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Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 10 January 2011**

Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") on the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project ("NSCCP").

Background

2. In 2008-2009, the Government earmarked \$45 million for the launch of the three-year pilot NSCCP under the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") with an aim to provide needy parents with more flexible child care service in addition to regular services and to foster mutual help and care in the community. The service is targeted for children aged under six, especially for those whose parents are either working long, unstable and/or unconventional hours, in emergency needs, but lack support network and have financial hardship in securing alternative child care support.
3. Under the pilot project, the Government provides subventions to non-governmental organisations and community groups as service operators of NSCCP. The operators recruit and train carers in the neighbourhood to take care of children in the service centres run by them or at the carers' homes. The service charge is decided by service operators and approved by SWD. At present, the basic fees for home-based child care service range from \$18 to \$24 per hour while those for centre-based care group range from \$13 to \$24 per hour. Needy families with financial hardship will be granted fee waiving or reduction, subject to their passing the social need and means tests.

4. According to the Administration, NSCCP has been launched in all the 11 administrative districts of SWD, each run by a service operator in the respective district.

Deliberations by members

5. At the meeting on 23 October 2008 when the Panel was briefed on the welfare initiatives in the 2008-2009 Policy Address, members were advised that NSCCP comprised two service components, namely, centre-based care group (close attention for children aged three to under six by organising group activities) and home-based child care services (for children aged under six at the carer's own residence). The pilot NSCCP would be launched in two phases. The first batch of six NSCCP projects would be launched in October 2008 in six districts where the demand for flexible child care services was more pressing, including Tung Chung, Sham Shui Po, Kwai Chung, Tuen Mun, Yuen Long and Kwun Tong. Another five projects would be launched in Wong Tai Sin/Sai Kung, Kowloon City/Yau Tsim Mong, Tai Po/North, Shatin and Eastern/Wanchai in March 2009, thus covering all SWD's administrative districts. The projects would last until the end of March 2011.

6. Members were concerned about the remuneration of the carers and whether the remuneration package would be subject to any monitoring mechanism. Some members enquired if the remuneration would be set on a par with the statutory minimum wage when the latter came into force.

7. According to the Administration, the operating hours of the services would be flexible to meet the needs of parents, and therefore the carers would be remunerated on an hourly basis. The remuneration for the provision of child care services was included in the subventions to the operating community organisations.

8. Members were advised that NSCCP aimed to promote mutual help in the neighbourhood and, at the same time, help needy families take better care of their children. Under the pilot NSCCP, home-based child carers could earn a remuneration for the service they provided. The project would create a win-win situation for both the needy families and the home-based child carers. Earning of the remuneration was not the primary aim of the project, and it was not appropriate to compare the remuneration of carers with the minimum wage level.

9. Members were subsequently advised at the Panel meeting on 22 October 2009 that NSCCP provided a total of at least 286 home-based child care places and 154 centre-based care group places. Feedback from service users had been generally positive.

Latest development

10. As stated in the 2010-2011 Policy Address, having regard to the positive feedback from service users, the Administration decided to regularise NSCCP and extend its geographical coverage from 11 districts at present to all 18 districts so as to benefit more needy families. The Administration will brief the Panel on the details at the meeting on 10 January 2011.

Question raised at Council meeting

11. Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che raised an oral question relating to NSCCP at the Council meeting on 17 March 2010. The Administration's reply to the question is in the **Appendix**.

Relevant papers

12. Members are invited to access the Legislative Council website at <http://www.legco.gov.hk/> to view the Administration's papers, and the relevant minutes of the meetings of the Panel on 23 October 2008, 22 October 2009 and 20 October 2010.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
4 January 2011

~~SECRETARY FOR COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT~~ (in Cantonese): In fact, offices of the SAR Government in the Mainland and foreign countries will keep an eye on the vital development of policies, laws and regulations in the relevant regions, in particular those that would impact on the development of Hong Kong businesses, and will keep in touch with Hong Kong enterprises operating in those regions. As Hong Kong businessmen have made investments in many places on a wide scope of businesses, we encourage and rely on Hong Kong businessmen in foreign countries and the Mainland to proactively liaise with the SAR Government and provide relevant information when they meet problems of specific concerns so that we can follow up. For example, in respect of the processing trade, many trade organizations and individuals contacted us following the outbreak of the financial tsunami last year and measures in various aspects were introduced to alleviate their difficulties.

