

LEGCO PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES

Social Welfare Planning Mechanism : Report of the Annual Consultation Session with the Welfare Sector for Priorities in 2007-08 and Beyond on 23 June 2006

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the outcome of the annual consultation session with the welfare sector for priorities in 2007-08 and beyond held on 23 June 2006.

Background

2. As foreshadowed in the paper titled 'Social Welfare Planning Mechanism' (LC Paper No. CB(2)1874/05-06(05)) for the Panel meeting on 8 May 2006, we held the first part of the annual consultation session with the welfare sector on 23 June 2006 to gather their views on the proposed priorities for 2007-08 and beyond. Members requested that we report the outcome of the discussions after the session. This paper provides the information required.

Outcome

3. The consultation was held on 23 June 2006 and a total of about 230 participated, including those from the subvented Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the relevant advisory committees, self-help groups on rehabilitation, the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau and the Social Welfare Department.

4. The focus of the discussions was on the consolidation of new/enhanced and existing services as well as any potential service gaps; and enhancements and sharpening of focus of existing services in 2007-08 and beyond. Apart from the discussions on the more immediate priorities, the discussions also touched on the longer-term vision.

5. To allow more focused discussion on each welfare service area, there were four parallel sessions to cover respectively family and children, youth, elderly and rehabilitation services. There were about 50 to 60 participants in

each session and they were eager to put up their views and suggestions. A summary of their views on each service area is at Annexes I to IV. These are also distributed to the participants.

6. The Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (SHWF) and Director of Social Welfare (DSW) listened carefully to the views expressed, including the reporting of the views expressed for each service area. They responded to the points raised generally and undertook to examine the views in greater detail after the session. The key messages from the Administration were :

- (a) welfare planning was a long and complex process involving many parties, including discussions with LegCo, advisory committees, NGOs and service users. The annual consultation sessions were just part of that process. The annual Policy Address and Policy Agenda set out the Government's views and priorities in the longer-term development of the welfare system;
- (b) while a vision is required for the development in the longer run, we should also formulate more concrete tasks for the more immediate future; and
- (c) NGOs should forge closer partnership with the relevant stakeholders, particularly at the district level, and enhance cooperation among NGOs themselves to create synergy and increase overall capabilities in responding to the changing needs of the community.

7. On individual service areas, SHWF indicated that :

- (a) family and children services : the Integrated Family Service Centres provided a basic safety network for families for the respective territorial coverage and they might handle the more difficult cases in collaboration with the other specialist service providers in the district;
- (b) youth services : youth problems were complex and evolving and more creative solutions/strategies were required;
- (c) elderly services : the Elderly Commission had set a clear long-term vision for the future development of elderly care, namely to enable

the elders to age in the community with the support of appropriate services. Among other things, issues such as local resistance to residential care homes for the elderly in their neighbourhood and difficulties of Residential Care Homes for the Elderly and other elderly service operators in recruiting and retaining nurses and other care staff would need to be tackled; and

- (d) *rehabilitation services* : community living was the general direction. Issues of employment and community/residential care were the priorities. For barrier-free access for people with disabilities, a gradual and pragmatic approach should be adopted. We would work with the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee for advice on the possible way forward in the area of information technology and communication to facilitate full integration of people with disabilities into society.

Way Forward

8. We are considering in greater details the views collated at the forum in formulating the priorities for welfare services for 2007-08 and beyond. This ties in with the policy and resource planning cycle of the Government. We will also report the views gathered to the relevant advisory committees for any further discussions as appropriate. The forum, is however, not the only occasion to solicit views from the welfare sector. We will continue to use other channels to receive views from them as well.

9. SHWF will also brief the welfare sector on the major new initiatives after the announcement of the Policy Address, say in November 2006.

