

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1304/11-12(02)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council
Secretariat for the special meeting on 14 March 2012**

Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre service mode

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of the discussions by the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") on the implementation of the service mode of the Integrated Family Service Centres ("IFSCs").

Background

2. In August 2000, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") commissioned the University of Hong Kong ("HKU") to conduct an eight-month consultancy study on the review of family welfare services. The findings and recommendations of the study are contained in the Report entitled "Meeting the Challenge : Strengthening Families" submitted by HKU in May 2001. One of the recommendations of the Report was the adoption of a new service delivery model of IFSC to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services.

3. To take forward the IFSC service model, 15 pilot projects were then launched for two years from April 2002 to March 2004 to test out the effectiveness of the IFSC service mode. HKU was commissioned to conduct the two-year evaluative study of the pilot projects. In the light of the positive findings of the evaluative study of the pilot projects on IFSC, SWD re-engineered the then family service resources to form a total of 61 IFSCs over the territory (of which 40 are run by SWD and 21 by nine non-governmental organisations ("NGOs")) in phases in 2004-2005.

4. In October 2008, the Administration commissioned HKU to conduct a review of the implementation of IFSC service mode. The Review report entitled "Building Effective Family Services: Review on the Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre Service Mode", as accepted by the Steering Committee, was released in May 2010. To further improve the implementation of the IFSC service mode, the Consultant Team made a total of 26 recommendations.

5. As announced in the 2011-2012 Policy Address, the Administration would allocate additional resources to set up four new IFSCs in districts with higher service demand, thereby increasing the number of IFSCs from 61 to 65. One of the four new IFSCs commenced operation in December 2011 in Sham Shui Po. The remaining three are expected to go into service in 2012-2013.

Deliberations of the Panel

Implementation of IFSC pilot projects

6. At its meetings on 7 July and 10 November 2003, the Panel was briefed on the findings and recommendations of the Interim Report on the Implementation of the Review of Family Services submitted by the Consultant Team in May 2003. According to the Administration, the findings of the evaluative study on the 15 IFSC pilot projects revealed high user satisfaction. The most noticeable aspect was that users no longer felt inhibited to come forward to seek assistance for fear of being viewed as weak and useless.

7. Members were supportive of the new IFSC service model and did not object to the pooling of resources from family service centres ("FSCs")/counselling units to form IFSCs, but they were of the view that funding for five Single Parent Centres ("SPCs") should continue until there were findings to support that IFSCs could meet the needs of single parents. A letter conveying members' view was sent to the Director of Social Welfare by the Chairman of the Panel on behalf of members, and copied to the Financial Secretary.

8. The Administration advised that IFSCs could meet the needs of single parents, as evidenced by the findings of the 15 IFSC pilot projects.

Given the varied and comprehensive family services provided by IFSCs, single parents were able to receive more services than they could receive at SPCs. Moreover, SWD had made clear with the agencies concerned from the outset that funding to SPCs was limited to three years from 1 February 2001 to 31 January 2004. It was the Administration's aim for support services for single parent families to be integrated with mainstream family services in the long run.

9. In response to members' concern about staff implications, the Administration advised that the re-engineering exercise would not give rise to staff redundancy in SWD, as family service remained the core business of SWD. As regards the concern that staff working in smaller NGOs providing family services would be made redundant as a result of larger NGOs taking up all the formation of IFSCs, the Administration advised that in order to help those smaller NGOs not having sufficient FSCs/counselling units resources to form an IFSC, it had proposed to allow them to pool other family service resources and/or resources beyond family services on request. The Administration also advised that the re-engineering exercise would not reduce allocation of resources to the welfare sector.

Implementation of the IFSC service mode

10. At its meeting on 9 May 2005, the Panel noted that the re-engineering of IFSCs was completed in 2005. Members were advised that subsequent to the re-engineering exercise, there were a total of 61 IFSCs (40 operated by SWD and 21 by NGOs) serving the whole territory and two integrated services projects operated by two NGOs in Tung Chung. An IFSC, comprising three major components, viz a family resource unit, a family support unit and a family counselling unit, provided a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services to meet the changing needs of families residing in the locality in a holistic manner. Deputations attending the meeting, however, pointed out that IFSCs could not totally replace the services provided by SPCs which were closed in April 2004. They urged the Administration to re-commission NGOs to operate SPCs as they considered that IFSCs could not meet their specific needs.

11. The Administration advised that although it was well aware that users of SPCs had a sense of belonging there, this should not prevent the Administration from working towards more effective and efficient use of resources through re-engineering of family resources into IFSCs. As compared with a traditional FSC/counselling unit, each IFSC had a stronger staffing support (at least 12 social workers apart from a supervisor), and

served a smaller designated geographical boundary with a population of 100 000 to 150 000.

12. In response to the request for providing funding to SPCs for continuous operation, the Administration advised that the re-engineering of IFSCs had just been completed and it was monitoring the operation of IFSCs, including their collaboration with other organisations. Improvements would be made where appropriate to ensure the needs of various target groups, including single parents, were catered for. It was the Administration's intention to review the effectiveness of the operation of IFSCs one year after the completion of the re-engineering of IFSCs.

13. Members reiterated that they raised no objection to the pooling of family resources units to form IFSCs, but considered it regrettable that the Administration had ignored the request made by the Panel at the meeting on 10 November 2003 for providing funding to SPCs continuously until there were findings to support that IFSCs could meet the needs of single parents. The Panel looked forward to the Administration's response to the issue of the re-opening of SPCs after the completion of the review on IFSCs in one year's time.

14. The Administration subsequently advised in early 2008 that since the invitation for proposal for the review of IFSCs conducted between August and October 2007 had to be re-tendered, the earliest time to report progress to the Panel would be in the fourth quarter of 2008.

Review of the IFSC service mode

15. At the Panel meeting on 9 March 2009, members noted that the Administration had commissioned HKU to conduct a review on the implementation of IFSC service delivery mode. The review covered all 61 IFSCs operated by SWD and NGOs which sought to assess the improvements that could be made to further refine the model. The review was expected to be completed by the end of 2009, and the Administration planned to revert to the Panel on the review findings in the first quarter of 2010.

16. Members also noted that the Hong Kong Polytechnic University ("PolyU") had separately conducted a study on frontline staff's views and made a number of recommendations on the IFSC service mode. The Panel received views from deputations including PolyU on the implementation of IFSC service mode from the perspective of service

providers. Deputations expressed grave concern about the tremendous workload faced by frontline social workers in IFSCs due to insufficient manpower to cope with the increasing service demands, taking into account that each IFSC was serving a population of 100 000 to 150 000.

17. The Panel held a further meeting on 11 May 2009 to receive views from deputations on the implementation of IFSC service mode from the perspective of service users. Deputations expressed concern about the capability of IFSCs in providing support and preventive services to the high-risk families and domestic violence cases.

18. The Administration advised that it was aware of the concerns raised by frontline social workers and staff unions about the operation mode. The Administration pointed out that the adoption of the IFSC service mode was a landmark in the development of family services in Hong Kong. Understandably, both management and frontline staff of IFSCs needed time to adjust to the substantial changes under the new mode. The Administration considered that the IFSC service mode was effective in service delivery. It would continue with the IFSC service mode, but would make improvements to further refine the mode.

19. While members did not object to the service concept of IFSCs in providing a continuum of services to individuals and families in the community, they took the view that the review underway should address the following issues –

- (a) whether the existing resources and staff establishment of IFSCs were sufficient to provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services to the community;
- (b) the effectiveness of IFSC services in establishing community network and preventing family problems and whether specific services provided by SPCs and Post-migration Centres could be completely replaced by services provided by IFSCs; and
- (c) whether the geographical boundary of an IFSC should be reduced.

20. Pointing out that frontline staff had repeatedly raised the concern about insufficient manpower, members urged the Administration to take concrete actions to address the concern, such as providing additional resources to IFSCs pending the completion of the review underway.

Major findings and recommendations of the Review report

21. The HKU Consultant Team released the Review report entitled "Building Effective Family Services : Review on the Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre Mode" on 24 May 2010, and made a number of observations and a total of 26 recommendations in the Review report (Chapters 7 and 8). In gist, the IFSC service mode had received general support from the IFSC management, frontline workers, stakeholders and service users. The IFSC service mode should continue to be adopted for publicly-funded family service in Hong Kong.