President, regarding Mr IP's question, the trade did not liaise with us until mid-2009, and we have been very concerned about the matter ever since. We have discussed the problem with the relevant Mainland authorities through a variety of channels with a view to introducing liberalization measures for the trade.

~~PRESIDENT~~ (in Cantonese): Fourth question.

Implementation of Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project

4. **MR CHEUNG KWOK-CHE** (in Cantonese): *President, the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP), which has been implemented since October 2008, provides more flexible forms of day care services for children aged under six to meet the needs of the parents at the neighbourhood level. At present, the Project in respect of each administrative district of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) is operated by only one operating organization. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the details of the operation of the NSCCP by various operating organizations, including fees charged for the services, average numbers of person-times using the services and utilization rates per month, and so on;*
- (b) *whether it will review the existing upper age limit of children eligible for the care services and the service hours; and*
- (c) *whether it will expand the NSCCP so that each administrative district may have more than one organization operating the NSCCP?*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, it is the responsibility of parents to take care of their young children. To support parents who are unable to take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons, the SWD has all along been providing subvention to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to run a variety of child care services. The SWD also strives to increase the flexibility of such services.

In 2008, the SWD launched the three-year NSCCP on a pilot basis. The NSCCP aims to provide needy parents with more flexible child care service in addition to regular services and to foster, at the same time, mutual help and care in the community. Services include the home-based care service for children aged under six and the centre-based care group for children aged between three and under six. Service operators recruit and train carers in the neighbourhood to take care of children in the service centres run by the operators or at the carers' homes.

The NSCCP commenced operation in October 2008. The first phase was launched in six districts with a higher demand for child care services (that is, Tung Chung, Sham Shui Po, Kwai Chung, Tuen Mun, Yuen Long and Kwun Tong). In March 2009, it was extended to Wong Tai Sin/Sai Kung, Kowloon City/Yau Tsim Mong, Tai Po/North, Sha Tin and Eastern/Wan Chai, thereby covering all the 11 administrative districts of the SWD. At present, the NSCCP is run by 11 different service operators in their respective responsible districts.

My reply to the three parts of Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's question is set out below:

- (a) Since the implementation of the NSCCP, service operators have maintained close liaison with relevant groups, organizations and social service units to develop child carers networks in the community. On the number of service places, the SWD requires each service operator to provide at least 40 service places, including 26 home-based child care places and 14 centre-based care group places, in its respective district. Therefore, the entire NSCCP provides at least 440 service places in total (including 286 home-based child care places and 154 centre-based care group places). Some service operators would increase the number of service places on a need basis in order to meet the service demand. As for the utilization rate, the average monthly number of children benefiting from the NSCCP during April to December 2009 was 430.

The fees for the NSCCP service are determined by service operators with prior approval from the SWD. At present, the basic fees for home-based child care service range from \$18 to \$24 per hour while those for centre-based care group range from \$13 to \$24 per hour. Families with financial difficulties will be granted fee waiving or reduction, subject to their passing the social need and means tests.

Detailed information about the operation of individual service operators is at Annex which has been distributed to Members.

- (b) To meet different service needs, the various kinds of child care services subsidized by the SWD have different service targets. The service targets of the NSCCP are young children under the age of six. That said, in exceptional circumstances (such as when there is an urgent need for child care services because of sudden events), service operators will provide temporary service for children aged six or above on a discretionary basis to ensure that the concerned children can be taken care of properly.

The service needs of children aged six or above are not entirely the same. We understand that many parents expect the service operators to provide homework guidance, and so on, to children aged above six in addition to the basic care services. We believe that the After School Care Programme (ASCP) targeting children aged six to 12, instead of the NSCCP, can better meet their needs. Services provided under the ASCP include homework guidance, meal service, parental guidance and education, skills learning and social activities, and so on. The SWD provides fee waiving or reduction to needy low-income families.

On service hours, the centre-based care group under the NSCCP operates up to at least 9.00 pm on weekdays, and provides at least one service session on weekends. Urged by the SWD, most of the service operators also provide additional service sessions in response to the actual demand. The service hours of the home-based child care service are even longer. It operates from 7.00 am to 11.00 pm daily (including weekends and holidays) and overnight service can be provided in exceptional circumstances.

We believe that the operating hours and flexibility of the two kinds of services under the NSCCP should be able to meet the needs of most parents who are unable to take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons. The SWD will continue to maintain close liaison with the service operators to monitor the operation of the NSCCP.