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**Summary of Views Expressed by the Welfare Sector
in Family and Children Services
at the Consultation Session held on 23 June 2006**

- There was high public expectation on the outcomes of the services delivered by the Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs), and hence the pressure experienced by the IFSC social workers. Public expectation should be managed properly, and that family problems could not be resolved by the intervention of social workers or the provision of social welfare services alone (see below).
- There was consensus on the importance of preventive work, early identification and appropriate follow-up. The high demand of remedial case work in IFSCs had strained the resources for preventive work. More supportive services would be required as more at risk cases are identified at an earlier stage in preventive programmes.
- There were participants who suggested that there was a need to strengthen IFSC's preventive work, including fostering cross-sectoral collaboration and partnership with schools, community organizations, private sector, etc., and identifying risk factors pertaining to vulnerable clientele to provide targeted support and services.
- Preventive work would become more important with the emergence of new family issues and needy families who are unwilling to seek help. Family issues may arise from changing social conditions, such as cross-boundary marriages, Hong Kong residents working in the Mainland and Hong Kong school children residing in the Mainland. Some participants raised concern over the increasing incidence of domestic violence and the service need of ethnic minorities.
- Apart from the social welfare sector, other sectors of the community should be mobilized to support families and children. The existence of integrated family services and other complementary services are not mutually exclusive. While acknowledging the additional resources for IFSCs to launch the Family Support Programme, there were participants who considered that the overall resource requirements of IFSCs should be further reviewed. The

model of collaboration between IFSCs and other types of organizations should also be further looked into. There were views that support should be provided to the non-subservent sector and their contribution should be considered in the service planning mechanism. Some of IFSC's existing duties such as assessing housing needs on social grounds might be taken up by other parties, as it had taken up much time of IFSC workers at present.

- Some participants considered that the existing family service should be made more comprehensive. For example, a 24-hour hotline could be set up to respond to family crisis around the clock where immediate intervention is critical.
- There was concern from some participants over the interest of children amid changing social and family conditions. Initiative such as the Comprehensive Child Development Service to facilitate early identification and intervention of the problems of the children and their families was considered a good start. There was also concern over the support facilities for families with children such as pre-primary education and flexible child care services. There were views on the need to devise an overall child policy to be overseen by a Children's Commission.

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**Summary of Views Expressed by the Welfare Sector
in Youth Services
at the Consultation Session held on 23 June 2006**

- The burden on the youth in future would increase in light of the aging population. We would need to consider how to build up the capacity of young people in terms of commitment and responsibility.
- There were abundant time-limited resources for tackling youth unemployment problems. But, the problem could not be solved simply through engagement in temporary jobs. Cross-bureau/department and cross-sectoral collaboration was required. In particular, it was noted that the “bottom 10%” of youths, many with mental problems, were unable to get a job. More intensive welfare and employment assistance should be provided for this group.
- Many NGOs had implemented innovative services to help the youth in finding a job, such as partnering with the business sector in running career fora and organizing vocational training and workshops at district levels. Sharing of such good practices should be promoted.
- Mental health problems in youth were getting serious but manpower resources with suitable training seemed to be insufficient. Since mental health was a cross-cutting issue, interfacing and joint efforts with the medical, rehabilitation and educational fronts should be strengthened. Deployment of additional staff and training resources to Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs) to form specialized teams to tackle the youth mental problems could be considered.
- The respective roles of teachers and social workers in tackling youth mental health problems at schools could be more clearly defined. While social workers were responsible mainly for remedial actions, teachers could be more proactive in taking preventive measures and identifying youths with special needs at an early stage.
- A community-oriented approach should be adopted in tackling youth mental health problems. NGOs’ collaboration with district groups

and service units in organizing programmes such as volunteering work, art therapy groups, IT training, etc. were effective in helping these young people re-integrate into the society.

- While the current service model on youth was moving towards service integration under ICYSCs, specialized services to meet the specific needs of different groups might be required to tackle problems such as gambling, web and drug addiction problems.
- There was no serious concern about the lack of funding but the planning could be strengthened. A longer-term and holistic planning mechanism for youth services might be developed, with reference to the successful experience of the Rehabilitation Programme Plan for rehabilitation services.
- The service model of agencies operating on a single service basis might need to be reviewed.
- Though resources on youth were plentiful among different bureaux/departments, many of them were time-limited funding and they came from different sources. This had created burden on frontline workers in preparing bidding proposals for various funding bodies. There could be more integration and consolidation of various funds in the longer run for better utilization of resources.
- There was duplication of resources in some areas such as youth outreaching services. Review of the existing provisions might be required for better utilization of resources and service improvement.

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**Summary of Views Expressed by the Welfare Sector
in Elderly Services
at the Consultation Session held on 23 June 2006**

- While rigid population-based planning ratios might have outlived their usefulness, there should be planning for elderly services in the form of vision/target/priority setting. The setting of targets and priorities was a reflection of Government's commitment on elderly care. Also, in identifying issues and goals, the characteristics and needs of individual districts should be taken into account.
- "Ageing in the community" should be the direction of future development in elderly care. The existing community care and support services and the interface among individual services should be further enhanced to meet the needs of elders and carers.
- Individuals and families should share responsibilities in taking care of elders.
- The community might not be fully aware of the efforts of the Government and elderly service providers in supporting elders in need and enhancing the quality of life of elders. The Government should proactively publicise the services available and successful user cases through the media.
- The District Elderly Community Centres (DECCs) and Neighbourhood Elderly Centres (NECs) were playing a pivotal role in providing support to elders in the community. However, they were facing resource constraints in further developing their services. To cater for the varying needs of elders, DECCs and NECs would require more physical space, a larger provision of furniture and equipment, and stronger professional inputs. Also, they had to be innovative, user-friendly and flexible in service delivery.
- The existing mode of providing home care services to elders in general without having regard to their frailty level should be reviewed, to ensure that resources were targeted at elders most in need.

- Long term care for the elderly was largely a composition of personal/nursing care and medical/health care. It was important that we enhance the interface between the welfare and health sectors to provide elders with a seamless set of services.
- There should be greater integration and collaboration among different providers of elderly services.
- Currently, quality elderly services were predominantly provided by the subvented sector. There was a lack of genuine choices in the private sector for middle class users. As a result, affordable users were competing with needy elders for heavily subsidized services. We need a more robust private market of elderly care services to meet the needs of the middle class users and relieve the competing demand on subsidized services.
- In view of an ageing population, we should help elders prepare for post-retirement life, such as helping them to be aware of the need to make early financial and personal plans for retirement.
- There should be further studies to project the demand for long term care services, taking into account both the physical and financial needs of frail elders. Also, the issue of long term care financing should be looked into.
- The sector is facing various manpower problems, such as shortage in nurses and care staff, high turnover, and ageing of staff. There was a need to take a holistic look at the issues of human resource development in the elderly services and to come up with solutions.

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**Summary of Views Expressed by the Welfare Sector
in Rehabilitation Services
at the Consultation Session held on 23 June 2006**

- Mental health was an important issue with far-reaching impact beyond the scope of rehabilitation and should involve the whole society.
- Employment of people with disabilities should be promoted through tripartite partnership. Other relevant measures recommended include tax concession for employers of people with disabilities, restricted tendering for suitable government jobs to foster the development of social enterprises, and setting of employment indicator. The setting of minimum wage is expected to have considerable negative impact on the employment opportunities of people with disabilities.
- Striking a balance between the development of residential care services and that of community support would be the way forward. The construction of large-scaled residential care homes was an outdated concept. Measures that could encourage and facilitate community living, such as helping people with disabilities to identify suitable housing, would be useful.
- There was room for improvement of barrier-free access in buildings and facilities, particularly those frequented by the public, as well as in information technology and digital broadcast.
- Collaboration of NGOs and other sectors with the District Councils was very important in mobilizing community support and in leveraging social resources for promoting the welfare of people with disabilities.
- Aging of people with mental handicap was an issue that needed to be addressed.
- Concessionary public transport fare for people with disabilities would be an incentive for encouraging the latter to integrate into

society.

- There were concerns about inclusive education and the opinions on which would be forwarded to relevant bureau for consideration.
- Self-help groups requested for more communication opportunities with relevant government authorities and enhanced support for their long-term development.
- Enhanced training for welfare workers and professionals prior to and during their employment was called for.
- It was suggested to reconsider the definition of “disability” to include visceral diseases (which is actually included in the current definition under the Rehabilitation Programme Plan).

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