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Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 10 April 2017**

Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre service mode

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of the discussions by the Council and its committees on the implementation of the service mode of the Integrated Family Service Centres ("IFSCs").

Background

2. In August 2000, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") commissioned the University of Hong Kong ("HKU") to conduct an eight-month consultancy study on the review of family welfare services. In the report of the study, HKU recommended, inter alia, the adoption of a new service delivery model of IFSC to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services.
3. To take forward the IFSC service mode, 15 pilot projects were then launched from April 2002 to March 2004 to test out the effectiveness of the IFSC service mode. HKU was commissioned to conduct the two-year evaluative study of the pilot projects. In the light of the positive findings of the evaluative study of the pilot projects on IFSC, SWD re-engineered the then family service resources to form a total of 61 IFSCs over the territory (of which 40 were run by SWD and 21 by nine non-governmental organizations ("NGOs")) in phases in 2004-2005.
4. In October 2008, the Administration commissioned HKU to conduct a review of the implementation of IFSC service mode. In the report of the review ("the Review Report"), HKU made a total of 26 recommendations to

further improve the implementation of the IFSC service mode. SWD then took forward these recommendations by setting up various working groups or liaison groups comprising management, supervisors and frontline staff of IFSCs as well as relevant government departments and other stakeholders to take necessary follow-up actions.

5. As announced in the 2011-2012 Policy Address, the Administration has allocated additional resources to set up four new IFSCs in districts with higher service demand, thereby increasing the number of IFSCs from 61 to 65. According to the Administration, the 65 IFSCs have been providing a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial welfare services for individuals and families in need, including counselling, crisis intervention, family life education, parent-child activities, enquiry service, volunteer training, support/mutual help groups and referral service, etc. so as to strengthen family's functioning and assist those individuals and families in difficulties to deal with adversities. Social workers of IFSCs will comprehensively assess service users' needs through different work strategies, such as early identification and intervention, service integration and partnership with other services stakeholders etc., so as to provide them with appropriate service.

Deliberations by Members

Handling of housing assistance cases

6. Members noted with concern that IFSC social workers had expressed concerns about managing the high and sometimes unrealistic expectations of service users and community stakeholders. Specifically, SWD IFSC social workers spent a substantial proportion of working hours on handling housing assistance cases. There was a suggestion on the adoption of a clear delineation of responsibilities between IFSCs and the Housing Department ("HD") in handling housing assistance cases. IFSC social workers should be dedicated to the core family services.

7. The Administration advised that apart from housing needs, housing problems were often related to personal and family reasons, and it would therefore be appropriate for social workers to handle such cases. In response to the concerns about handling of housing assistance cases by IFSCs, SWD had set up a liaison mechanism with HD at both the headquarters and district levels. The liaison group at the headquarters level had reviewed and streamlined the existing work procedures in respect of the referral system, with a view to achieving clearer delineation of roles of social workers and HD staff and ensuring the implementation of agreed procedures in actual operation. Specifically, HD would process applications for public rental housing flats and

refer those cases which did not meet eligibility criteria but warranted consideration for compassionate rehousing to IFSCs for follow-up actions. Apart from the referral mechanism, HD had put in place a reporting system to ensure that irregularities could be brought to the attention of senior management at regional level for appropriate handling or rectification.

IFSC priority target groups

8. In view of the increasing complexity of family problems and the population size currently served by an IFSC, a concern was raised about the capability of IFSC social workers to provide assistance to all families in need of supportive and preventive services. The Administration should model on the experience of the former Single Parent Centres and foster the concept of self-help and mutual help of the disadvantaged groups so as to provide target assistance to meet their specific needs. Some Members considered that IFSCs should focus on early identification of child abuse cases and make necessary referrals to the Family and Child Protective Services Units of SWD for appropriate follow-up services.

