Concerns were raised by members and some deputations attending the meetings that despite the numerous requests from the welfare sector for a blueprint on the long-term development of social welfare services in Hong Kong, the Administration was responding to changing circumstances in a piecemeal manner by adopting an annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector. Some members took the view that the long-term social welfare planning exercise should be led by the Government rather than SWAC.

17. Members noted the Administration's advice that SWAC was tasked by the Chief Executive to study the long-term development for social welfare in Hong Kong; the consultation exercise was part of SWAC's study on long-term welfare planning; and the study was in progress. The Administration had an open mind on the subject. The proposals presented in the consultation paper did not represent the stance or final decision of the Administration. SWAC would take into account the views collected and put forward a report setting out its recommendations for consideration by the Administration.

Need for a blueprint with concrete targets in service delivery

18. Upon release of the SWAC Report in July 2011, the Panel discussed and received views from deputations on the Report's key findings and recommendations at its meetings on 11 July and 22 August 2011. According to SWAC, in preparing the Report, SWAC had conducted an environmental scan on the changes in the population, economy, social structure, and the development of information and communication technologies in Hong Kong since 2000 and had given an account of the current situation and development trends of social welfare in Hong Kong. SWAC had also made a series of recommendations to the Administration on the mission, fundamental values, guiding principles, strategic directions and planning mechanism of social welfare as set out in the Report.

19. While raising no objection to the recommendations to formulate guiding principles and strategic directions for social welfare planning as set out in the SWAC Report, members generally considered that SWAC should have recommended the formulation of concrete targets for future welfare services development and evaluation of the performance of individual service areas. More importantly, it was the Government's responsibility to make a blueprint for the long-term development of social welfare, set objective targets and timetable for meeting the specific service needs. For instance, the Administration should, in the light of the ageing population,

set out clearly the target number of additional subsidized residential care places for the elderly to be provided in subsequent years.

20. In the view of SWAC, it fully understood that some stakeholders expected the study to cover the development and planning of individual welfare service areas. However, SWAC considered that its study on long-term social welfare planning should look into the subject from a macro perspective and aim to formulate a blueprint for the future welfare system, instead of scrutinizing details of individual service areas and resource allocation. SWAC hoped that its study would facilitate the sustainable development of the social welfare policies and services in the long term. The Administration stressed that it played three major roles in social welfare, namely principal resource provider, policy maker and policy executor; and SWAC had recognized these roles in its Report.

21. Members noted with concern that most deputations attending the meetings expressed reservations about the SWAC's recommendation, under which the principle of cost-sharing by the financially capable for welfare services should be introduced. The Administration pointed out that some stakeholders had confused the user-pay principle and the principle of cost-sharing by the financially capable. According to the Administration, SWAC was of the view that those who were financially capable could choose to pay for specific welfare services, so as to optimize the effective use of limited public resources in helping people who were most in need.

Planning mechanism

22. On the planning mechanism, both members and deputations expressed reservations about the SWAC's proposal of putting in place a planning mechanism which dovetailed with the delivery of the Policy Address by the Chief Executive in October each year. They considered that instead of reviewing the social welfare initiatives and services on an annual basis, the Administration should reinstate the five-year plan mechanism for better and longer-term planning of the social welfare services and manpower projection.

23. At the Panel meeting on 11 June 2012, the Panel was advised that the Administration accepted the recommendations as set out in SWAC's Report and had implemented the proposed enhanced planning mechanism to facilitate full and interactive participation of the welfare sector and other stakeholders in the delivery of welfare services. As regards the concerns about the planning mechanism, the Administration advised that –

- (a) the welfare services and initiatives over the years were not short-term in nature or to be implemented for one year only; but for long-term implementation on an ongoing basis that usually involved recurrent provision of resources;
- (b) under such enhanced mechanism, the Administration would consult the stakeholders and plan for the future focus and priorities of welfare services in response to the latest social circumstances on an ongoing and regular (i.e. annual) basis. New and enhanced initiatives had been rolled out to address the changing welfare needs of the community flexibly;
- (c) the "Five-Year Plan" mechanism for planning social welfare services adopted by the Government before 1999 lacked flexibility in terms of target-setting for, and monitoring of, service provision in responding to the rapid changing socio-economic circumstances; and
- (d) the Government had all along been investing heavily in the development and provision of social welfare services, with sustained growth in expenditure.

Latest development

24. In the current Legislative Council ("LegCo"), members took the view that upon the commencement of the term of the current Government, the Administration should plan its welfare policies and services in a broader framework as well as conduct medium and long-term planning. When the Panel was briefed on the Chief Executive's 2013 Policy Address at its meeting on 21 January 2013, members were concerned that the Administration did not have holistic planning on welfare services which included elderly services, rehabilitation services, as well as planning of sites and manpower for provision of these services. They urged the Administration to reinstate the five-year plan mechanism for full-scale and comprehensive social welfare planning, instead of rolling out short-term, piecemeal and remedial measures. The Administration was requested to brief members on its medium and long-term social welfare planning at the Panel meeting on 19 February 2013.

Relevant papers

25. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Appendix

Relevant papers on long-term social welfare planning

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	8 May 2006 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	10 July 2006 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	23 October 2008 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	22 October 2009 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	5 June 2010 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	26 June 2010 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	14 March 2011 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	13 June 2011 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	11 July 2011 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	22 August 2011 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	11 June 2012 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	21 January 2013 (Item I)	Agenda

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