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Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 9 January 2017**

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 ("KG-cum-CCC") 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 for 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 2009-2010 to 2014-2015, funding had been allocated to provide about 1 500 additional pre-school rehabilitation places, representing an increase of nearly 30%. In addition, the Government had reserved sites for providing nearly 1 500 additional pre-school rehabilitation places within the term of the current Government. Additional places would also be provided through redevelopment or expansion on the sites owned by the non-governmental organizations ("NGOs"), particularly those under the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses ("Special Scheme"). In 2017-2018, 344 pre-school rehabilitation service places would be provided under the Special Scheme and if all the proposals received under the Special Scheme could be implemented smoothly, an additional 3 800 service places would be provided. As at end-October 2015, a total of 6 810 pre-school rehabilitation service places were provided and 5 821 children were waiting for these services. The average waiting time (as in 2014-2015), depending on the type of pre-school rehabilitation service, ranged from 13 to 19.6 months.

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

Training Subsidy Programme") under the Community Care Fund could not help parents with disabled children obtain self-financing services operated by 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. The Administration regularized the Training Subsidy Programme in October 2014 and increased the level of subsidy. It was estimated that around 1 500 children would receive subsidy each year.

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 advised that it had launched a two-year Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services ("the Pilot Scheme") through the Lotteries Fund to invite NGOs operating subvented pre-school rehabilitation services to provide on-site services so as to benefit children with special needs, who were studying in kindergartens ("KGs") or KG-cum-CCCs, as early as possible. Apart from providing on-site rehabilitation services to target service users, the Pilot Scheme also provided professional advice for teachers/child care workers in the participating KG or KG-cum-CCCs. Support to parents would be provided to enhance their acceptance and understanding of their children with special needs, so as to foster the overall development of their children. The initiatives under the Pilot Scheme had been implemented progressively from November 2015 to January 2016, providing a total of 2 925 places.

10. Given that many additional pre-school rehabilitation service places would only come on stream in the next few years and some service users

of the Pilot Scheme might still be in KGs/KG-cum-CCCs when the Pilot Scheme ended in 2017, some Members requested the Administration to consider extending the Pilot Scheme or adopting other measures to address the demand for pre-school rehabilitation services between the lapse of the Pilot Scheme and the availability of these additional service places. The Administration advised that it would endeavour to secure resources to regularize the Pilot Scheme to ensure the continuity of the services. The Administration would be flexible in facilitating the articulation of the Pilot Scheme to the regularized scheme.

11. 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.

Relevant papers

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

Appendix

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
Panel on Welfare Services	14 December 2015 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes