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Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 14 December 2015**

Pre-school rehabilitation services

Purpose

This paper summarizes past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") and the Finance Committee 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 services provided by EETCs are 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 aged between two

and six 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 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. Some Members had time and again expressed grave concern about the long waiting time and serious shortfall of pre-school rehabilitation services for children with disabilities. 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.

5. According to the Administration, it had been continuously increasing the provision of pre-school rehabilitation places. 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%. Within the current Government's term, some 1 400 additional places for subvented pre-school rehabilitation services would be provided. The provision and the number of children on the waiting list for pre-school rehabilitation services as at end-December 2014 are in **Appendix I**.

6. Some Members considered that the additional pre-school rehabilitation places were not adequate to meet the growing demand. Moreover, the provision of "Training Subsidy for Children who are on the Waiting List for Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services" ("Training Subsidy") programme under the Community Care Fund 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.

7. The Administration advised that the Training Subsidy programme was launched in December 2011 with a view to enabling children from low-income families and those who were on the waiting list for subvented pre-school rehabilitation services to acquire self-financing services run by recognized service providers. When the programme was launched, the maximum monthly subsidy for each eligible child was \$2,500. The Administration had raised the maximum amount of subsidy to \$2,615 per month for each eligible child since May 2013. A total of 2 840 children had received subsidy in the past three years. Subsequently, the programme was regularized with the increased subsidies in October 2014. Each eligible child waiting for EETC or IP might receive a maximum monthly subsidy of \$2,763, while each eligible child waiting for SCCC or residential SCCC might receive a maximum monthly subsidy of \$3,867. It was estimated that around 1 500 children would receive subsidy each year. The Social Welfare Department had no plan to review the amount of the Training Subsidy at this stage.

Measures to increase supply of pre-school rehabilitation services

8. Some 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. Under the Special Scheme, some 3 800 additional places for EETCs and SCCCs would be provided which would be of great help in relieving the tight supply of pre-school rehabilitation services.

10. Some Members were of the view that as the development 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. 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.

11. Taking into account the substantial financial resources injected into the Special Scheme, some 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. 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.

12. Some Members said that according to the Administration, there would be surplus Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres ("ICYSCs") arising from the decline in youth population. To address the acute shortage problem of pre-school rehabilitation services, the Administration should consider making use of some of these ICYSCs to replenish the supply of these services. The Administration advised that it would examine the suggestion of using ICYSCs for rehabilitation services from the service integration perspective.

13. Noting that the Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services ("Pilot Scheme") would be launched through LF, some Members were concerned about the implementation details of the Pilot Scheme, such as the scale and the number of beneficiaries.

14. The Administration advised that having regard to the concern of some kindergartens that they did not have the expertise to provide rehabilitation services for children with special needs, NGOs operating subvented pre-school rehabilitation services would be invited to provide on-site services under the two-year Pilot Scheme. As the Pilot Scheme would be funded by LF and its deployment would be relatively flexible, no quota was set for the Pilot Scheme. The Administration would discuss with NGOs their service capacity and secure the required funds accordingly. Subject to the outcome of the evaluation study of the Pilot Scheme, the Administration would strive to bid for resources to regularize the scheme.

Latest development

15. At its meeting on 14 December 2015, the Panel will be briefed on the Pilot Scheme which will provide on-site rehabilitation services for children with special needs studying in kindergartens and kindergartens-cum-child care centres participating in the scheme.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
10 December 2015

Appendix I

Provision and Waiting List for Pre-school Rehabilitation Services

Type of Service	Number of Places (as at end-December 2014)	Number of Applicants (as at end-December 2014)
Early Education and Training Centre	2 899	3 418
Special Child Care Centre	1 775	1 182
Integrated Programme in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centre	1 860	1 484

Source: The Administration's reply (Reply Serial No. LWB(WW)0102) to Hon Albert HO's written question in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016 regarding welfare and women.

Appendix II

Relevant papers on pre-school rehabilitation services

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
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 Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	14 April 2014 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	2 April 2015	Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016 Pages 251-253, 407-411 and 536-537
Panel on Welfare Services	26 January 2015 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes

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