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Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 14 January 2019**

Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services

Purpose

This paper summarizes past discussions of the Council and its committees on the Pilot Scheme on On-Site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services ("OPRS").

Background

2. According to the Administration, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") provides subvented pre-school rehabilitation services for children (from birth to six years old) assessed mainly by the Child Assessment Centres of the Department of Health to be in need of early professional intervention. 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"). EETCs provide early intervention programmes for children aged from birth to six assessed to have mild to moderate disabilities with emphasis on the caring and training role of children's families. SCCC provide special training and care for children aged from two to six assessed to have moderate to severe disabilities to facilitate their growth and development. IP provides training for children aged from two to six assessed to have mild disabilities with emphasis on facilitating their integration into mainstream education.

3. Recognizing the importance of early intervention for children in need of rehabilitation services, SWD launched the Pilot Scheme from November 2015 onwards with a view to enabling pre-school children

with special needs to receive necessary training early in their prime learning period. Under the Pilot Scheme, inter-disciplinary service teams from 16 non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") offer around 3 000 OPRS places at participating kindergartens ("KGs") and kindergarten-cum-child care centres ("KG-cum-CCCs") to provide early intervention for children on the waiting list for subvented pre-school rehabilitation services. The Pilot Scheme also provides professional advice and support for KG teachers/child care workers for children with special needs, and renders support to parents in fostering a positive attitude and acquiring effective skills in raising their children with special needs. With the Pilot Scheme delivering notable preliminary results, the Administration has regularized OPRS in the 2018-2019 school year and increased the number of service places from about 3 000 at present to about 5 000 in October 2018, which will be further increased to 7 000 in October 2019.

Deliberations by Members

Provision of additional pre-school rehabilitation service places

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. Expressing concern that some children on the waiting list for pre-school rehabilitation services were unable to receive necessary training in their prime learning period, these Members suggested that the Administration should set a service provision target and a timetable for achieving zero waiting time for such services. At its meeting on 10 June 2013, the Panel on Welfare Services ("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, as at end-December 2017, there were a total of 7 118 pre-school rehabilitation service places provided by the Administration, with 8 144 children on the waiting list for pre-school rehabilitation services and the average waiting time from 13.5 to 18.2 months. Of these 8 144 children, 1 960 were participating in the Pilot Scheme and 1 442 were receiving training subsidies through the Training Subsidy Programme ("TSP") for Children on the Waiting List of Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services, representing about 40% of those on the waiting list. Apart from regularizing the Pilot Scheme, the

number of TSP places had also been increased from about 1 500 to about 3 000 from October 2017. In parallel, it was estimated that 500 and 900 additional places would be provided for SCCCs and EETCs respectively between 2017-2018 and 2021-2022. In addition, development sites had been earmarked for the provision of about 1 000 additional places under the subvented pre-school rehabilitation services from 2018-2019 to 2020-2021. It was estimated that an additional 3 800 pre-school rehabilitation places would also be provided under the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses¹ and 344 of which would be provided in 2017-2018. The review of the Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan would also study the long-term planning for rehabilitation services. The Administration would continue to assess the demand for pre-school rehabilitation services, and would seek to allocate more resources when necessary to achieve the policy objective of "zero-waiting time" for such services.

6. Some Members considered that the supply of OPRS places would still be inadequate to meet the demand after the provision of 7 000 additional places. They enquired about the justifications for increasing 7 000 OPRS places only, and whether more NGOs would be engaged to meet the service demand arising from these additional service places.

7. The Administration advised that the shortage of allied health professionals (e.g. occupational therapists and physiotherapists) in the welfare sector was the major bottleneck in the increase in pre-school rehabilitation services. Nevertheless, the Administration would still make its best efforts to increase OPRS places progressively in the 2018-2019 to 2019-2020 school years. Given that the number of pre-school students was projected to reach at the peak in the 2017-2018 school year and the number would drop starting from the 2018-2019 school year, the Administration would monitor the service demand and subject to availability of resources, OPRS places could be further increased if necessary.

