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Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 14 April 2014**

Pre-school rehabilitation services

Purpose

This paper summarizes past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") relating to pre-school rehabilitation services.

Background

2. According to the Administration, the Government's policy objective in respect of the provision of pre-school rehabilitation services is to provide children, from birth to six years old, with disabilities or at risk of becoming disabled with early intervention to enhance their physical, psychological and social developments, thereby improving their opportunities for participating in ordinary schools and daily life activities and helping their families meet their special needs. Pre-school rehabilitation services are provided mainly through Early Education and Training Centres ("EETCs"), Special Child Care Centres ("SCCCs") and Integrated Programme in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres ("IP").

3. The service provided by EETCs is designed mainly for disabled children from birth to the age of two, providing them with early intervention programmes with particular emphasis on the role of the disabled child's family. Disabled children aged two to under six can also receive the service if they are not concurrently receiving other pre-school rehabilitation services, which will facilitate their integration into the mainstream education system. SCCC provide special training and care for moderately and severely disabled children to facilitate their growth and development, helping them prepare for primary education.

IP provides training and care to mildly disabled pre-schoolers in an ordinary kindergarten-cum-child care centre with a view to facilitating their future integration into the mainstream education as well as in the society. Apart from these three services, pre-school rehabilitation services also include service provided by residential special child care centre and occasional child care service.

Members' deliberations

Inadequate provision of pre-school rehabilitation services

4. Members expressed grave concern about the long waiting time and serious shortfall of pre-school rehabilitation services for children with disabilities. Since the waiting time for these services was one to three years, many children who were zero to two years old had missed the opportunity to receive suitable services. Even for urgent and serious cases, the children concerned had to wait for at least three months for a place in a SCCC. Members strongly urged the Administration to formulate concrete plans for the provision of pre-school rehabilitation services having regard to the great demand.

5. According to the Administration, it had been continuously increasing the provision of pre-school rehabilitation places. Over the past six years (from the 2007-2008 to 2012-2013 financial years), the Administration had allocated funding to provide about 1 500 additional places, representing an increase of nearly 30%. The Administration anticipated that about 607 additional places would come on stream in 2013-2014. In addition, the Administration had reserved sites for providing 1 200 additional places in the coming five years (from 2013-2014 to 2017-2018). Of them, two-third would be EETC places and the remaining one-third would be SCCC places. The provision and the number of children on the waiting list for pre-school rehabilitation services as at September 2013 are in **Appendix I**.

6. Members considered that the 1 200 additional pre-school rehabilitation places were not adequate to meet the growing demand. Moreover, the provision of training subsidy under the relevant assistance programme of the Community Care Fund ("CCF") could not help parents with disabled children obtain self-financing services operated by non-governmental organizations ("NGOs"), given that the subsidy amount was too small and there was a general lack of rehabilitation services in the private market. Furthermore, parents were subject to a means test before they became eligible for the training subsidy. In members' view, needy children had the right to receive free rehabilitation

services since education was a basic human right rather than a welfare benefit. The Administration should provide regular funding for the provision of rehabilitation services for pre-school children.

7. The Administration advised that among the some 7 000 children waiting for subvented pre-school rehabilitation places, more than half of them were waiting for places in EETCs. Parents of these needy children could make use of the training subsidy provided under the CCF assistance programme to enable their children to receive self-financing services operated by NGOs. CCF's endorsement for additional funding to meet the expenses of the assistance programme would be sought when necessary. Starting from May 2013, the ceiling of monthly training subsidy had been increased from \$2,500 to \$2,615. The Steering Committee on CCF had endorsed the extension of the relevant training subsidy assistance programme up to March 2014 so that the children in need could continue to receive appropriate training as early as possible. According to the Administration, the aforesaid CCF programme had enabled about 2 100 children to receive self-financing pre-school rehabilitation services. The Administration would incorporate the programme into its regular subvented service in 2014-2015.

