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Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council
Secretariat for the meeting on 11 June 2012**

Long-term social welfare planning

Purpose

This paper summarises the deliberations of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") on issues relating to social welfare planning.

Background

2. Following the discussions on the broad strategic direction of the welfare development in the context of the Strategic Framework for the Social Welfare conducted in 2004, the Administration adopted the following broad approaches in planning for future welfare services and programmes –

- (a) *social investment* : it would invest in strategies that focused on building the capacity of individuals, families and the communities so as to help the disadvantaged groups to be self-reliant as far as possible; and
- (b) *tripartite partnerships* : it would encourage various forms of partnerships among the Government, the third sector and the business community to work together to solve social problems and build a harmonious society.

3. In 2005-2006, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") introduced the annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector on the priorities in the coming years, and the District Welfare Planning Protocol to set out a

standardised planning framework and workflow on how to assess and prioritise district welfare needs and formulate strategies in the districts to meet such needs.

4. In 2007, the Chief Executive undertook in his Election Manifesto to study the long-term social welfare development plan for Hong Kong through the Social Welfare Advisory Committee ("SWAC").

Deliberations by the Panel

Social welfare planning mechanism

5. At the Panel meeting on 8 May 2006, members were advised that under the broad direction set out in paragraph 2 above, the Administration introduced in 2005 the annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector under which it would discuss with the sector and members of the welfare-related advisory committees on the priorities of the coming years. The first consultation session was held in June 2005 to gather the views of the sector on their proposed priorities for 2006-2007 and beyond. The second one was held in September 2005 for the Administration to debrief the sector on the new initiatives likely to be announced in the Policy Address in October 2005. According to the Administration, the new annual consultation mechanism was useful in exchanging views and setting the priorities to tie in with the Government's policy and resource planning cycle. The views gathered had been reflected in the Policy Address where appropriate. It would continue with the mechanism in 2006.

6. The deputations attending the meeting expressed that while the Administration had engaged the welfare sector in the discussions on the Strategic Framework for the Social Welfare in 2004, it failed to put in place an integrated and forward-looking planning framework comprising long-term strategic directions, medium-term plans for individual programme areas and service development and delivery of annual plans by SWD and non-governmental organisations ("NGOs"), as undertaken by the Administration when it introduced the Lump Sum Grant subvention system in 2000. More importantly, the Administration had yet to come up with a blueprint in guiding the long-term development of social welfare services in Hong Kong.

7. According to the Administration, it had adopted a flexible planning approach comprising mainly an annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector and the District Welfare Planning Protocol. The new

arrangement allowed the Administration and NGOs to be responsive to the latest requests and changing circumstances. While discussions were primarily focused on the immediate priorities for the coming year, there were also exchanges with the sector on the longer-term development. The mechanism could be regarded as an annual rollover exercise to plan for the coming years.

8. Noting that the Administration had abandoned the previous planning mechanism in the form of a five-year plan, members were of the view that the Administration should work out a long-term plan to guide the long-term development of welfare services, instead of merely responding to changing circumstances in a piecemeal manner. Some members suggested that the Administration should reinstate the five-year plan, or the practice of preparing a 10-year White Paper on social welfare policies.

9. The Administration responded that it had adopted different planning mechanisms for different service areas, having regard to the individual needs and situation of each service area. Apart from frequent exchanges with the relevant NGOs, it would also engage in regular dialogues with the relevant advisory bodies, such as the Elderly Commission for services to the elderly and the Commission on Youth in respect of youth services, to map out the long-term plan for each service area.

10. At the request of the Panel, the Administration reported to the Panel on 10 July 2006 on the outcome of the annual consultation session for 2006. Members remained concerned that the Administration had failed to accede to the numerous requests from the welfare sector for a blueprint on the long-term development of social welfare services. Members reiterated the view that the Administration should map out a long-term plan for social welfare services.

11. In the view of the Administration, welfare planning was a long and complex process involving many parties. The Administration had introduced new philosophy and strategies, such as cross-sectoral collaboration and community involvement to tackle the increasingly complex social issues. It was of the view that social welfare planning in the form of service projection in detailed figures was no longer suitable to the present situation of Hong Kong. Where justified, a longer-term plan would still be developed for a specific service area, whereas for other areas, the Administration would adopt a more flexible planning approach. The consultation approach in the form of Green Paper and White Paper would be considered if the policy issue was of great significance to the society as a whole. The Administration stressed that the annual consultation

sessions were just part of the process and were not the only occasion to solicit views from the welfare sector. It would continue to use other channels to collect views from the sector.

Long-term social welfare planning

12. At the Panel meeting on 23 October 2008, members noted that as undertaken in the 2007-2008 Policy Agenda to study the long-term development planning for social welfare in Hong Kong through SWAC, the latter commenced initial consultation in April 2008 by seeking initial views from various stakeholder groups on a number of key issues which were fundamental to the review. The initial consultation period ended on 30 September 2008. Taking into account the comments received, SWAC would proceed with the next stage of the study.

13. The Panel was further advised at its meeting on 22 October 2009 that SWAC had invited stakeholders in the sector to offer their initial views on a number of key issues pertinent to the study. A Task Group on Welfare Planning was formed under SWAC in 2009 to take forward the study. As part of the study process, SWAC would conduct another round of consultation with the sector and stakeholders and was working out the details.

Consultation paper on long-term social welfare planning

14. SWAC released a consultation paper on 14 April 2010 to seek views from the social welfare sector and relevant stakeholders on the long-term social welfare planning in Hong Kong. Noting that the consultation exercise would end on 31 July 2010, the Panel held two special meetings on 5 and 26 June 2010 to receive views from 58 deputations on the subject; the meetings were also attended by members of SWAC.