22. At the Panel meeting on 14 June 2010, members were advised that the Administration accepted in principle all the 26 recommendations in the Review report. The Panel held another meeting on 26 June 2010 to gauge views from deputations on the findings and recommendations of the Review report. According to the Administration, SWD would take forward all the recommendations in collaboration with administrators, supervisors and frontline staff of IFSCs and other relevant parties. Where necessary, it would seek additional resources for the implementation of the recommendations. Members were further advised that SWD had/would set up working groups or liaison groups to follow up the implementation of the recommendations. SWD would regularly report the progress of its follow up of the recommendations to the Task Group on the Implementation of IFSCs ("Task Group"), which comprised members from 11 District Social Welfare Offices and the nine NGOs operating IFSCs.

Expectation on the aim and scope of IFSC services

23. Members noted with concern that IFSC social workers had expressed concerns about managing the high and sometimes unrealistic expectations of service users and community stakeholders. Deputations attending the Panel meeting sounded out similar concerns. Specifically, SWD IFSC social workers spent a substantial proportion of working hours on handling housing assistance cases. Deputations called on the adoption of a clear delineation of responsibilities between IFSCs and the Housing Department ("HD") in handling housing assistance cases. IFSC social workers should be dedicated to the core family services.

24. The Administration advised that apart from housing needs, housing problems were often related to family problems, and it would therefore be appropriate for social workers to handle such cases. In response to the

concerns about handling of housing assistance cases by IFSCs, SWD had set up a liaison mechanism with HD at both the headquarters and district levels. The liaison group at the headquarters level would review and streamline the existing work procedures in respect of the referral system, with a view to achieving clearer delineation of roles of social workers and HD staff and ensuring the implementation of agreed procedures in actual operation. Specifically, HD would process applications for public rental housing flats and refer those cases which did not meet eligibility criteria but warranted consideration for compassionate rehousing to IFSCs for follow-up actions.

25. Members took the view that the Administration should step up publicity efforts on the function and role of IFSCs and enhance the public understanding of the difficulties and sentiments of IFSC social workers in service delivery.

IFSC priority target groups

26. Pointing out that the aims of the IFSC service mode were to provide family services under the direction of "child-centred, family-focused and community-based" and in accordance with the four guiding principles of accessibility, early identification, integration and partnership, some members considered that IFSCs should focus on early identification of child abuse cases and make necessary referrals to the Family and Child Protective Services Units of SWD for appropriate follow-up services.

27. In view of the increasing complexity of family problems and the population size currently served by an IFSC, a concern was raised about the capability of IFSC social workers to provide assistance to all families in need of supportive and preventive services. The Administration should model on the experience of the former SPCs and foster the concept of self-help and mutual help of the disadvantaged groups so as to provide target assistance to meet their specific needs.

28. According to the Administration, the implementation of the IFSC service mode aimed to provide a family-focused and community-based integrated service mode i.e. providing a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services. The provision of resources and manpower for IFSCs was therefore premised on the assumption that the service need for remedial service would be diminishing if adequate preventive and supportive services had been provided by IFSCs. The Administration pointed out that most IFSCs had developed special services

to meet the service needs of specific target groups in their own communities, including single-parent families. As compared with the then five SPCs, the IFSCs located over the territory could provide single-parent families with more easily accessible services in a one-stop manner without labelling effect. Such services included intensive counselling, assessment on application for compassionate rehousing, etc. In 2009, IFSCs organised a total of 144 support/developmental groups for single parents with around 2 400 participants. While acknowledging the remedial services provided by IFSCs, the delivery of preventive and supportive services were other important roles of IFSCs.

Provision of IFSC services for population-based service boundaries

29. Noting that the Consultant Team considered it reasonable and appropriate for an IFSC to deliver family services in a community with 100 000 to 150 000 residents, members enquired if the Consultant Team had examined the adequacy of the resources and manpower for IFSCs to deliver the service mode of providing a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial services to the community, and whether the caseload of IFSC social workers should be set at a lower level. Some deputations suggested that specific indicators to reflect the changing needs in the community should be drawn up to facilitate service planning and manpower requirement.