9. According to the Administration, the implementation of the IFSC service mode aimed to provide a family-focused and community-based integrated service mode i.e. providing a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services. The provision of resources and manpower for IFSCs was therefore premised on the assumption that the service need for remedial service would be diminishing if adequate preventive and supportive services had been provided by IFSCs. The Administration pointed out that most IFSCs had developed special services to meet the service needs of specific target groups in their own communities. IFSCs could provide specific target groups with more easily accessible services in a one-stop manner without labelling effect. Such services included intensive counselling, assessment on application for compassionate rehousing, etc.

Resource and manpower requirements for IFSCs

10. Noting that the Administration considered it reasonable and appropriate for an IFSC to deliver family services in a community with 100 000 to 150 000 residents, Members enquired if the Administration had examined the adequacy of the resources and manpower for IFSCs to deliver the service mode of providing a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services to the community, and whether the caseload of IFSC social workers should be set at a lower level. It was suggested that specific indicators to reflect the changing needs in the community should be drawn up to facilitate service planning and manpower requirement.

11. The Administration advised that the provision of manpower resources for IFSCs were premised on the service boundaries i.e. each IFSC would serve a population of 100 000 to 150 000, as well as the characteristics and the specific service needs of the community. Since the implementation of IFSC service mode, additional resources had been allocated to meet the increasing service demand and the characteristics of individual districts. Reference was made to a number of indicators, for example, the number of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance households, cases of child abuse, spouse abuse, and juvenile crime. Instead of allocating resources to IFSCs across the board, more resources had been allocated to the high-risk districts such as Sham Shui Po and Yuen Long. Moreover, the number of frontline social workers of the 41 IFSCs run by SWD would be increased to 750 in 2016-2017. Increasing the manpower of professional social workers in IFSCs aimed at improving the workload of individual social workers in IFSCs so that they could provide more intensive attention for the cases under their handling. IFSCs run by NGOs under the Lump Sum Grant Subvention System had flexibility to deploy the subventions in arranging suitable staffing to ensure service quality and meet service needs.

Monitoring performance standards of IFSCs

12. Members were concerned about whether a mechanism was in place to monitor the performance standards of IFSCs. The Administration advised that under the existing arrangement, IFSCs were required to submit quarterly statistical reports to SWD. Should any IFSCs fail to meet the performance standards stipulated in the relevant funding and service agreements ("FSAs") with SWD, they were required to submit reports on the substandard performance. As reported by the IFSCs concerned, they were on some occasions unable to meet the performance standards because some duties performed were not counted under FSAs, and some duties were discontinued because of staff movement or the responsible officers had to handle urgent duties. In the light of the explanation, the overall performance of IFSCs was considered satisfactory. Having regard to the recommendations of the Review Report, the Administration had set up a working group to review FSA for IFSCs with a view to updating and adjusting the performance indicators and encouraging IFSCs to develop service initiatives beyond the FSA requirements. With the endorsement of the Committee on IFSCs on the recommendations made by the working group, FSA for IFSCs had been revised and had come into effect since 2011-2012.

13. Members asked whether a mechanism was in place to impose penalties on IFSCs or staff members if they had acted against rules in the course of providing family services. According to the Administration, if a subvented service unit was assessed to be failing to comply with the standards set out in

FSA, it had to submit a service improvement programme. SWD would examine the programme and monitor implementation of the improvement measures. If the service unit had failed to improve its performance or to take suitable follow-up action on any irregularities, SWD might consider withholding or terminating the subvention to the service unit.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 April 2017

Appendix

Relevant papers on Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre service mode

Committee	Date of meeting	Papers
Panel on Welfare Services	12 June 2000 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	12 March 2001 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	9 July 2001 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	7 July 2003 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	10 November 2003 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	9 May 2005 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	9 March 2009 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	11 May 2009 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	14 June 2010 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes CB(2)305/10-11(01)
Panel on Welfare Services	26 June 2010 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	12 December 2011 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes

Panel on Welfare Services	14 March 2012 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	13 November 2013	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 2480-2491
Finance Committee	2 April 2015	Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2015-2016 Page 721
Finance Committee	8 April 2016	Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2016-2017 Page 115

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