

For discussion
on 14 June 1999

LEGCO PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES
Review of School Social Work Service

PURPOSE

This paper informs members of the Administration's response to the recommendations of the Working Group on the Review of School Social Work Service (the Working Group).

BACKGROUND

Working Group on the Review of School Social Work Service

2. At the meeting of the Panel held on 27 July 1998, Members have considered a draft report on the Review of School Social Work Service.

3. During the consultation period from 6 July to 19 September 1998, over 1,400 copies of the Draft Report were distributed to over 1,100 units or organisations within the welfare and education sectors. Consultation sessions were held for major boards and committees including this Panel, the Social Welfare Advisory Committee, the Board of Education, the Commission on Youth, and the Fight Crime Committee. Some 31,500 returns in the form of letters and

questionnaires covering views on the draft report were received. They were generally supportive of the package of improvement measures, while an overwhelming majority of the respondents suggested that the manning ration of school social workers should be improved to 1:1,000 for all secondary schools.

Major Recommendations of the Working Group

4. Taking into account the views of the public, the Working Group agreed on a package of improvement measures to enhance the provision of school social work service. Highlights of the major recommendations of the final Report include:-

- (a) the existing roles of school social workers should be refocused to reflect their professional functions in providing social welfare service;

- (b) school social workers should assist in mobilising community-based family and child welfare services, in particular family life education service, to support students and parents through parent-teacher associations;

- (c) the existing provision at the manning ratio of one school social worker for every 1,000 students for ALA schools is acceptable; the same level of provision should be applied to new ALA schools. To ensure the most effective use of available

resources, the continued status of ALA schools should be reviewed;

- (d) the manning ratio for non-ALA schools should be improved from 1:2,000 to 1:1,500 subject to availability of resources. However, as there are non-ALA schools which may require further improvement to the manning ratio of one school social worker to 1,000 student population, the Steering Committee will work out an assessment mechanism to further improve manning ratio for schools with demonstrable needs;

- (e) co-ordination and interfacing between school social work service and other community-based services for young people and facilities should be strengthened. School social workers are to be recognised as an integral part of the student guidance team;

- (f) a Steering Committee on School Social Work Service, comprising representatives from the Social Welfare Department, Education Department, and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, non-governmental organisations operating school social work service and school personnel and parents etc., should be set up to oversee the recommendations of the Review Report, to monitor and review the

future direction and development of the service and recommend measures in meeting the changing needs of students;

- (g) a comprehensive multi-disciplinary guideline, setting out the division of responsibilities among school social workers, the school guidance teams and other professionals, should be developed jointly by SWD, ED and the NGO sector; and
- (h) the Funding and Service Agreement and Service Quality Standards should be adopted by the non- governmental operating agencies upon its implementation.

The Administration's response

5. Having examined the recommendations in the Working Group Report and the public views on the various recommendations, the Administration is generally agreeable to the package of proposed measures which will help improve the provision of social work support to the students in schools. Recommendations (a) and (b) are expected to help set out more clearly the role of school social workers vis-a-vis other professionals working in schools, such as the guidance teachers, and help avoid any overlapping of responsibilities. Recommendations (e) to (g) will help facilitate co-ordination and interfacing of duties, particularly those between the school-based and community-based services. Recommendation (h) can be implemented as part of the Service

Performance Monitoring System which has been brought into operation, by phases, over the next 3 years from April this year. As regards recommendations (c) and (d) on manpower provisions, the Administration has carefully considered the proposed arrangements, taking into account public comments on the proposal, and would like to put forward an alternative option.

6. We note that recommendations (c) and (d) have yet to meet the strong demands of the education and welfare sectors to provide one social worker in every secondary school. In addition, it is difficult to develop objective and widely-accepted criteria to allocate resources in the school social work service, as the needs and composition of students of individual schools differ from time to time. The need for frequent review and re-allocation of resources amongst schools with different academic standards would inevitably create administrative difficulties. Further, the major objection to the proposed manning ratio of 1:1,500 was that this would not allow a full-time social worker to be allocated to each school, thus adversely affecting the quality of service provided and hampering the effectiveness in the interface between the school-based and non-school based welfare services.

The Administration's proposal

7. We therefore propose that:-

- (a) one full-time school social worker post should be provided in each secondary school; and

- (b) other service demands of students should be met by existing youth welfare resources in the community.

8. Policy and funding responsibility for the school social work service would remain with the Health and Welfare Bureau/Social Welfare Department, Resources required for implementing the proposal will be provided from redeploying resources from existing youth services. This is consistent with our approach to allocate resources to those services which are of highest priority. As regards the provision for new schools, we propose to give the same scale of provision for new secondary schools as part of a school's standard operating budget provided for, as the recurrent consequences of the commissioning of new schools.

Justification

9. The proposal to provide one post in each school, as part of the school's total establishment reflects the role of the school social worker as an integral and important component in the education service, in which all young people participate, This would help meet the concerns raised by the community about the need to strengthen manpower provision for school social work in individual schools. This position was also strongly supported by this Panel, members of the Social Welfare Advisory Committee, the Board of Education, the Commission on Youth, and other community organisations involved in youth services.

10. A dedicated school social worker in each school will help enhance the co-ordination and mobilization of community resources to support the needs of the students, their families and the schools. It is also expected to facilitate the flexible deployment of community resources and target them at the most needy areas. For those schools with proven needs, additional support from existing community services can be channelled to help the students through the co-ordination of the school social worker.

11. This standard provision will also help overcome the labelling effect on ALA schools, which exists under the present allocation system. The school is considered the most convenient venue to identify the welfare needs of young people and to provide preventive and remedial services as part of the nine-year compulsory education system. With increased stationing time in schools, school social workers will have greater interaction with students, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of service delivery.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

12. The cost of providing the school social work service today (300 units) is approximately \$190m. To implement the proposal of one school social worker in each secondary school, 153 additional units, costing approximately \$97m, would be required to meet the needs of existing schools and new schools coming on stream in the 1999/2000 school year. The resources required will be redeployed from existing youth service.

ADVICE SOUGHT

13. Members are invited to comment on the Administration's proposal as outlined in paragraphs 7 and 8. Subject to the advice of this Panel, a Steering Committee on School Social Work Service, as outlined in paragraph 4(f) above, will be set up to oversee the implementation of the recommendations to further strengthen the school social work service.

Health and Welfare Bureau/
Social Welfare Department
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