30. The Consultant Team and the Administration advised that the provision of manpower resources for IFSCs were premised on the service boundaries i.e. each IFSC would serve a population of 100 000 to 150 000, as well as the characteristics and the specific service needs of the community. Since the implementation of IFSC service mode, additional resources had been allocated to meet the increasing service demand. Over the years, additional resources had been allocated to IFSCs according to the characteristics and needs of individual districts. Reference was made to a number of indicators, for example, the number of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance households, cases of child abuse, spouse abuse, and juvenile crime. Instead of allocating resources to IFSCs across the board, more resources had been allocated to the high-risk districts such as Sham Shui Po and Yuen Long. Moreover, the number of social workers and supervisory posts in IFSCs had been increased from 896 and 62 in 2004-2005 to 1 017 and 91 respectively in 2009-2010, representing an increase of 16%. In 2009-2010, each social worker of IFSCs on average handled 46.2 active cases monthly, and 42 new/reactivated cases in a year. It was noteworthy that although additional resources were allocated to

IFSCs in past years, a higher output standard had not been set. The Administration assured members that it would seek additional resources for the implementation of the recommendations of the Review Report, where necessary.

Output standards of IFSCs

31. In respect of the findings of the Review report that two IFSCs had not met the required level of outcome standards for service users' satisfaction and about 30% of IFSCs had not met the output standards indicator in respect of handling new/reactivated cases in 2008-2009, members were concerned about the mechanism in place to monitor the performance standards of IFSCs. Some deputations also expressed grave concern about the need of IFSCs to perform duties which were not counted.

32. The Administration advised that under the existing arrangement, IFSCs were required to submit quarterly statistical reports to SWD. Should any IFSCs fail to meet the performance standards stipulated in the relevant funding and service agreements ("FSAs") with SWD, they were required to submit reports on the substandard performance. As reported by the IFSCs concerned, they were on some occasions unable to meet the performance standards because some duties performed were not counted under FSAs, and some duties were discontinued because of staff movement or the responsible officers had to handle urgent duties. In the light of the explanation, the overall performance of IFSCs was considered satisfactory. Having regard to the recommendations of the Review report, the Administration would set up a working group to review FSA for IFSCs with a view to updating and adjusting the performance indicators and encouraging IFSCs to develop service initiatives beyond the FSA requirements.

Implementation of recommendations of the Review report

33. On the concern about the implementation of the 26 recommendations of the Review report, the Administration advised that some of the recommendations, such as the identification of appropriate premises for the relocation of inconveniently-located IFSCs had commenced. A working group would be set up to follow up on the recommendations relating to FSA for IFSCs. The Task Group would be informed of the progress on the implementation of the recommendations. The Administration would keep the Panel informed of the progress of the implementation of the recommendations in due course.

34. At its meeting on 12 December 2011, the Panel was briefed on the progress on the follow-up action taken by SWD to take forward the recommendations of the IFSC service mode. A major issue raised by deputations representing IFSC staff was about handling of housing assistance cases by IFSC social workers. The deputations called on HD to draw up clear policy and procedures for handling housing assistance cases such that HD would provide a negative reply to the applicants if they did not meet the eligibility criteria, instead of relying on the recommendations of IFSC social workers for compassionate rehousing to further process such cases.

35. According to the Administration, SWD had set up a liaison mechanism with HD to enhance collaboration and communication between SWD/NGO IFSCs and HD at the headquarters and district levels as well as to review and streamline work procedures on handling housing assistance cases. Specifically, HD would process cases relating to purely housing management issues, such as requests for addition of family members to the tenancy, household splitting and transfer by existing public housing tenants. The liaison groups would continue to accord priority to discussion items aiming at achieving a clear delineation of roles of IFSC social workers and HD staff in handling housing assistance cases.

36. While the issue on handling housing assistance cases remained a prominent concern of IFSC staff, members agreed that a special meeting would be held on 14 March 2012 to further discuss with the Administration, and to receive views from deputations on the subject.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
8 March 2012

**Relevant papers on
Implementation of the Integrated Family Service Centre service mode**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	12 June 2000 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	12 March 2001 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	9 July 2001 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	7 July 2003 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	10 November 2003 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	9 May 2005 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	9 March 2009 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	11 May 2009 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	14 June 2010 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes CB(2)305/10-11(01)
Panel on Welfare Services	26 June 2010 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	12 December 2011 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes