

**For discussion on
9 July 2018**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**Consultancy Study on the
Long-term Development of Child Care Services**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the progress of the Consultancy Study on the Long-term Development of Child Care Services (the Study) and seeks Members' views on the direction of the Study's recommendations.

Background

2. In January 2015, the Government announced in the report on "Population Policy: Strategies and Initiatives" and the 2015 Policy Agenda the commissioning of the Study to advise on the long-term development of child care services. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) commissioned the Study in December 2016 to the Department of Social Work and Social Administration of The University of Hong Kong (Consultant Team). A Steering Committee was set up for overseeing and monitoring the progress of the Study, as well as endorsing the work plan and reports submitted by the Consultant Team.

Objectives of the Study

3. The Government and the Consultant Team consulted various stakeholders (including Legislative Council Members, The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), service users, service operators, women's groups, etc.) to collect views on the objectives and scope of the Study. Having regard to the views received from different parties, the Study's objectives are set out below –

- (a) to review the philosophy and policy objectives of day child care services;
- (b) to take stock of the operation modes and service positioning of day child care services;

- (c) to identify service gaps, gauge the demand and supply of day child care services, and explore a systematic and workable service planning mechanism; and
- (d) to advise on the service modes and financing modes of day child care services with reference to the needs of different types of families and other relevant considerations (e.g. cost-effectiveness, sustainability, etc.).

Scope of the Study

4. The Study draws on the experience of overseas places, takes stock of the existing day child care services in Hong Kong and collects views from various stakeholders (including bureaux/departments, advisory bodies, concern groups, service users/potential service users/non-service users, NGOs, local child care service operators, employers, etc.).

5. The Study also makes recommendations on the long-term development of day child care services, covering the following areas –

- (a) the service objectives, service contents, target user groups and planning parameters of aided standalone child care centres (CCCs) which are under SWD's planning and regulatory control;
- (b) the relationship of CCC service, including standalone CCCs and kindergarten-cum-CCCs, with kindergarten education;
- (c) the manpower planning and training for child care staff, including child care workers and child care supervisors;
- (d) the planning mechanism applicable to centre-based day child care services;
- (e) the functions of the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP) and the Mutual Help Child Care Centres (MHCCCs), as well as the improvement measures to enhance service quality and optimise the use of public resources;
- (f) the appropriate service model(s) and financing mode(s) for different types of day child care services;

- (g) the projection of the demand and supply of day child care services;
- (h) the need for re-engineering and integrating different types of day child care services; and
- (i) the role of the Government vis-à-vis private operators in the provision of day child care services.

Inception Report

6. The Inception Report, as endorsed by the Steering Committee, comprises the following parts –

- (a) **Part I**: By drawing reference to the experiences of Singapore, Australia, South Korea and Finland in providing child care services, the Consultant Team would conduct in-depth analyses and make recommendations on the objectives, contents, targets, financing modes, service models, demand and supply situation, facility planning, manpower planning and training, etc. of child care services in Hong Kong.
- (b) **Part II**: Through population projection figures and the geo-spatial analysis technique, the Consultant Team would analyse the supply of day child care services in different districts, examine the operation of existing child care services (including availability, accessibility and affordability) and make integrated analyses.
- (c) **Part III**: Through questionnaire-based survey and/or interviews with service users/potential service users/non-service users, service providers' frontline staff, management and decision-makers, etc., the Consultant Team would solicit their views on the objectives, contents, targets, financing modes, service models, demand and supply situation, facility planning, manpower planning and training, etc. of child care services in Hong Kong, and make in-depth analyses.

Interim Report

7. The Consultant Team submitted the Interim Report in May 2018 for consideration and endorsement by the Steering Committee. Their observations are set out below –

