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**Panel on Welfare Services**

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council  
Secretariat for the meeting on 8 March 2021**

**Long-term planning for provision of child care services**

**Purpose**

This paper gives an account of past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") on long-term planning for provision of child care services.

**Background**

2. The Government announced, in the report on "Population Policy: Strategies and Initiatives" in January 2015 and the 2015 Policy Agenda, the commissioning of the Consultancy Study on the Long-term Development of Child Care Services ("the Study") to advise on the long-term development of child care services. The Social Welfare Department ("SWD") commissioned in December 2016 the Department of Social Work and Social Administration of The University of Hong Kong ("the Consultant Team") to conduct the Study. The Consultant Team furnished the final report of the Study in November 2018, putting forward a total of 11 recommendations.<sup>1</sup>

3. The Administration accepted in principle the recommendations put forward by the Consultant Team and proposed in 2018 the following initiatives to follow up certain recommendations with a view to improving

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<sup>1</sup> The final report of the Study (English version only) can be accessed at the website of the Social Welfare Department at [https://www.swd.gov.hk/storage/asset/section/219/en/Final\\_Report\\_updated\\_version\\_eng\\_\(W3C\).pdf](https://www.swd.gov.hk/storage/asset/section/219/en/Final_Report_updated_version_eng_(W3C).pdf).

the quality of child care services:

- (a) formulating planning ratio for the provision of child care centre ("CCC") places;
- (b) enhancing the manning ratios for qualified child care workers serving in day and residential CCCs;
- (c) increasing the level of subsidy for CCC service so as to alleviate parents' financial burden in paying service fees;
- (d) enhancing the service quality of the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project ("NSCCP") by increasing the number of professional and supporting staff and strengthening the training for home-based child carers; and
- (e) re-engineering in phases the existing Mutual Help Child Care Centres ("MHCCCs") and enhancing manpower support by additional social workers and supporting staff, as well as considering to convert these centres to provide after-school care services for pre-school children so as to further meet the child care needs in the community.

According to the Administration, it will examine the follow-up measures or explore the feasible options for the remaining recommendations proposed in the final report of the Study, including promotion on and dissemination of information on child care services, review on the distribution of the occasional child care services, enhancement on the monitoring system, streamlining of administrative procedures, assessment of service quality, enhancement on the cost-effectiveness, etc. If the recommendations are considered appropriate, the Administration will introduce relevant measures in a timely manner.

### **Deliberations of the Panel**

4. The Panel discussed the Study at three meetings held between July 2018 and January 2019 and received views from deputations on the final report of the Study at one of the meetings. In the context of receiving briefings from the Secretary for Labour and Welfare on the welfare initiatives featuring in the Chief Executive's 2019 and 2020 Policy Addresses, the Panel also received updates from the Administration on the implementation progress of the measures being put in place in response to

the recommendations of the Study. The deliberations and concerns of members are summarized in the following paragraphs.

#### Increasing supply of child care services

5. In the light of the long waiting time for CCC places, members had long been calling for the formulation of a planning ratio for the provision of CCC places. They noted that it was recommended under the Study that for children aged below three, a planning ratio of 103 aided CCC places per 20 000 general population should be set. Some members expressed concern about whether the proposed planning ratio was feasible and enquired about the Administration's plan for implementing the proposed planning ratio. There were suggestions that the Administration should consider reserving lower floors of new public rental housing ("PRH") estates and using idle spaces in existing PRH estates to provide child care services, and imposing conditions on land sale site projects to require developers to include the provision of child care facilities in commercial development projects.

6. According to the Administration, it had included the population-based planning ratio for subsidized CCC places in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines in March 2020. In the course of planning, relevant bureaux or departments were expected to reserve suitable premises for operating CCCs according to the planning ratio. Given that it might require 10 years or more to meet the proposed planning ratio, the Administration in the meantime would continue to look for suitable sites for operating CCCs. When receiving briefing on the welfare initiatives featuring in the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address, members were advised that 10 CCCs (involving about 900 aided CCC places) had been planned for provision in the coming three or four years through various development projects (e.g. Land Sale Programmes, Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses, development or redevelopment of PRH estates and urban renewal projects). In addition, SWD planned to provide an additional 1 000 child care service places in phases from 2021-2022 through the purchase of premises initiative<sup>2</sup>.

7. Pointing out that the population size of children varied from district to district, some members were concerned about the supply of child care

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<sup>2</sup> A commitment of \$20 billion was approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council on 30 June 2020 for the Government to purchase premises in the private property market for over some three years for the provision of welfare facilities. In respect of child care facilities, it was proposed that 28 CCCs would be accommodated in the premises acquired through the purchase exercise.

services for various districts in future. The Administration advised that the Planning Department would adopt a macro perspective instead of taking into account the demography of individual districts during the planning process. Given that the demand for child care services would be affected by factors such as changes in the number of families with domestic helpers or grandparents who could help look after the children, changes in the population of small children, etc., the planning ratio would need to be reviewed periodically. In the context of receiving briefing on the welfare initiatives featuring in the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address, members were advised that SWD planned to provide in phases about 400 long full day child care service places in aided standalone CCCs for children aged below three in North District, Kwun Tong, Kwai Tsing, Sha Tin and Yuen Long.