¹ The Administration launched the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses ("Special Scheme") in September 2013 with a view to making better use of the land owned by non-governmental organizations through redevelopment or expansion to provide diversified subvented and self-financing facilities. An organization applying for the Special Scheme will have to provide on a site under its ownership a net increase in the provision of one or more than one service on the list of facilities set out by the Administration through expansion or redevelopment. Projects under the Special Scheme are funded by the Lotteries Fund.

Evaluation of effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme

8. The Panel was briefed on the progress of the Pilot Scheme and preliminary observations of an evaluative study on the Pilot Scheme at its meeting on 12 February 2018. Some Members enquired about the progress of the evaluative study. According to the Administration, SWD had commissioned a consulting team headed by the City University of Hong Kong ("the Consulting Team") to carry out an evaluative study on the Pilot Scheme and review the service models of various NGO service operators, with a view to formulating the modes and standards of services to be regularized in the 2018-2019 school year. The Consulting Team was consulting NGO service operators, KGs/KG-cum-CCCs and parents/parents' groups on the preliminary observations of the evaluative study and gauged their views on the regularization of the Pilot Scheme. It was envisaged that the final report would be completed in the third quarter of 2018.

9. Given that the number of KGs/KG-cum-CCCs to be served by participating NGOs would vary, some Members expressed concern that there would be an imbalanced allocation of resources to these KGs/KG-cum-CCCs. The Administration advised that it had stringently assessed the capacity of participating NGOs versus the service quota they proposed. The Administration would allocate a suitable number of project teams to participating NGOs according to the assessment results, where each project team would need to serve 100 children. Participating NGOs might flexibly deploy a small number of surplus service quota to children who were studying in KGs or KG-cum-CCCs and were waiting for assessment.

Supply of allied health professionals for the Pilot Scheme

10. Some Members were concerned about whether the existing supply of allied health professionals could cope with the growth in the service demand brought about by the Pilot Scheme. According to the Administration, the Consulting Team would put forward recommendations on the mode of the regularized services, including staffing establishment and the optimal mix of allied health professionals and other professionals in the multi-disciplinary service teams, as well as standards of services. Taking into consideration the recommendations of the evaluative study, SWD would review the manpower required for the services.

11. Given that the additional OPRS places would be provided in phases, some Members took the view that the Administration should have time to plan ahead for the manpower supply for these service places.

They suggested that the Administration should disseminate information on the types and numbers of allied health professionals required for the additional service places so that tertiary institutions could plan for offering relevant programmes.

12. According to the Administration, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University ("PolyU") had organized the postgraduate entry-level two-year Master programme in Occupational Therapy ("OT") and two-year Master programme in Physiotherapy ("PT") in 2012, 2014 and 2017. These programmes would be organized again in 2019. Furthermore, the shortage of speech therapists had been alleviated as more tertiary institutions had offered Master programmes in Speech Therapy in recent years and there were more than 130 graduates of the programmes in a year. Besides, SWD implemented a training sponsorship scheme to sponsor the tuition fees of students enrolled in the Master programmes in OT and PT organized by PolyU to encourage them to join the welfare sector upon graduation. Students were required to serve at the relevant NGOs for three years upon graduation. There would be 60 odd graduates of these programmes in 2019. To relieve the shortage of occupational therapists and physiotherapists for the welfare sector, SWD would continue to implement the training sponsorship scheme. In addition, to increase the supply of educational psychologists and clinical psychologists, publicly funded universities had planned to increase the places for the relevant programmes in the 2019-2022 triennium.

Relevant papers

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

Appendix

Relevant papers on Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	10 June 2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	14 December 2015 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	12 February 2018 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes LC Paper No. CB(2)978/17-18(01)
Panel on Health Services, Panel on Education and Panel on Welfare Services	23 April 2018 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	23 May 2018	Official Record of Proceedings (Pages 162-167)
Panel on Welfare Services	30 October 2018 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes

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