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Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the special meeting on 23 September 2020**

**Support for carers and provision of residential care services for
persons with disabilities**

Purpose

This paper gives an account of past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services on support for carers of persons with disabilities and provision of residential care services ("RCS") for persons with disabilities.

Background

Support for carers of persons with disabilities

2. According to the Administration, it is committed to providing support for carers of persons with disabilities. Through the provision of a wide range of community care and support services, the Administration assists persons with disabilities in developing their physical, mental and social capabilities to the fullest possible extent, thereby promoting their integration into the community; and strengthen the carers' caring capacity and relieve their burden. Support offered to carers includes providing them with training and counselling services, helping them with the formation of mutual-assistance groups and setting up of resource centres with a view to strengthening their caring capacity and relieving their burden.

3. The Administration has, through the Community Care Fund ("CCF") under the Commission on Poverty ("CoP"), launched the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities

("the Pilot Scheme") in October 2016. The Pilot Scheme provides carers of persons with disabilities from low-income families with a living allowance to help supplement their living expenses, so that persons with disabilities with long-term care needs may, with their carers' assistance, receive more proper care and continue to live in a familiar community. The Pilot Scheme was originally scheduled to close in September 2018, but CoP endorsed on 21 June 2018 the implementation of the Pilot Scheme Phase II for a period of two years from October 2018 to September 2020.

Provision of residential care services for persons with disabilities

4. According to the Administration, various kinds of subsidized RCS¹ are provided to those who cannot live independently or cannot be adequately cared for by their families. In line with the strategic directions enshrined in the Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan, the Administration has introduced a statutory licensing scheme for residential care homes for persons with disabilities ("RCHDs") to regulate their standards and operation since November 2011. As a complementary measure, the Administration has also launched the Bought Place Scheme for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities ("BPS") on a pilot basis since October 2011. BPS sought to encourage operators of private RCHDs to upgrade the service standard, shorten the waiting time for services by increasing the overall supply of subsidized RCS places, and help the market develop more service options. BPS has been regularized since October 2014.

5. To identify persons with disabilities with genuine need for RCS and to match them with appropriate types of services, the Administration implemented the Standardized Assessment Mechanism for Residential Services for People with Disabilities in January 2005. All persons with disabilities applying for subvented RCS are required to undergo the standardized assessment before they are put on the waiting list for or provided with RCS.

¹ Residential care services for persons with disabilities include Hostel for Severely Mentally Handicapped Persons, Hostel for Moderately Mentally Handicapped Persons, Supported Hostel, Care and Attention Home for Severely Disabled Persons, Hostel for Severely Physically Handicapped Persons, Long Stay Care Home, Halfway House, Care and Attention Home for the Aged Blind, Integrated Vocational Training Centre (Residential Service), Small Group Home for Mildly Mentally Handicapped Children/Integrated Small Group Home and Residential Special Child Care Centre, etc.

Deliberations of the Panel

Support for carers of persons with disabilities

Enhancing support for carers of persons with disabilities

6. Some members called on the Administration to provide comprehensive community support services for persons with disabilities and their carers, which should include establishing a case management system and database, arranging family visits and providing household cleaning and meal delivery services.

7. The Administration advised that the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") had been providing an array of subsidized community care services for persons with disabilities and their carers, with the aim to help persons with disabilities to stay in the community and assist their carers in coping with the difficulties in taking care of them. These services included parents/relatives resource centres, respite service, district support centres for persons with disabilities, home care service for persons with severe disabilities, integrated support service for persons with severe physical disabilities, day care service for persons with severe disabilities and integrated community centres for mental wellness. These services covered emotional support, personal and nursing care, rehabilitation training, day care, home respite service, escort service, and cash subsidies for renting respiratory support medical equipment and purchasing medical consumables. SWD would conduct timely review of these services so as to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and their carers.

8. Some members urged the Administration to conduct surveys on the demographic structure, care-giving situation and service needs of carers so as to provide carers with the necessary support. They considered that the Administration should publish the findings of these surveys on a regular basis. The Administration advised that while it had no plan to conduct a survey on carers at this stage, it had taken note of the demand for various types of services for persons with disabilities and increased the supply of such services with a view to relieving the burden of carers.

Provision of emergency and daytime respite service

9. Noting that some carers were unable to attend to urgent personal matters due to a lack of emergency respite service for persons with disabilities and that some carers were unable to take a short break because they could not afford the fees of daytime respite service, some members urged the Administration to provide emergency respite service for persons

with disabilities and reduce the fees for daytime respite service.

10. The Administration advised that SWD would purchase some 40 places from private RCHDs joining BPS (including those providing high level of care) to serve as designated residential respite places so that carers of persons with disabilities living in the community might take a short break to attend to their personal business and make their life less stressful. In addition, SWD launched the Vacancy Enquiry System for Residential Respite Service for Persons with Disabilities, Residential Respite Service for the Elderly and Emergency Placement for the Elderly in December 2019, with a view to facilitating persons with disabilities/elderly persons and their carers to search for information on vacant residential respite places.

Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities

11. Some members held the view that in determining the eligibility for the Pilot Scheme, the Administration should take into account a carer's capability of taking up the care-giving role rather than his/her income. These members suggested that given the great demand for carers, the Administration should lower the eligibility threshold, such as relaxing the income limit or removing the income assessment requirement in the long run. Noting that in order to be eligible for the living allowance under the Pilot Scheme, carers must not be recipients of Disability Allowance and the persons of disabilities they took care of must be on the waiting lists for specified rehabilitation services subsidized by SWD, some members urged the Administration to abolish such requirements.

12. According to the Administration, as CCF's programmes aimed to provide assistance for the needy who fell outside or were not covered by the safety net under the current social welfare system, carers who applied for joining the Pilot Scheme should be subject to income test so as to enable the effective use of limited public resources. Besides, the income threshold under the Pilot Scheme, which was set at not more than 75% of the Median Monthly Domestic Household Income, was among the lowest of all means-tested assistance schemes. Other social security protection such as Comprehensive Social Security Assistance was available to individuals who had financial needs. It was not the Government's policy to provide financial assistance for all carers irrespective of their income levels.

13. Some members took the view that the Administration should lower the threshold and streamline the application procedures so that more carers

could benefit from the Pilot Scheme. The Administration should also increase the level of living allowance and regularize the Pilot Scheme. These members urged the Administration to review the Pilot Scheme without further delay to alleviate the financial burden of carers.

14. The Administration advised that SWD had commissioned the Sau Po Centre on Ageing of the University of Hong Kong to conduct an evaluation study on the Pilot Scheme with a view to helping the Administration consider the way forward for the Pilot Scheme. SWD would review the existing criteria, the levels of allowances and the way forward for the Pilot Scheme in the light of the results of the evaluation study.

Residential care service places for persons with disabilities

Expediting the provision of residential care services

15. Noting with grave concern about the long waiting time for hostels for mentally handicapped persons, some members held a strong view that the provision of subvented RCS for persons with disabilities should be expedited and a pledge for reducing the waiting time for RCS places for persons with disabilities should be made. These members also stressed the need for the Administration to formulate a long-term plan and set targets for the provision of RCHDs and hostels for mentally handicapped persons. They suggested that the Administration should consider allocating a certain percentage of the total floor area of new public rental housing projects for setting up RCHDs and providing RCS places for persons with disabilities and hostels for mentally handicapped persons in Home Ownership Scheme flats and government premises.

16. The Administration advised that as at end-December 2018, there were 315 RCHDs offering around 17 000 RCS places for persons with disabilities. From 2019-2020 to 2021-2022, about 3 800 additional daytime rehabilitation services and RCS places were expected to be provided gradually through planned development projects. In 2020-2021, 345 additional RCS places would be purchased under BPS, and 130 additional day rehabilitation service places would be provided through purchase of premises. The Administration further advised that it would be difficult to set a target for reducing the waiting time as the waiting time would be affected by factors such as the location preference of individual waitlistees and the slow turnover of RCS places due to ageing of persons with disabilities, particularly the ageing of persons with intellectual disabilities. The Administration considered it necessary to review the mode of services having regard to the ageing of persons with disabilities. To this end, the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee had set up a Working

Group on Ageing of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities to examine in detail the service needs having regard to the ageing of persons with intellectual disabilities as well as the provision and the mode of the related services. A survey on the service users' profiles was being conducted to collect data for studying the supply of and demand for the services.

Monitoring of residential care homes for persons with disabilities

17. Some members urged the Administration to step up the regulation of RCHDs so as to enhance their quality of service and prevent abuse of residents of RCHDs. Casting doubt on the effectiveness of the inspection and licensing system for monitoring RCHDs, these members took the view that the Administration should conduct a comprehensive review of the inspection system for and step up the monitoring of RCHDs by putting in place a round-the-clock inspection mechanism or conducting inspections at night.

18. The Administration advised that the inspection teams of the Licensing Office of Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities ("LORCHD") conducted around 2 000 inspections to RCHDs every year. If irregularities were detected during the inspections, depending on the severity of the irregularities, advisory or warning letters would be issued to the non-compliant RCHDs. In addition, under the Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) Ordinance (Cap. 613), SWD might issue directions to RCHDs to direct remedial measures. SWD might take prosecution actions if the RCHD concerned failed to comply with the requirements specified in a direction. In 2018-2019 (as at end-December), LORCHD had issued 238 advisory letters and two warning letters to RCHDs. Besides, the number of inspectors responsible for RCHD inspection had been increased to more than 20 in the past few years. Under the enhanced mechanism, these inspectors had strategically conducted surprise inspections in the form of small teams or multi-disciplinary inspectorate teams during office hours and non-office hours as well as on public holidays.

19. The Administration further advised that to enhance the monitoring and upgrade the service quality of RCHDs, SWD had established a notification mechanism with the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority for early identification of and follow-up on problem areas of RCHDs. Training programmes for RCHD staff would be provided and guidelines would be issued to RCHDs as necessary for assisting them in improving their management of operation and services. The Administration had also launched a five-year scheme in March 2019 to provide full subsidies in phases for home managers, health workers and

care workers of all RCHDs in the territory to enroll in Qualifications Framework-based training courses to enhance the service quality of RCHDs.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Appendix

Relevant papers on support for carers and provision of residential care services for persons with disabilities

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy	21 November 2017 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Welfare Services	9 July 2018 (Items III and IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
	11 February 2019 (Item III)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
	22 February 2019 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
	15 April 2019 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>

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