#### Improving manning ratios for qualified child care workers serving in child care centres

8. Members noted that the Administration had drawn reference to the Study's recommendations and enhanced the manning ratios for qualified child care workers serving in aided day CCCs from 1:8 to 1:6 for children aged zero to under two, and from 1:14 to 1:11 for children aged two to under three in September 2019. With reference to the manning ratio for day CCCs, the ratio for residential CCCs had also been adjusted accordingly in September 2019. Pointing out that the manning ratios for children aged under two in Singapore and South Korea were 1:5 and 1:3 respectively, some members held the view that the enhanced manning ratio of 1:6 lagged behind global practices and might not meet public expectation. These members called on the Administration to further improve the manning ratios for qualified child care workers serving in day CCCs.

9. The Administration advised that in accordance with the Child Care Services Regulations (Cap. 243A), the statutory minimum manning ratio for child care workers working in CCCs were 1:8 for children under two years of age. The enhanced manning ratio of 1:6 was proposed on top of meeting the minimum requirement with a view to improving service quality. The number of qualified child care workers required had already been increased by one-third under the enhanced manning ratio. In view of the stringent manpower supply of child care workers, it would not be feasible to achieve a manning ratio of 1:4 in the short term.

### Raising the level of subsidy for child care services

10. Expressing concern that service users of aided standalone CCCs or aided CCCs attached to kindergartens were required to pay monthly fees amounted to an average of about 80% of the service operation costs, members asked whether the Administration would consider providing full fee remission for these service users to alleviate parents' financial burden. Members were subsequently advised that the Child Care Centre Parent Subsidy had been introduced in February 2020 to partially subsidize the CCC service fee afforded by parents directly. In the light of the enhanced manning ratio for qualified CCWs serving in aided day CCCs, the Subsidy for Further Manpower Enhancement had been introduced in 2019-2020, raising the subsidy level of aided standalone CCCs from 20% to 34%.

### Enhancing Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project

11. Some members expressed concern that while NSCCP was welcomed by many working parents, the supply of home-based child carers under NSCCP could not meet the demand as these carers were volunteers. There was a view from some stakeholders that home-based child carers should be full-time employed. Given the great demand for home-based child carers, these members were of the view that NSCCP should be systematized and revamped. The Administration should also consider increasing the level of incentive payment and enhancing training for home-based child carers so as to improve the quality of their services. At the meeting on 9 July 2018, the Panel passed a motion urging the Government to increase the incentive payment for home-based child carers to a level comparable to the statutory minimum wage; cover the round-trip transport cost of child carers to facilitate their provision of pick-up services for the children; and enhance the training for home-based child carers and set up a monitoring system to enhance the service quality and home safety of these carers.

12. The Administration advised that the employment of home-based child carers as employees of service operators would involve the consideration of issues in relation to monitoring, regulation, training, employees' compensation insurance, mandatory provident fund, statutory minimum wage, long service payment, etc. It required further study as to whether there was room to engage home-based child carers as part-time workers whose service quality would be subject to monitoring and whether a registration system for HCCs should be established. Members were subsequently advised that additional provision had been provided to increase professional and supporting staff to strengthen training for

home-based child carers since January 2020, and raise the level of incentive payment for home-based child carers to encourage more volunteers to serve as child carers.

### Re-engineering of Mutual Help Child Care Centres

13. Members noted that the utilization rate of the 19 MHCCCs, which were currently run by non-governmental organizations on a fee-charging and self-financing basis to provide flexible form of child care service for children aged below three (children aged below six could also use the service if needed), was low in recent years. Some members considered that when the Administration re-engineered MHCCCs in phases to convert them to provide after-school care service for children aged between three and six as per the recommendation of the Study, it should provide adequate support for MHCCCs and consider the affordability of service users.

14. According to the Administration, the utilization rate of MHCCCs had been low since the implementation of NSCCP as there was an overlap in the functions of MHCCCs and NSCCP, with the latter being more flexible in meeting the needs of parents who had to work long or irregular hours. The Administration had completed a feasibility study in April 2020 on the provision of after school care service for children aged three to six in suitable welfare facilities with a proposed way forward of revamping MHCCCs. SWD would re-engineer the 19 MHCCCs in phases from 2020-2021 onwards through additional provision of social workers and supporting staff to further meet the child care needs in the community.

### **Relevant papers**

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

**Relevant papers on long-term planning  
for provision of child care services**

| <b>Committee</b>          | <b>Date of meeting</b>         | <b>Paper</b>  |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Panel on Welfare Services | 9 July 2018<br>(Item V)        | <a href="#">Agenda</a><br><a href="#">Minutes</a>                                       |
|                           | 10 December 2018<br>(Item III) | <a href="#">Agenda</a><br><a href="#">Minutes</a>                                       |
|                           | 19 January 2019<br>(Item I)    | <a href="#">Agenda</a><br><a href="#">Minutes</a>                                       |
|                           | 1 November 2019<br>(Item I)    | <a href="#">Agenda</a><br><a href="#">Minutes</a><br><a href="#">CB(2)447/19-20(01)</a> |
|                           | 30 December 2020               | <a href="#">CB(2)504/20-21(03)</a>  |

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