8. Pointing out that there were currently more than 7 000 applicants for pre-school rehabilitation services but only about 607 additional places would come on stream in 2013-2014, members were of the view that the provision of pre-school rehabilitation services could never catch up the demand if the Administration continued to adopt the existing approach. They strongly urged the Administration to use revolutionary ways to address the problem. The Administration should make a pledge to meet the growing demand for pre-school rehabilitation places and set targets to reduce the waiting time for such services.

9. The Administration explained that while its goal was to provide sufficient places to meet the demand for pre-school rehabilitation services, it had genuine difficulties in identifying sufficient suitable sites for the facilities. To encourage social welfare organizations to provide the necessary welfare facilities, including pre-school rehabilitation services, through in-situ expansion or redevelopment, the Administration had launched the special scheme on privately owned sites for welfare uses ("Special Scheme") in September 2013. It would in parallel explore different modes of pre-school rehabilitation services and regularize the relevant CCF assistance programme to improve the waitlisting situation.

10. At its meeting on 10 June 2013, the Panel passed a motion urging the authorities to substantially increase pre-school rehabilitation service

places, establish an inter-departmental mechanism for formulating a policy on rehabilitation of pre-school children, and making long-term planning on service places, manpower (for both professional and supporting staff), premises, facilities, resources and so on.

Reducing waiting time for Child Assessment Service

11. Members expressed strong disappointment that the inadequacy of rehabilitation services for pre-school children remained a serious problem over the years. They considered that as early identification and assessment helped enhance the rehabilitation progress of disabled children, especially those aged zero to six, and thus could save medical costs in the long run, the Administration should allocate additional resources for adequate provision of rehabilitation services for pre-school children. Some members also suggested offering compensation to professional staff to work overtime to provide assessment services for those needy children who were on the waiting list so as to reduce the waiting time for assessment services.

12. The Administration explained that a mechanism had been put in place under the Maternal and Child Health Centres of the Department of Health to identify pre-school children with developmental problems. Needy children and their family members would be referred to the appropriate health and welfare service units for follow-up. The Administration would continue to step up efforts in increasing pre-school rehabilitation places to meet the growing demand.

Subvented and self-financing social welfare services under the Special Scheme

13. Members were of the view that as the projects under the Special Scheme were funded by the Lotteries Fund ("LF"), they should aim to provide subsidized welfare services. The Administration should provide the NGOs concerned with guidelines regarding the provision of subvented and self-financing services under the Special Scheme.

14. The Administration advised that in considering the subsidized and self-financing services proposed for the projects under the Special Scheme, it would adhere to the established rules and procedures. It would also take into account the need for different types of services in the community in the long run, the choices for service users as well as the maturity of the relevant services in the market.

15. Taking into account the substantial financial resources injected into the Special Scheme, members considered that the NGOs concerned should commit a longer or even permanent service period to ensure the continuous provision of the agreed services. A mechanism should be in place to prevent these NGOs from changing the service types at will.

16. The Administration explained that the NGOs concerned must comply with the agreement under the Special Scheme as far as service period was concerned. They were required to provide the type of services as stated in their proposals and the Administration's approval should be obtained for changing the service types.

Latest development

17. At its meeting on 14 April 2014, the Panel will be consulted on the Administration's proposal to seek funding from LF for the redevelopment of Heep Hong Society's Catherine Lo Centre for the provision of pre-school rehabilitation and other support services under the Special Scheme. The Administration aims to submit the proposal to the Finance Committee in May 2014.

Relevant papers

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

Appendix I

Provision and Waiting List for Pre-school Rehabilitation Services

Type of Service	Number of Places (as at September 2013)	Number of Applicants (as at September 2013)
Early Education and Training Centre	2 628	3 517
Special Child Care Centre	1 757	1 077
Integrated Programme in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centre	1 860	1 492

Source: Information provided by the Administration at the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services on 11 November 2013.

Appendix II

Relevant papers on pre-school rehabilitation services

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	7 November 2012	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 133 – 138
Panel on Welfare Services	10 June 2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	11 November 2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	10 February 2014 (Item III)	Agenda

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