- (c) The NSCCP is still in its pilot stage and this will end in the first quarter in 2011. The SWD will review the effectiveness and operation of the NSCCP by the end of this year. Upon completion of the review, we will decide on the way forward for the NSCCP having regard to the review outcome and the best interests of children.

Annex

Service Operation and Utilization by District

(as at 31 December 2009)

<i>SWD Administrative District</i>	<i>Kwun Tong</i>	<i>Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing</i>	<i>Sham Shui Po</i>	<i>Central Western, Southern and Islands</i>	<i>Tuen Mun</i>	<i>Yuen Long</i>	<i>Kowloon City & Yau Tsim Mong</i>	<i>Sha Tin</i>	<i>Wong Tai Sin and Sai Kung</i>	<i>Tai Po and North</i>	<i>Eastern and Wan Chai</i>
<i>Name of Operator</i>	<i>Christian Family Service Centre</i>	<i>Women Service Association</i>	<i>The Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong Social Service Company Limited</i>	<i>Hong Kong Outlying Islands Women's Association</i>	<i>Yan Oi Tong</i>	<i>Hong Kong Tin Shui Wai Women Association</i>	<i>Tung Wah Group of Hospitals</i>	<i>Hong Kong Single Parents Association</i>	<i>Hong Kong Family Welfare Association</i>	<i>Hong Kong Women Development Association Limited</i>	<i>Baptist Of Kwan Social Service</i>
<i>Service capacity and service fees of Home-Based Child Care Service (HCCS)</i>											
<i>Capacity</i>	26	40	26	26	26	30	28	26	26	26	26
<i>Service fee (per hour)</i>	\$18	\$18	\$18	\$20	\$18	\$18	\$18	\$18	\$20 (\$24 - applicable to HCCS provided at the service users' home, or service from 11.00 pm to 7.00 am)	\$23	\$18
<i>Service capacity and service fees of Centre-Based Care Group (CCG)</i>											
<i>Capacity</i>	14	14	14	28	14	14	14	14	14	14	14
<i>Service fee (per hour)</i>	\$13	\$13	\$18	\$15	\$13	\$13	\$18	\$13	\$20 (\$24 - applicable to non-operating hours of the CCG)	\$18	\$13
<i>Total number of children beneficiaries during the period from April to December 2009</i>											
<i>Number of children</i>	263	552	308	435	525	478	392	166	299	290	161

MR CHEUNG KWOK-CHE (in Cantonese): *President, according to the information provided by some service operators, child carers are now generally*

paid approximately \$20 per hour. I find this a blatant exploitation of the income of child carers, for they are exposed to the risk of work injuries or accidents when taking care of young children. May I ask the Secretary, through the President, whether the service operators have taken out employees' compensation insurance for their child carers? If not, how can these operators make compensation should their child carers encounter any work injury accidents?

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I would like to thank Mr CHEUNG for his question. This issue is also of great concern to us. This is why we have requested the service operators participating in the pilot scheme to adopt complementary measures, including providing training and insurance, and making regular home visits to examine the quality of child carers. Furthermore, the service operators must ensure that the child carers are already trained, have at least five years' experience in taking care of children, have received professional training, and know how to handle sudden events. Hence, all of them are trained.

Just now, Mr CHEUNG mentioned that the subsidy was relatively low. Actually, it must be noted that the objective and starting point of the NSCCP is not an employment project. Members can see that the project is named the "Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project". By "Neighbourhood Support", it really means bringing into play the spirit of neighbourhood support. Many women participating in the provision of child care service have their own children. In addition to taking care of their own children, they can now take care of one more child without leaving their home and, at the same time, receive a subsidy. Actually, \$20 the rationale of the NSCCP is volunteer work. The subsidy nonetheless, I appreciate Members' concern. Therefore, the subsidy will also be reviewed during the review to be conducted in the future. Members all understand that a minimum wage will be implemented. Upon the implementation of a minimum wage, the subsidy will also be brought in line with the minimum wage, and they will at least have a basic income. By then, the issue of whether the subsidy is too low will no longer exist, as a level would have been set then. This is an improvement.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Which part of your supplementary question has not been answered?

MR CHEUNG KWOK-CHE (in Cantonese): *President, the Secretary has not answered whether employees' compensation insurance cover has been provided.*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I already answered it just now. We require service operators to provide insurance cover, including employees' compensation insurance.

DR JOSEPH LEE (in Cantonese): *President, the reply given by the Secretary to Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che just now made me think of the Chinese saying of "putting one more pair of chopsticks on the table for one more person", thus assuming that the child carers can be paid less. I have no idea if the NSCCP is designed in this manner, and as a result, even insurance is included. But my supplementary question is not about this. I have read the figures provided by the Secretary in the annex and found that the demand is particularly high in several districts, namely Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, Kwai Tsing and Tsuen Wan. However, according to the Secretary, a review of the NSCCP will not be conducted until a year later. My supplementary question is: Will the Secretary consider he should have noticed that the demand in some districts is particularly high. Will he provide more resources to meet the demands or increase the number of places? If so, he will be able to help the people living in those districts.*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, I would like to thank Dr LEE for his question. The NSCCP, which has been implemented for some time, will be reviewed by the end of this year. For the time being, we will, based on our expenditure, give each service operator a funding of \$1.27 million, with \$760,000 being used for paying subsidy, or meeting waived fees, and the remaining \$510,000 for meeting operating expenses which will be met in part by fees and charges. If necessary, we can discuss with the service operators to see if the number of places can be increased. Of course, decisions will be made in the light of the actual situation.

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): *The Secretary said for participants of the NSCCP the service operators will take out employees' compensation insurance for them. However, if they are not employees, would it be wrong to take out employees' compensation insurance for them?*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, the insurance mentioned by me just now is meant to ensure the safety of the children and there are two types of services, namely home-based service and centre-based service. They are different, and Members have to be clear about this. The purchase of insurance shall depend on whether the child carers have a so-called employment relationship with the centres. If such a relationship is established, the centres will have to take out insurance for the child carers. This is what I meant when I said that insurance should be included in the funding.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Is your supplementary question not yet answered?

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): *President, perhaps my question was not clear enough. I said Mr CHEUNG Kwok-che's question is about the domestic case, but my question just now was about taking care of children at the neighbourhood level. The Secretary described the \$20 as a subsidy rather than an income. In spite of this, the Secretary then said that the centres would take out employees' compensation insurance for the child carers. For this reason, I asked the Secretary whether or not the child carers were employees or it was wrong to take out employees' compensation insurance for them.*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, just now, I made it very clear that there are two types of services. First of all, the \$20 is a subsidy payable to them for provision of services. However, two types of services are involved here, namely centre-based service and home-based service, depending on their relationship with the service operators, or whether there is an employment relationship between the two. Should there be an employment relationship, the centres will definitely bear the responsibility. This

was what I meant when I said a sum of money had been set aside for providing insurance cover.

MR FREDERICK FUNG (in Cantonese): *Have the service operators taken out insurance for women providing home-based service?*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Secretary, do you have anything to add?

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, just now I made it very clear that if they have a very clear employment relationship with the service operators, that is, if the service operators treat them as employees or require them to provide services, then the service operators will have to take out insurance for them. However, discretion will have to be exercised depending on the actual circumstances should the abovementioned circumstances do not apply to them, and the services provided are treated as isolated services. In any case, we have advised service operators to provide insurance cover by all means. Certainly, as pointed by a Member just now, it is true that employees' compensation insurance is unnecessary if there is no employment relationship.

MRS SOPHIE LEUNG (in Cantonese): *The Secretary mentioned in the main reply that the NSCCP is in its pilot stage and will be reviewed by the end of the year. May I ask if the Secretary will consider diversification of the NSCCP during the review, as with the proposal put forth by the Women's Commission years ago, in the hope that these service operators will not only be responsible for recruitment, but also maintain their self-help and mutual-help role with even greater perseverance by inviting mothers in the neighbourhood who have to take care of small children to join the centres as members? Only in doing so will there be a chance for these mothers to take up employment and receive training, so that they can rebuild self-confidence in taking up employment in the future.*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): I would like to thank Mrs Sophie LEUNG for her valuable and constructive suggestion. Actually, we will conduct a comprehensive study during the review. Since the NSCCP has been implemented for a considerable period, we have already gained some valuable experience. How should we proceed if regular and major services are really to be launched? A certain mode should be established. I will definitely take into account the Member's view, that is, to provide a variety of opportunities for participation by women at different levels.

