

**For discussion on
10 April 2017**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**Review of the Role and Staff Establishment of
Integrated Family Service Centres of the Social Welfare Department**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the role and staff establishment of the Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and on the relevant review and improvement measures.

Service Mode and Current Situation

2. SWD and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) provide a wide range of family services to maintain and enhance family functioning. In August 2000, SWD commissioned The University of Hong Kong (HKU) to conduct a consultancy study, entitled the “Review of Family Services in Hong Kong”, on the role, operation, management and manpower resources etc. of family services, and published the “Meeting the Challenge: Strengthening Families. Report on the Review of Family Services in Hong Kong” (the Report) in June 2001. The Report recommended that the Government adopted the IFSC service mode to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial family services for meeting the changing needs of families in a holistic manner. After the re-organisation of the family service resources, a total of 61 IFSCs serving the whole territory were formed by phases starting from 2004-05.

3. In October 2008, SWD, through open tender, commissioned HKU to form a consultant team (the Consultant Team) to conduct a review on the implementation of the IFSC service mode. After the review, SWD released a report entitled “Building Effective Family Services: Review on the Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre Service Mode” (the Review Report) in May 2010. The Consultant Team, after a comprehensive and in-depth review, considered that the

IFSC service mode had received general support from IFSC management and frontline workers, stakeholders and service users, and was suitable for delivering family services in contemporary Hong Kong. The Consultant Team recommended that the IFSC service mode should continue to be adopted as the service mode for publicly-funded family services in Hong Kong. As to how to address the needs of specific target groups (such as single parents, new arrivals, ethnic minorities and deprived families), the Consultant Team noticed that the IFSCs located in the residing areas of these target groups could serve as a natural platform to facilitate their integration into the communities. The Consultant Team also recommended that IFSCs should continue to be encouraged and supported to identify specific target groups in the communities and provide appropriate services for them. The Consultant Team made a total of 26 recommendations in the Review Report to further improve the implementation of the IFSC service mode. After issue of the Review Report, SWD agreed with the Consultant Team's conclusions and accepted all the recommendations in principle. SWD has been following up actively on the implementation of the 26 recommendations.

4. To more effectively prevent and deal with family problems, prevent deterioration of the problems and reduce the workload of IFSC social workers, the Government subsequently allocated additional resources to provide four additional IFSCs in areas with high demand for services¹, one of which is operated by SWD and the remaining three are operated by NGOs. At present, among the 65 IFSCs across the territory, 41 are operated by SWD and the remaining 24 are operated by 10 NGOs.

Role

5. The IFSCs provide services under the direction of “child-centred, family-focused and community-based” and the guiding

¹ Pursuant to the “Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines” of the Planning Department, “Each Integrated Family Service Centre serves a well-defined service boundary with a population of 100 000 to 150 000 persons, based on a combination of factors including not just the population to be served but also the complexity of social problems and district needs”. SWD considers the social indicators and service needs of individual districts, such as the number of new cases handled by each centre, the factors of population growth and structural forecasting, etc. in determining the districts where the IFSCs are set up. The four IFSCs include the one located in Sham Shui Po district opened in December 2011, the two located in Kwun Tong district and Yuen Long district respectively commenced operation since January 2013, and the one located in Kowloon City district commenced operation since February 2013. The IFSC located in Kowloon City district is operated by SWD, where more cases are in need of the handling of SWD social workers, including statutory cases and cases of “Director of Social Welfare Incorporated – Specified Persons” etc.

principles of “accessibility, early identification, integration and partnership”. Each IFSC consists of three major components, including Family Resource Unit, Family Support Unit and Family Counselling Unit, and provides a range of preventive, supportive and remedial services to individuals and families in need. The units have the following strategic functions-

(a) Family Resource Unit

It provides developmental and preventive services to families in the community, including drop-in services, provision of information, family life education, parent-child activities, educational/developmental groups/programmes, mutual help groups, volunteer development, social networking, and outreaching services, etc. The main objective is to develop the strength and resilience of individuals and families.

(b) Family Support Unit

It provides support services to vulnerable or high-risk individuals and families, including parenting and family management training, supportive groups, referrals for assistance, and short-term counselling, etc. The main objective is to render timely support services to prevent further deterioration of individual or family problems.