15. According to SWAC, the consultation paper examined the subject of long-term welfare planning at a macro level. It set out the guiding principles for social welfare planning and the strategic directions for providing welfare services to address welfare-related issues at a macro level, instead of focusing on service provision in individual areas. SWAC hoped that the consultation document would help align objectives for developing more concrete proposals on service provision in specific areas. SWAC would analyse the views received during the consultation with a view to formulating its views and recommendations on welfare planning for consideration by the Administration.

16. Concerns were raised by members and some deputations attending the meetings that despite the numerous requests from the welfare sector for a blueprint on the long-term development of social welfare services in Hong Kong, the Administration was responding to changing circumstances in a piecemeal manner by adopting an annual consultation mechanism with the welfare sector. Some members took the view that the long-term social welfare planning exercise should be led by the Government rather than SWAC.

17. Members noted the Administration's advice that SWAC was tasked by the Chief Executive to study the long-term development for social welfare in Hong Kong; the consultation exercise was part of SWAC's study on long-term welfare planning; and the study was in progress. The Administration had an open mind on the subject. The proposals presented in the consultation paper did not represent the stance or final decision of the Administration. SWAC would take into account the views collected and put forward a report setting out its recommendations for consideration by the Administration. The Administration would carefully study SWAC's recommendations and revert to the Panel on how it would take forward the recommendations of SWAC in the second quarter of 2011.

18. At the request of the Panel, the Administration provided members with an update on the progress of SWAC's study on the long-term social welfare planning at the meetings on 14 March and 13 June 2011. According to the Administration, SWAC was finalising the report on its analyses and recommendations. It was expected that SWAC's report would be completed by the second quarter of 2011. Upon receipt of SWAC's report, the Administration would thoroughly analyse and study its recommendations and report to the Panel as soon as practicable.

Report of SWAC on long-term social welfare planning

19. SWAC released its Report on Long-term Social Welfare Planning in Hong Kong ("SWAC Report") in July 2011. The Panel discussed and received views from deputations on the key findings and recommendations of the SWAC Report at its meeting on 11 July and 22 August 2011 respectively. According to SWAC, in preparing the Report, SWAC had conducted an environmental scan on the changes in the population, economy, social structure, and the development of information and communication technologies in Hong Kong since 2000 and had given an account of the current situation and development trends of social welfare in Hong Kong. SWAC had also made a series of recommendations to the

Administration on the mission, fundamental values, guiding principles, strategic directions and planning mechanism of social welfare as set out in the Report.

20. While raising no objection to the recommendations to formulate guiding principles and strategic directions for social welfare planning as set out in the SWAC Report, members generally considered that SWAC should have recommended the formulation of concrete targets for future welfare services development and evaluation of the performance of individual service areas. More importantly, it was the Government's responsibility to make a blueprint for the long-term development of social welfare, set objective targets and timetable for meeting the specific service needs. For instance, the Administration should, in the light of the ageing population, set out clearly the target number of additional subsidised residential care places for the elderly to be provided in subsequent years.

21. In the view of SWAC, it fully understood that some stakeholders expected the study to cover the development and planning of individual welfare service areas. However, SWAC considered that its study on long-term social welfare planning should look into the subject from a macro perspective and aim to formulate a blueprint for the future welfare system, instead of scrutinising details of individual service areas and resource allocation. SWAC hoped that its study would facilitate the sustainable development of the social welfare policies and services in the long term. The Administration stressed that it played three major roles in social welfare, namely principal resource provider, policy maker and policy executor; and SWAC had recognised these roles in its Report.

22. On the planning mechanism, both members and deputations expressed reservations about the SWAC's proposal of putting in place a planning mechanism which dovetailed with the delivery of the Policy Address by the Chief Executive in October each year. They considered that instead of reviewing the social welfare initiatives and services on an annual basis, the Administration should reinstate the five-year plan mechanism for better and longer-term planning of the social welfare services and manpower projection.

23. The Administration explained that the planning mechanism proposed by SWAC would allow full and interactive participation of the welfare sector and other stakeholders, and ensure that consultation and planning for welfare services would be conducted on an ongoing and regular (i.e. annual) basis. The proposed new initiatives and pilot schemes did not mean that they were short-term in nature or to be implemented for one year only.

The Government was committed to increasing in its expenditure on welfare services to help the disadvantaged and enhancing the services as reflected in the diversity and quality of welfare services. According to the Administration, the recurrent expenditure for social welfare programmes had been increased by 111% from 1997-1998 to 2011-2012; and the recurrent expenditure for various aspects of social welfare accounted for 17.4% of the total Government Recurrent Expenditure in 2011-2012.

24. Members noted with concern that most deputations attending the meeting expressed reservations about the recommendation in the SWAC Report of introducing the principle of cost-sharing by the financially capable for welfare services. The Administration pointed out that some stakeholders had confused the user-pay principle and the principle of cost-sharing by the financially capable. According to the Administration, SWAC was of the view that those who were financially capable could choose to pay for specific welfare services so as to optimise the effective use of limited public resources in helping people who were most in need.

25. On members' concern about the implementation plans of the SWAC's recommendations, the Administration advised that it would carefully study the recommendations in the SWAC Report and revert to the Panel within the current term of the Government. The Administration will brief the Panel on its response to SWAC's recommendations on the long-term social welfare planning at its meeting on 11 June 2012.

Relevant papers

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

**Relevant papers on
long-term social welfare planning**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	8 May 2006 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	10 July 2006 (Item II)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	23 October 2008 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	22 October 2009 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	5 June 2010 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	26 June 2010 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	14 March 2011 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	13 June 2011 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	11 July 2011 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	22 August 2011 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes