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Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 14 February 2008**

Establishment of the Family Council

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the establishment of the Family Council, and summarizes the deliberations of the Panel on Welfare Services on the subject.

Background

2. In his 2006-2007 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that the Administration would study the feasibility of the establishment of an integrated, holistic and high-level Family Commission to be responsible for policies and initiatives relating to family support. The Commission would bring under one roof the various commissions and committees in operation for handling issues covering different age groups and genders.

3. Currently, the Commission on Youth, Women's Commission, Elderly Commission and other bodies have been formed to handle family-related issues. The Commission on Youth was set up in February 1990 to help Hong Kong meet the needs of youth and respond to their aspirations. The Women's Commission was set up in January 2001 as a central mechanism to promote the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong as well as advise the Government on the policy direction on women issues. The Elderly Commission was established in 1997, and its main task is to provide advice to the Government in the formulation of a comprehensive policy in caring for elders.

Deliberations of the Panel

4. The Panel on Welfare Services was briefed on the proposed establishment of a Family Commission by the Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food at the meeting on 13 October 2006.

5. Members were advised that the proposed Family Commission would study and address problems from a family, instead of individual perspective, with a view to taking a more holistic approach in supporting families. It would also address family problems from a cross-policy perspective.

6. In response to members on how the Administration would proceed to establish the proposed Family Commission, the Administration advised that the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau would take the lead in the study, with a view to examining the relationship between the proposed Family Commission and the Commission on Youth, Women's Commission, Elderly Commission and other bodies which were also handling family-related issues. The Administration would first study whether the establishment of a Family Commission could enhance the implementation of social policy and be conducive to building a harmonious community. It would also examine the need for re-organization and re-allocation of resources of existing commissions and committees.

7. Members were in support of the policy initiative to promote family harmony and considered that the Administration was on the right track to facilitate better coordination of cross-sectoral efforts on family matters. Some members, however, pointed out that the Administration should adopt a wider definition of family having regard to the fact that the types of family units were much more diversified nowadays and included, for example, single-parent families. They considered that the Administration should pay more attention to the needs of these non-traditional families in formulating family policies.

8. Members were also advised that the report on the study was expected to be finished by mid-2007, and a final decision would be made by the Third Term Government.

9. In his 2007-2008 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced that a high-level Family Council (formerly known as the Family Commission) chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) would be set up. At the briefing by the Secretary for Home Affairs on the Policy Address at the Panel meeting on 15 October 2007, members were advised that the Family Council would be established before the end of 2007-2008. The policy purview has since been placed under the Secretary for Home Affairs.

10. According to the Administration, it would adopt a holistic approach using the family as the framework of action in the formulation of policies and

the implementation of programmes relating to family support. The Family Council would advise the Government on the formulation of policies and strategies for supporting and strengthening the family and on the development of related programmes and activities, and would monitor their implementation. To ensure effective co-ordination, it would also advise the Government on the integration of family policies and related programmes across different bureaux and departments for different age and gender sectors, including the work of the Elderly Commission, the Women's Commission and the Commission on Youth. The Administration would consult the Family Council and the three above mentioned Commissions on how the latter would be fully integrated into the former institutionally by 31 March 2009.

Latest development

11. The Administration announced the appointment of members to the Family Council on 3 December 2007. It comprises five Government officials, namely CS, Secretary for Education, Secretary for Home Affairs, Secretary for Labour and Welfare, and Head of the Central Policy Unit, and 16 members from the social welfare, professional, commercial and industrial, and academic sectors. The Family Council has held its first meeting in December 2007.

12. The Administration will brief the Panel on the establishment of the Family Council at the meeting on 14 February 2008.

Related information

13. A question relating to the establishment of the Family Council was raised at the Council meeting on 5 December 2007.

Relevant papers

14. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk> to view the Administration's papers for the meetings of the Panel on Welfare Services on 13 October 2006 and 15 October 2007, and the relevant minutes of meetings.