(c) Family Counselling Unit

It provides services, such as intensive counselling, therapeutic groups and crisis intervention, etc., to individuals and families in crisis. The main objective is to assist individuals and families to regain resilience, restore normal family functioning and prevent family breakdown and tragedies.

With the aim of facilitating the service users in seeking and utilising the services, IFSCs will, in accordance with its respective service boundaries, provide welfare services to those living therein.

6. Basically, there is no difference between the services provided by SWD-operated IFSCs and NGO-operated IFSCs, but the IFSCs operated by SWD have to handle statutory cases and cases involving the use of public funds, including applications to court for protection orders for children/juveniles in need of care or protection and providing guardianship to the wards of Director of Social Welfare pursuant to the Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance (Cap. 213,

Laws of Hong Kong), guardianship cases under the Mental Health Ordinance (Cap. 136, Laws of Hong Kong), Director of Social Welfare Incorporated – Specified Persons (DSWI-SP) cases², and assessment of medical fee waiving, etc.

Staff Establishment and Manpower Resources

7. SWD will, on the basis of the district service needs and characteristics, arrange suitable staffing at varied ranks for its IFSCs, including officer-in-charge (Social Work Officer rank), frontline social workers (including Assistant Social Work Officers, Senior Social Work Assistants and Social Work Assistants) as well as auxiliary staff (including Assistant Clerical Officers, Clerical Assistants and Workman IIs, etc.). At present, the staffing arrangement is mapped out in accordance with the district service needs, case complexity and caseload, and the staff establishment of each SWD-operated IFSC is in the range from 21 to 36.

8. As regards the IFSCs operated by NGOs under subventions, NGOs have the flexibility to deploy the subventions and arrange suitable staffing to meet the requirements as set out in the Funding and Service Agreements, and are accountable for the service provision and staff deployment. To increase transparency, SWD has uploaded on its website the notional staffing establishment, which is used for calculating the subvention for IFSCs (see Annex).

9. SWD has been keeping in view of the workload and manpower demand of its IFSCs and will, when necessary, strengthen the manpower resources of frontline social workers and supervisory staff through provision of additional resources. In view of the more complicated case nature, SWD has, since the adoption of IFSC service mode, continuously provided additional resources for frontline social work manpower, which was increased from 638 in 2004-05 to 750 as at October 2016. This has helped the IFSCs in early identification and intervention of, and providing enhanced support to, families and children

² Pursuant to section 4 of the Director of Social Welfare Incorporation Ordinance (Cap. 1096, Laws of Hong Kong), the Director of Social Welfare Incorporated (DSWI) has the power to act as trustee of any trust created for the benefit of persons under SWD's care. For those persons who are found unlikely to be able to manage their money because of age, health condition or other reasons, the money may be held by DSWI on behalf of the persons in accordance with the Ordinance. Under these circumstances, social workers entrusted by DSW would have to open and manage DSWI-SP accounts for the related persons.

who are vulnerable to domestic violence and have other welfare needs, at-risk pregnant women, mothers suffering from postnatal depression, and children with development problems and their family members, etc. To strengthen supervision in support of the work of frontline social workers as well as to enhance service and support to the needy families, SWD also increased the number of supervisory staff from 41 to 65 during the same period. SWD will continue to closely monitor the workload and manpower condition of the IFSCs, and provide additional resources when necessary.

Way Forward

10. SWD will, together with stakeholders, continue to review the role and staff establishment of its IFSCs.

Advice Sought

11. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Social Welfare Department
April 2017

**Integrated Family Service Centre
Notional Staffing Establishment (Note)**

Ranks / Posts	Number of Staff
Social Work Officer	2
Assistant Social Work Officer	7.23
Senior Social Work Assistant	3
Social Work Assistant	5
Assistant Clerical Officer	2
Clerical Assistant	2
Workman II	2

Note:

1. There is no standard notional staffing establishment of the service because most of the IFSCs were formed through re-organisation in early 2000s. The one shown above, which is for reference only, is the manpower resources provided to a NGO for operating an IFSC set up in 2012-13, with the additional social work manpower resources allocated in October 2015 already included.
2. The above notional staffing establishment is used solely for the purpose of calculating recurrent subvention and should not be used for benchmarking the manpower and staff combination of the subvented service unit. NGOs have the flexibility to deploy subvention and arrange suitable manpower to meet the requirements as set out in the Funding and Service Agreements and are accountable for the service and staffing needs.