

立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)1669/13-14(04)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 9 June 2014

Family Council

Purpose

This paper gives an account of past discussions at the meetings of the Council and relevant committees on the work of the Family Council.

Background

2. According to the Administration, the objective of its family policy is to enhance family harmony for building a harmonious community and alleviating social problems. To this end, the Administration set up the Family Council in 2007, with the Chief Secretary for Administration as the Chairperson and its secretariat serviced by the Home Affairs Bureau ("HAB"). The Family Council serves as a cross-sector and cross-bureau platform to study and address family-related problems with a view to providing high-level steer and advice, and fostering effective co-ordination and collaboration to maximize efforts and achieve synergy.

3. With effect from 1 April 2013, the established approach of including family perspectives in the policy-making process is further enhanced by introducing a mandatory assessment of family implications and impact on family for all policies. Relevant assessment is included in all policy submissions and the Legislative Council briefs. Bureaux and departments ("B/Ds") are encouraged to consult the Family Council on new policies which carry family implications. To implement these new initiatives and to strengthen its advisory role, the Family Council is re-constituted under a new non-official Chairperson.

Deliberations by Members

Efforts of the Family Council in promoting family support

4. While supporting the policy initiative to promote family harmony, Members considered that the Family Council should draw up its targets, especially on how to foster the collaboration among different B/Ds on family support work. The Administration advised that the setting up of the Family Council aimed to establish a family-based support network and forge closer and harmonious relationships among family members. The Family Council would advise the Government on the integration of family policies and strategies for supporting and strengthening the family as well as the development of related programmes and activities across different B/Ds, and monitor their implementation. The Administration further advised that the Family Council had agreed that the priority issues to be considered should include identification of core family values; ways to create a pro-family environment including work environment; ways to enhance the effectiveness and co-ordination of family education and fostering a family perspective among policy-makers.

5. Some deputations giving views to the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") expressed disappointment at the Family Council's failure to give due attention to the specific needs of different age groups and members in the family, in particular children and people with disabilities. They strongly urged the early setting up of a Children's Commission to safeguard the well-being of children, and the introduction of family impact assessment in policy formulation. At the special Finance Committee meetings in April 2014 to examine the Estimates of Expenditure 2014-2015, Members expressed concern that the Family Council focused on family implications only and overlooked children's perspective in policy discussions.

6. The Administration advised that a mandatory assessment of family implications had been introduced for all government policies (for different age and gender sectors including children). In formulating policies relating to children, children's best interest and perspectives were taken into consideration. The Family Council, which played an important role in the family impact assessment, also invited B/Ds to brief the Family Council on policies which might affect the family (including children). In addition, the Children's Rights Forum formed under the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau served to provide a platform for exchanging views on matters concerning children's rights among non-governmental organizations ("NGOs"), children's representatives and the Government.

7. Regarding the services to be provided by the Family Council in 2014-2015, the Administration advised that the Family Council would

continue to launch initiatives to promulgate family core values through the "Happy Family Campaign" and the "Happy Family Info Hub" which was an online platform allowing easy access to a wide range of family-related information and facilitating sharing of family-related issues. Moreover, a series of territory-wide activities would be organized to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family, including the organization of symposium, educational events and publicity campaigns.

Strategic directions on family-related policies

8. Some Members considered that the Family Council should formulate strategic directions on family-related policies, instead of launching promotional activities. While acknowledging the public expectation on the work of the Family Council, the Administration stressed that the Family Council was an advisory body to the Government. It provided a high-level platform for discussion of major issues from the family perspective and strategic directions as well as priorities on family-related policies. Two subcommittees had been set up under the Family Council to conduct in-depth deliberations on the strategic directions regarding promotion of family core values, family education and family support. The Family Council would continue to study policy initiatives and conduct in-depth deliberations on its areas of work. Provision of services to support families would continue to be delivered by different relevant service providers and delivery agents.

9. According to the Administration, many social problems, viz. youth drug abuse, youth prostitution, child neglect and elderly neglect, could be traced back to the family. To effectively tackle these four problems from a family perspective, the Family Council was tasked to conduct four research studies on these problems. The Panel was briefed on the findings of the four research studies as well as the new policy directions arising from the findings and the measures to support these policy directions. The findings of the research studies confirmed that although the causes of the four social problems under study were complicated and multi-faceted, they could be traced back to the family.

10. Members generally considered that the studies had failed to neither identify causes of social problems which were not already known, nor propose insightful measures to tackle family problems. Members urged the Administration to first identify the underlying causes of family problems, such as long working hours and low income, and then make appropriate policy changes. Priority should also be given to address the social problems faced by cross-border families, single-parent families and families receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance. The Administration was also called upon to deploy more resources with a view to implementing more specific measures to sufficiently and effectively tackle the multi-faceted family problems.

11. According to the Family Council, the four studies had adopted a new approach to look into the causes of youth drug abuse and youth prostitution from the family perspective. The research studies also confirmed the need for a "family-focused" strategy in order to tackle such problems effectively. The Family Council had, in the light of the research findings, recommended three new policy directions, viz. family engagement, prevention, and community-based family support as well as the measures to support the new policy directions. Members were given to understand that the new policy directions had been featured in the Policy Agenda of the 2011-2012 Policy Address and the relevant B/Ds had implemented the measures in support of these new policy directions. The Family Council would keep in view the implementation of the recommended measures and review the effectiveness of these measures.

12. Some Members questioned whether the Family Council had looked into the impact of long working hours on families. They considered that one of the main reasons leading to family problems was long working hours which deprived family members from having sufficient time to spend with each other. According to the Family Council, concerns about the impact of long working hours on families had been raised time and again in the course of deliberations by the Family Council, and the Administration was aware of the views and concerns expressed. The Administration advised that in view of the implementation of the statutory minimum wage and completion of the policy study on standard working hours, the Family Council would invite relevant B/Ds to report on the related measures and study results, so as to facilitate the Administration in the formulation of policies and strategies for supporting and strengthening the family.

