

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1676/15-16(06)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 13 June 2016**

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, a mandatory assessment of family implications has been introduced for all government policies. Bureaux and departments ("B/Ds") are required to use the three sets of family core values (i.e. "Love and Care", "Respect and Responsibilities" and "Communication and Harmony") as identified by the Family Council, as well as the impact on family's structure and functions, as the basis for assessing the impact of the relevant policies on families. B/Ds are also 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. 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.

5. 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 non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") and social enterprises.¹

6. Some Members considered that instead of launching promotional activities, the Family Council should formulate strategic directions on family-related policies. While acknowledging the public expectation on the

¹ According to the Administration, the "Family-Friendly Employers Award Scheme" was launched for the third time on 15 December 2015.

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 relevant service providers and delivery agents.

7. While supporting the policy initiative to promote family harmony, some 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 Administration 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.

8. Some Members expressed concern that the Family Council focused on family implications only and overlooked children's perspective in policy discussions. Some other Members urged the Administration to establish a Children's Commission to tackle children poverty. The Administration reiterated that a mandatory assessment of family implications as mentioned in paragraph 3 above 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. B/Ds were also invited to brief the Family Council on policies which might affect the family (including children). Since January 2014, the Family Council had enhanced its co-operation with the Children's Right Forum² in taking children's perspective into account during policy discussions.

² According to the Administration, Children's Right Forum convened by the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau serves as a platform for exchange of views among children bodies, children and the Administration on matters that concern children.

9. Some Members suggested that the Family Council should not overlook the needs of women who were facing pressure and problems arising from long working hours, divorce, cross-boundary marriages, and being full-time carers. Some other Members asked if the Family Council would consider coordinating NGOs' efforts in promoting harmonious family life to strengthen the support for the needy, particularly, mothers with newborn babies and/or suffering from postpartum depression. In addition, the Family Council was called upon to put more efforts in addressing family problems arising from divorce, cross-boundary marriages, domestic violence and poverty. The Family Council advised that it was concerned about the issues raised by Members, and agreed that it should do more to help the underprivileged families.

Research work of the Family Council

10. Noting the findings of the four research studies published in 2011 by the Family Council on youth drug abuse, youth prostitution, child neglect and elderly neglect, Members generally considered that the studies had failed to neither identify causes of the aforesaid social problems, nor propose insightful measures to tackle family problems. Some 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. In comparing the findings of the 2011 and 2013 Family Surveys,³ some Members noted that there were a growing number of respondents who found the stress of raising their children overwhelming and encountered difficulties in balancing family and work. These Members asked if the Family Council had identified the crux of the problems and proposed specific measures accordingly. The Family Council advised that the increase might be due to statistical variations. That said, the Family Council would continue to strengthen family education by uploading more relevant materials onto the "Happy Family Info Hub" (<http://www.familycouncil.gov.hk>) which recorded an average monthly hit rate of one million. In planning the future survey, the Family Council would attempt to identify the causes leading to the difficulties in striking a balance between family and work. In addition, the Family Council would seek to examine the major causes of family problems with relevant B/Ds and advisory bodies.

Effectiveness of the work of the Family Council

13. Some Members questioned about the ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes on promoting family core values which were implemented by the Family Council. The Administration advised that HAB, which provided secretariat support to the Family Council, would continue to monitor the effectiveness of various activities on promoting family core values and review matters such as the scope of activities as well as the engagement of stakeholders and partnering organizations. For programmes/activities co-organized with other organizations, the sponsored organizations were required to submit reports setting out financial reporting, participants' feedback and evaluation of the effectiveness of the projects, etc. upon completion of the projects.

14. Some Members questioned whether the Family Council was in a position to press the Administration for taking forward its views and recommendations on family-related issues. Some other Members urged the Administration to empower the Family Council to ensure that recommendations of the Family Council would be implemented. According to the Administration, with the introduction of the mandatory assessment of family implications as mentioned in paragraph 3 above, the advice of the Family Council on various family-related policies had been duly reflected to relevant B/Ds for follow-up actions. In 2016, the Family Council would commission the Central Policy Unit to conduct a study of the effectiveness of the "Family Impact Assessment"

³ According to the Administration, the Family Council had conducted the Family Survey on a biennial basis since 2011 to cover a wide range of areas, including attitudes on family core values, work-life balance, parenthood, family functioning, satisfaction with family life, etc, with a view to understanding the current state of Hong Kong families in a more comprehensive manner. The Family Survey 2015 is in the pipeline and expected to be completed in 2016.

framework, which was expected to complete in the third quarter of 2017, and to develop a more elaborated checklist as the basis for assessing the impact of various policies on families.⁴

Working relationships with Elderly Commission, Women's Commission and Commission on Youth

15. Noting that the Family Council would seek to rationalize the work of Elderly Commission ("EC"), Women's Commission ("WC") and Commission on Youth ("CoY") under the Family Council, some Members and deputations giving views to the Panel considered 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.

16. 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 Administration 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

17. 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

⁴ According to the Administration, the Family Council recommended that the checklist should be able to:

- (a) assist bureaux and departments in examining the impact of their policies on families and families' functions. Their impact on different forms of families should also be taken into consideration;
- (b) reflect different policy objectives and take into account the social economic situations of Hong Kong;
- (c) make flexible adaptations for different policy areas; and
- (d) provide evidence-based information.

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 Administration 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

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
7 June 2016

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	Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2014-2015 Pages 15-17, 30, 657, 812-818 and 836
Panel on Welfare Services	9 June 2014 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	9 December 2015	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 82-108
Panel on Welfare Services	25 January 2016 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes CB(2)624/15-16(02)
Finance Committee	6 April 2016	Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2016-2017 Pages 65-66, 88-89 and 777-778

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
7 June 2016