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**Panel on Welfare Services**

**Background brief prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the meeting on 11 March 2013**

**Manpower of non-professional front-line care staff engaging in subvented  
homes and community care services for the elderly**

**Purpose**

This paper summarizes the discussions at the Council and its committees on issues relating to the manpower of non-professional front-line care staff engaging in subvented residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs") and community care services for the elderly ("CCS").

**Overview of subvented RCHEs and CCS**

2. According to the Administration, as at end-December 2012, there were 127 subvented RCHEs in the territory. Together with contract RCHEs, private RCHEs participating in the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme and self-financing nursing homes under the Nursing Home Place Purchase Scheme, they provided about 26 000 subsidized residential care places for the elderly.

3. Regarding CCS, "ageing in the community" is an underlying principle of the Government's elderly policy. This is in line with most elders' wish as they cherish the support from their families and the sense of belonging that a familiar community offers. To this end, the Government provides a range of subsidized supporting services, including centre-based day care services and home-based services. 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 subsidized residential care places.

## **Past discussions by Members**

### Impact of statutory minimum wage ("SMW")

4. When the Panel on Manpower discussed issues relating to the impact of initial SMW after its implementation on 1 May 2011, members noted with concern that SMW had narrowed the wage gap among various industries and it had been difficult for specific industries with less favourable working environment and obnoxious duties to retain existing staff and recruit new entrants. Specifically, many RCHE workers had been attracted to other industries with more decent working environment after the implementation of SMW.

5. At the meeting of Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy ("Joint Subcommittee") on 26 February 2013, some members took the view that the shortage of front-line care staff engaging in long-term care services (which included, inter alia, services provided by RCHEs and CCS) was attributed to the implementation of SMW. They asked whether the Administration would consider increasing the salary of these staff or providing them with a special allowance, in order to retain the existing staff and attract new entrants to the field.

6. According to the Administration, under the lump sum grant approach, subvented RCHEs run by non-governmental organizations had the flexibility to deploy the allocated provisions to arrange suitable staffing and determine their salary levels, so as to ensure service quality and meet service needs.

### Staffing complement of RCHEs

7. A written question was raised at the Council meeting of 4 May 2011 about whether the Administration would have any new monitoring measures to ensure that RCHEs had sufficient manpower. The Administration advised that all RCHEs had to comply with the minimum staffing requirements under the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance (Cap. 459) and its subsidiary legislation. The Licensing Office of Residential Care Homes for the Elderly ("LORCHE") of the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") conducted inspections on RCHEs to ensure compliance of the licensing requirements. If irregularities (e.g. understaffing) were detected during the inspections, LORCHE would require the RCHEs concerned to rectify the situation. It would issue advisory or warning letters to non-compliant RCHEs, or even initiate prosecution actions.

8. At the Joint Subcommittee meeting on 26 February 2013, some members asked whether the Administration would increase the staffing complement of

RCHEs as there were increasing care needs for residents of RCHEs due to their deteriorating health conditions.

9. The Administration advised that the statutory staffing requirements (mentioned in paragraph 7 above) were devised following extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders in the elderly care sector, and were still considered appropriate for ensuring minimum acceptable standards for RCHEs. SWD had been providing RCHEs which offered subsidized places with various kinds of supplements including the Dementia Supplement and Infirmary Care Supplement so that they could engage additional professional and/or care staff, or purchase relevant professional services, in a more flexible manner.

#### Manpower for implementation of CCS voucher scheme

10. As regards CCS, the Panel on Welfare Services ("WS Panel") was advised at its meeting on 27 April 2012 that the Government would introduce a four-year pilot CCS voucher scheme in 2013-2014 to provide direct subsidy to elders who had long-term care service needs with more flexibility and choices of CCS that suited their needs to age at home. Members of the WS Panel expressed concern about the manpower provision to tie in with the implementation of the voucher scheme.

11. The Administration advised that it had been working on the overall healthcare manpower planning for the healthcare and social welfare sectors. Specifically, the Health and Food Bureau would review the manpower projection for the sectors concerned from time to time. The Administration had solicited the support of various training institutes to increase the supply of training places. The Education Bureau had undertaken to develop a qualifications framework for the elderly care service sector, with a view to attracting more new entrants to the field.

#### Manpower demand and career ladder for front-line care staff engaging in elderly services

12. At the special WS Panel meeting on 21 January 2013 to receive briefing on the Chief Executive's 2013 Policy Address, members noted that the Administration was aware of the social welfare sector's demand for, among others, front-line care staff and was particularly concerned about the manpower shortage in, inter-alia, elderly services. Members maintained that the demand for front-line care staff had not been addressed by the Administration. They urged the Administration to immediately discuss with the welfare sector ways to meet the demand.

13. At the Joint Subcommittee meeting on 26 February 2013, members asked

whether the Administration would consider providing a career ladder for care workers engaging in long-term care services, with a view to upgrading the posts concerned to professional/semi-professional posts, thereby enhancing the status of the practitioners concerned and attracting more new entrants to the field.

14. The Administration responded that the Industry Training Advisory Committee of the elderly care sector under the Qualifications Framework would draw up Specifications of Competency Standards for the sector, setting out the skills, knowledge and outcome standards required of employees in different functional areas, and providing a basis for course providers to design training courses to meet the needs of the sector. This would facilitate employees in the sector to set clear goals and directions for learning with a view to enhancing their career through continuous learning, raise the professionalism of practitioners and their sense of belonging, thereby attracting more people to join or remain in the welfare sector.

### **Relevant papers**

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

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
5 March 2013

## Appendix

### Relevant papers on manpower of non-professional front-line care staff engaging in subvented homes and community care services for the elderly

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	4 May 2011	<u>Official Record of Proceedings</u> <u>Pages 89 - 93</u>
Panel on Welfare Services	27 April 2012 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Manpower	29 May 2012 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Manpower	20 November 2012 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	21 January 2013 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a>
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy	26 February 2013 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a>

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