13. Some Members called on the Family Council to consider commissioning local universities to conduct further studies on the underlying causes of family problems and make recommendations as appropriate. According to the Administration, the Family Council conducted a family survey in 2011. The preliminary findings of the survey indicated that families in Hong Kong in general functioned quite well and respondents were also satisfied with their family life. However, the results also indicated that people experienced stress in raising children and in balancing work and family. There was also a low awareness and participation rate of family-related programmes organized by the Government and/or NGOs. Focus group meetings were organized by the Central Policy Unit ("CPU") to examine the implications of the survey findings. Arising from the focus group discussions, CPU formulated action plans including (a) strengthening family-related research; (b) strengthening family education; (c) formulating specific family policies; and (d) establishing a "Family Development Fund". The Family Council would map out the strategies in taking forward the

proposed action plans and carry out the survey on a biennial basis to keep track of the changes and development of Hong Kong families in terms of family structures, attitudes and values, etc.

Motion passed by the Council

14. At its meeting on 5 June 2013, the Council passed a motion urging the Administration to make stronger efforts in promoting family-friendly policies, enhancing family cohesion and individual resilience against adversities, restoring mutual love among family members and building up positive family values, so as to create a harmonious society. The proposed measures included, among others, the following –

- (a) expeditiously implementing an impact assessment system in respect of public policies on families to assess the impact of existing social policies, legislation and measures on families, so as to make the relevant improvements;
- (b) enhancing the functions of the Family Council, and setting up a "social fund for families" to subsidize social welfare organizations to organize programmes and activities related to family education; and
- (c) encouraging public and private organizations to implement family-friendly employment policies more proactively for creating a family friendly working environment.

15. The Administration advised that it had implemented the new initiatives regarding family impact assessment, which were mentioned in paragraph 3 above. In the light of the implementation experience, HAB would continue to review the effectiveness of the assessment framework in consultation with the Family Council. On family education, the Family Council would introduce new family education packages in early 2014, with special focus on addressing the needs of different types of families, including young families, underprivileged families and cross-border families. As regards the promotion of family-friendly employment policies, the Family Council launched the territory-wide "Family-Friendly Employers Award Scheme" in 2011 under which business firms were awarded for the family-friendly measures they implemented. Some 1 110 companies signed up for the Scheme. In view of its success, the Family Council expanded the scope of the Scheme in 2013-2014 to cover organizations outside the business sector, including NGOs and social enterprises.

Working relationships with Elderly Commission ("EC"), Women's Commission ("WC") and Commission on Youth ("CoY")

16. Noting that the Family Council would seek to rationalize the work of EC, WC and CoY under the Family Council, Members and deputations giving views to the Panel however pointed out that EC, WC and CoY were performing different roles to meet the specific needs of different age groups and genders, and should not be brought under the Family Council. Some Members considered it unacceptable for the Family Council to assume the overall responsibility of rationalization of the work of various commissions currently responsible for handling issues regarding different age groups and genders.

17. The Administration responded that it was open-minded on the issues of concern raised by Members. According to the Administration, the Family Council would advise the Government on the integration of family policies and related programmes across different B/Ds for different age and gender sectors, including the work of EC, WC and CoY. The Family Council would consider carefully how to rationalize the work of EC, WC and CoY, and achieve more collaboration between the Family Council and the three commissions. The Administration further advised that the Family Council recommended that while EC, WC and CoY should continue to perform their roles in relevant sector-specific areas, they could form a closer alliance with the Family Council and make more concerted efforts to help enhance support services for families. To facilitate communication and co-operation between the three commissions and the Family Council, the Chairpersons of EC, WC and CoY were appointed as ex-officio members of the Family Council with effect from 1 April 2009.

Membership of the Family Council

18. According to the Administration, representatives from the social welfare, professional, commercial and industrial, and academic sectors had been appointed as non-official members of the Family Council. Some Members took the view that the Administration should expand the membership to include representatives from the frontline social workers, the labour sector and people with disabilities, with a view to coming up with concrete recommendations to meet the needs of individual groups. The Administration explained that members of the Family Council had different expertise, knowledge and experience from their professions and would be able to advise the Government from different perspectives. Moreover, one of the terms of reference of the Family Council was to take into account the needs of different age and gender sectors. As such, groups in need would be duly considered in formulating policy recommendations.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
3 June 2014

Appendix

Relevant papers on Family Council

| Committee | Date of meeting | Paper |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Panel on Welfare Services | 13 October 2006 (Item I) | Agenda Minutes |
| | 15 October 2007 (Item I) | Agenda Minutes |
| | 14 February 2008 (Item IV) | Agenda Minutes CB(2)2661/07-08(01) |
| | 23 October 2008 (Item I) | Agenda Minutes |
| | 11 May 2009 (Item IV) | Agenda Minutes |
| | 22 October 2009 (Item I) | Agenda Minutes |
| | 11 January 2010 (Item V) | Agenda Minutes CB(2)2152/09-10(01) |
| | 12 March 2012 (Item IV) | Agenda Minutes CB(2)2617/11-12(01) |
| Finance Committee | 10 April 2013 | Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2013-2014 Page 626 |
| Legislative Council | 5 June 2013 | Official Record of Proceedings Pages 145-281 Progress Report |

| Committee | Date of meeting | Paper |
|-------------------|------------------------|---|
| Finance Committee | 2 April 2014 | <u>Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2014-2015 Pages 15-17, 30, 657, 812-818 and 836</u> |

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
3 June 2014