- (a) Cross-jurisdiction comparison on the models of child care services
- The Consultant Team looked into the philosophy, policy objectives and models of child care services in four overseas jurisdictions (i.e. Singapore, Australia, South Korea and Finland, as mentioned in paragraph 6(a) above), and made comparison with those in Hong Kong. As compared to Hong Kong's child care services that focus more on "care" element, the findings demonstrate that there is a global trend of integrating both "care" and "education" elements in child care services. The importance of Early Childhood Education and Care towards children's development is highlighted in the Interim Report.
 - The Consultant Team compared the quality of child care in terms of staff to child ratio, training as well as working condition for staff in the child care systems in the four jurisdictions. The staff to child ratio for children aged under 2 in Hong Kong is higher than that of Australia, Finland and South Korea (i.e. 1:4 in Australia and Finland, 1:3 in South Korea, 1:5 to 1:8 in Singapore and 1:8 in Hong Kong). For children aged 2 to 3, the staff to child ratio in Hong Kong is also higher than that of Australia and Finland (i.e. 1:4 in Finland, 1:5 in Australia, 1:12 in Singapore and 1:14 in Hong Kong). For qualification and training of child care staff, the qualification requirement of child care staff in the four jurisdictions is also higher than that of Hong Kong.
 - The Consultant Team reviewed the monitoring and regulation of child care services adopted in the four jurisdictions. The advantages of adopting a unitary regulation structure are highlighted. In particular, a unitary approach combining systems of care and education can provide optimal support for developing and implementing a child centered approach in child care services.

(b) Demand and supply of child care services

- With the statistical data of 2016 Population By-census obtained from the Census and Statistics Department, the Consultant Team analysed the supply of child care services on three key metrics, i.e. (1) availability; (2) accessibility; and (3) affordability.
- The Consultant Team also divided families with children aged under 6 into three priority categories for child care services –
 - (1) high priority group: children living with parents (both of them working) or working single parents, without helpers;
 - (2) mid priority group: children living with parents (either both of them working or only one of them working) and grandparents, without helpers; and
 - (3) low priority group: families with helpers/relatives/grandparents to help look after the children.
- The findings of the Study show that the provision of child care services is insufficient in general, especially for children aged under 2.

(c) Views of respondents of focus group meetings and questionnaires

- A total of 11 focus group interviews for five groups of stakeholders, including government officials, service providers at managerial level, service providers at frontline level, service users, potential service users and non-service users, were conducted with a total of 103 respondents. The findings show that the respondents generally expect (1) to have education elements integrated into child care services; (2) an adjustment in the manning ratios of CCCs; (3) an increase in the level of incentive payment for home-based child carers of NSCCP; (4) higher accessibility to child care services; (5) re-engineering of MHCCC; and (6) an improvement in the availability of service provision of

occasional child care service, etc.

- The Consultant Team collected a total of 2 100 questionnaires from existing service users, potential service users and non-service users. The findings show that parents have higher satisfaction in services like “caregivers showing warmth and affection” but lower satisfaction in factors like “operating hours and price”. Also, “parents have to work” is the common reason for arranging children to receive child care services, which indicates that the provision of child care services is critical to meeting the demand of working parents.

8. Based on the findings and the observations, the Consultant Team will formulate the direction of the recommendations corresponding to the scope of the Study as set out in paragraph 5(a) to (i) above. The major areas to be covered include –

- (a) Philosophy and positioning of child care services – making changes in the philosophy and positioning as well as policy objectives of child care services, which will steer the development and provision in long run.
- (b) Planning parameters for CCC places to meet the demand – formulating appropriate planning parameters for CCC places, which will consider not only the equality in availability and accessibility of the services at the spatial levels, but also the temporal changes in demand over time.
- (c) Manning ratios for qualified Child Care Workers serving in CCCs – improving the existing manning ratios for CCCs serving children aged 2 to under 3 and children aged 0 to under 2 with a view to enhancing the service quality.
- (d) Enhancement of NSCCP – improving the quality of service by enhancing the training provided to the home-based child carers (HCCs) as well as increasing the level of incentive payments for HCCs.
- (e) Re-engineering of MHCCCs – re-positioning and re-engineering MHCCCs so as to optimise the use of public resources.
- (f) Government subsidy for CCC service – increasing the

level/amount of subsidies provided for CCC places.

Way Forward

9. The Consultant Team is now conducting engagement sessions with different stakeholders, including the relevant advisory bodies, to brief them on the findings and observations in the Interim Report, and the direction of the recommendations of the Study. The Consultant Team would take into account the views collected during the engagement in preparing for the Final Report of the Study, which is expected to be ready by around August 2018.

Advice Sought

10. Members are invited to note the content of this paper and provide views on the direction of the recommendations of the Study set out in paragraph 8 above.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
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