MR IP WAI-MING (in Cantonese): *After listening to the reply given by the Secretary just now, I feel that the Secretary himself is actually not clear about the relationship between those service operators and the child carers in the community. It seems that First, I find that the fees charged range from \$18 to \$24 per hour, and the gap is actually quite large. Second, is there an employment relationship between the child carers and the service operators? It seems that the SWD merely allows the service operators to decide by themselves. Under such circumstances, will the SWD encounter problems in supervision? Will even the SWD find this confusing? What is more, if the Government cannot determine whether or not the child carers should be treated as employees, we will doubt whether the wages are too low and whether the child carers are being exploited. The most important point concerns insurance as mentioned just now. If there is an employment relationship, insurance must be taken out. However, if there is no employment relationship, what kind of insurance should be taken out instead? As far as we know, general insurance and employees' compensation insurance are different in terms of coverage and premium*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Please clearly raise the supplementary question you would like the Secretary to answer.

MR IP WAI-MING (in Cantonese): *May I ask the Secretary if, in case there is no employment relationship, he has ensured that the insurance taken out for them is comparable to employees' compensation insurance?*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, just now I have stated very clearly that there are two types of services provided under the NSCCP. The first type of service is centre-based care service. The woman child carers providing such service definitely have an employment relationship with the service operators. Hence, the funds provided to these service operators will definitely include the amount of money payable for the insurance taken out for these child carers. This is absolutely clear.

As for the second type of service, that is, service provided by child carers at home, it will really depend on whether these child carers have any employment relationship with the service operators. Should the latter opt for a flexible approach, they will have no employment relationship with the child carers. Members are concerned about what will happen should the child carers in the community sustain work injuries. We appreciate Members' concern. However, it must be borne in mind that the chances of these women sustaining work injuries in taking care of children are actually not high, as they are also taking care of their own children. This should be known to all Members. Yet, we do appreciate Members' concern. Therefore, in conducting the review in the future, we will consider how best issues concerning these women in such aspects as work injuries and insurance during the implementation of the regular project can be addressed. I agree that this problem must be tackled.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Which part of your supplementary question has not been answered?

MR IP WAI-MING (in Cantonese): *The question raised by me just now is: For those child carers who have no employment relationship with service operators, can the Government ensure that the insurance taken out by service operators for them is comparable to employees' compensation insurance? I feel that*

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I think the Secretary has already answered the question. If you are not satisfied with his reply, you may follow up through other channels.

MR WONG KWOK-HING (in Cantonese): *President, on behalf of some mutual aid committee (MACs), I would like to put a question to the Secretary. The After School Care Programme offered is actually very popular in the community, but the number of places is utterly insufficient. I have been told by some MACs that the SWD had contacted them in the hope that they could support and organize after-school care service. They are very enthusiastic and eager to render support. But unfortunately, the support given by the Government or the SWD for organizing after-school care service is inadequate. For instance, the MACs have no toilets and water taps. How can the children wash their hands if there are no water taps? At the same time, the MACs cannot afford paying the electricity bills on a long-term basis. Even if they wish to turn on their air-conditioners, they cannot afford the electricity bill. Therefore, I would like to ask the Secretary this question: Will he review how support can be given to the MACs in the community to complement the after-school care service launched by the Government? If this service can really be provided, many people will be benefited because the demands of the people can hardly be met if there is only one centre providing such service in each community.*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): Thanks to Mr WONG. After-school care service is currently provided on a self-financing basis. At present, there are 5 000 places, with 137 organizations providing such service in Hong Kong. These organizations, which are scattered in different housing estates, can even be found in some easily-accessible places. But their utilization rate is only 85%, and some places are still of course, the supply and demand situation is relatively tight in some places, but such service is not fully utilized in other parts of the territory. We have also set aside \$15 million for the SWD to waive or reduce the fees payable for the services provided by these organizations. This is in line with the calculation method adopted by the NSCCP. When necessary, the fees payable by relatively poor families can be waived or reduced. Hence, we will discuss with the relevant party.

Members should understand that after-school care service is provided for children aged six or above. Basically, homework guidance and other services are provided. Generally speaking, there are three sessions of service provision, including morning, afternoon and evening sessions. In some cases, even meal service is provided. Therefore, the requirements on facilities will be more stringent. For instance, toilets must be provided. As the requirements are

similar to those to be met by a school, the matter cannot be handled in a slapdash manner. In the review to be conducted in the future, I will definitely consider Members' views and examine how best the service can be improved. We will definitely give this consideration.

MR LEUNG YIU-CHUNG (in Cantonese): *President, can the Secretary clarify this, such that those child carers in the community can be given specific guidelines? Those child carers will often treat the money they receive as subsidy as a small amount of wages or allowance. However, they bear the risk of sustaining work injuries, such as sprain and strain, when taking care of small children. I think they cannot enjoy protection should the Secretary merely allow the service operators to determine their employment relationship with them. Can the Secretary make it clear that this is also a kind of employment relationship in a clearer and more specific manner so that they can enjoy greater protection?*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): President, thanks to Mr LEUNG. Today, a number of Members have expressed great concern about employee protection. As Members are aware, this is also a matter of great concern to me. I undertake that I will study this matter again to examine what can be done in terms of protection during the transitional period. However, the most important point is that there must be an employment relationship because many child carers are self-employed or consider the service as a part-time job at home. Once they have registered with a service operator to express their willingness to be a child carer, the service operator will arrange for them to provide child care service, or arrange time slots for them to take care of small children. We need to study the matter again to examine how the relationship between the service operator and them should be handled should they sustain work injuries under such circumstances. Nevertheless, I undertake that a study will be conducted in this respect.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): We have spent more than 20 minutes on this question. Last supplementary question.

MR WONG SING-CHI (in Cantonese): *I thought I would not be able to ask my question. The question I wish to ask the Secretary has actually been asked by a number of Members already, and that is: Have the authorities determined the positioning of this service? Insofar as this service is concerned, are the people serving the small children treated as volunteers or employees? If they are treated as volunteers, I am worried that a very dangerous situation will arise because the protection for these people will definitely be affected. The children served by them might also encounter problems because, if they are treated as volunteers, they will have no specific responsibility to ensure the safety of the small children, and the relevant service operators will have to do something on their own. May I ask the Secretary if this service can be classified as one being supervised by the SWD? Furthermore, should the quality of the service be regulated? Should the staff providing such service be protected as well? Will concrete plans and supervisory measures be formulated in this direction?*

SECRETARY FOR LABOUR AND WELFARE (in Cantonese): I would like to thank Mr WONG for his question. The objective of the NSCCP *per se* can be said to be "killing several birds with one stone", with the hope that a multi-win situation can be achieved. In other words, the Government seeks to, on the one hand, provide flexible child care service and, on the other, promote care and mutual care at the community level while allowing some parents and women to, in addition to taking care of their own children, make some money by taking care of their neighbours. This is actually an all-win situation. Therefore, Members should not describe the NSCCP merely as an employment project; it is actually a multi-win project.

Regarding the question raised by the Honourable Member concerning whether the child carers should be treated as volunteers or employees, I would say they are both volunteers and employees. This is actually a multi-win situation. Is it a good thing that they can take care of small children without leaving their home and make some money and help their neighbours at the same time? We will definitely improve the NSCCP in this direction when we determine the positioning of the service in the future. As for supervision, the SWD has its requirements. We will sign service contracts with the service operators and they will be required to submit an operating report to us monthly. Should they receive complaints about child abuse, they will have to report to us. Furthermore, we attach great importance to the quality of training, and we will

ensure that the child carers will receive training. These will be our requirements, and we will continue to maintain them. During the review, we will study all factors in a holistic manner.

~~PRESIDENT~~ (in Cantonese): Fifth question.

Human Swine Influenza Vaccination Programme

5. **MS AUDREY EU** (in Cantonese): *President, the Government earlier spent \$237 million to purchase 3 million doses of Human Swine Influenza (HSI) vaccine, of which only about 180 000 doses have been administered as at 1 March. Moreover, it has been reported that the World Health Organization (WHO) has formed a preliminary view earlier that the HSI outbreak had passed its worst stage, and the Controller of the Centre for Health Protection has also admitted that the progress of HSI vaccination in Hong Kong is unsatisfactory and a large surplus of vaccines is expected. It has also been reported that at present, many European and American countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany, and so on, have one after another requested pharmaceutical manufacturers to reduce the supply of such vaccines, or have sold the surplus vaccines to other countries in need. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:*

- (a) *of the existing stock of vaccines and their total value, and how the authorities plan to dispose of the vaccines, so as to ensure the optimal use of public funds;*
- (b) *whether it has assessed the public's acceptance level of the vaccination, so as to estimate the ultimate amount of surplus vaccines, and whether it has followed the practice of some European and American countries with a view to disposing of the surplus vaccines properly; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and*
- (c) *whether the authorities have learnt their lesson from this exercise of vaccine procurement, so as to improve the policy on vaccine procurement in the future; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?*