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Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 10 July 2012**

Services to support families at-risk

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") and its Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Family Violence ("the Subcommittee") on the provision of services to support families at-risk and tackle domestic violence.

Background

2. Under the guiding principle of family as the vital component of the society, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") has developed a network of services to cater for family needs, including crisis intervention and support services for individuals/families facing domestic violence or in crisis and measures to prevent abusers from repeating abusive acts.

3. According to the Administration, it has adopted a three-pronged approach to combat domestic violence and strengthen support for families, as follows -

- (a) specialized services and crisis intervention (such as Family and Child Protective Services Units ("FCPSUs"), Family Crisis Support Centre and refuge centres);
- (b) supportive services (such as family services, housing assistance, financial assistance and child care services); and
- (c) preventive measures (such as publicity and community education, and enhancing social capital).

Deliberations by members

Support measures for high-risk families

4. The Panel held two meetings in October 2007 and January 2008 to discuss the provision of support services for high-risk families in Tin Shui Wai ("TSW") arising from a family tragedy occurred in October 2007, which had sparked off wide public concern. Members generally considered that tackling family problems at source required holistic and integrated social and economic policies. A motion urging the Administration to strengthen the support services for TSW was passed at the meeting on 30 October 2007.

5. According to the Administration, it had since 2004 implemented a series of district-based crisis intervention services and community building initiatives to follow through the recommendations made in the "Report of Review Panel on Family Services in Tin Shui Wai" to improve family services in the district. These recommendations were put forward by a three-member Review Panel which was appointed by the Government following the occurrence of the TSW domestic violence case in April 2004.

6. The Administration stressed that it was always concerned with the well-being of TSW residents, and had introduced a number of measures to strengthen support for TSW. These included creating more local job opportunities in the area by further developing and promoting more tourist attractions and encouraging more companies to set up business in the area; enhancing employment services and vocational training/retraining for TSW residents, and organizing more large-scale job fairs in the district; advancing the timing of the review of the Transport Support Scheme; promoting mutual help and support; and strengthening neighbourhood network in the community.

7. Members urged the Administration to adopt measures to facilitate early intervention of high-risk cases through outreach services and hotline support, as well as adopt a holistic approach spanning different policy areas from employment, housing to town planning to tackle family problems expeditiously. The Administration advised that to strengthen the services for high-risk families, a district inter-departmental co-ordination and community building approach had been adopted. In addition, a holistic approach had been adopted to prevent family problems caused by unemployment and poverty through the provision of assistance to help unemployed Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients to become self-reliant.

8. Members also noted that to meet the changing needs of families at large, SWD had strengthened social work manpower in FCPSUs and Integrated Family Service Centres, and increased the number of FCPSUs from five units in 2004-2005 to 11 in 2007 across the territory. Additional resources had also been allocated to enhance shelter services for women, childcare services, and clinical psychological services for victims and families in need, as well as to strengthen multi-disciplinary collaboration and co-ordination. Specifically, a new family support and crisis intervention centre (CEASE Crisis Centre) was set up in March 2007 to provide round-the-clock service to individuals and families affected by domestic violence, hotline services manned by social workers and short-term accommodation for those in need. On case management, social workers had already adopted the principle of "one family one worker" to serve the whole family in need, and if more than one social worker was involved in the case, one of them would take up the role as the key worker, responsible for liaising with all other social workers concerned and co-ordinating the services provided.

Tackling domestic violence

9. The Panel had been following up closely on the Administration's strategy and measures to prevent and tackle domestic violence. The Subcommittee was appointed by the Panel in the Third Legislative Council to study the subject matter.

Implementation of the batterer intervention

10. Members of the Subcommittee urged the early introduction of court-ordered batterers intervention programme ("BIP"), as the arrangements of putting batterers on probation order to join the counselling programme under the arrangement of the probation officers were far from effective, as evidenced by only a handful of such probation orders made by the court in a year. The Administration advised that more careful and in-depth examination was needed before it could decide on whether and, if so, how court-ordered BIP should be introduced.

11. The Panel was advised that upon completion of the two-year pilot project on BIP in March 2008, SWD would continue to implement BIP for suitable abusers mainly involved in spouse battering as a component of their counselling service. To cater for the needs of different types of batterers, suitable treatment models would further be developed. In 2010-2011, SWD had started providing BIP for women on a pilot basis.

12. Members also noted that SWD had separately launched an anti-violence programme ("AVP") in August 2008 as provided for under the Domestic

Violence (Amendment) Ordinance¹. Specifically, the court might, in granting a non-molestation order, require the abuser to attend a programme approved by the Director of Social Welfare that sought to change the abusers' attitude and behaviour. With the enactment of the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance (Cap. 189), AVP had been extended to same-sex cohabitants involved in violence cases since January 2010.

Implementation of the Victim Support Programme for Victims of Family Violence ("VSP")

13. Members were advised that VSP, which was run by a non-governmental organisation with funding provided by SWD, was launched in June 2010 to enhance support services to victims of domestic violence including those undergoing the judicial process. Services provided by VSP included legal aid service, accommodation, treatment and childcare support for the victims. It was expected that through close collaboration with case workers, the victims would be empowered and supported to resume normal life and functioning. As at October 2011, VSP had provided support services for about 600 victims of domestic violence.

Setting up of the standing Child Fatality Review Panel

14. The Subcommittee had examined the feasibility of setting up a mechanism for convening an independent review committee to examine fatal and serious injury cases to identify ways to prevent recurrence of similar tragedies, as recommended by the three-member Review Panel on the TSW family tragedy in 2004. Members of the Subcommittee noted the Administration's proposal of launching a two-year pilot project to examine cases of children aged below 18 who died of non-natural causes in 2006 and 2007. Members considered that the Review Panel should have statutory backing and its scope of work should be expanded in the long run to cover all domestic violence cases which had caused deaths or serious injuries. The Administration advised that subject to the experience gained and outcome of the evaluation of the child fatality review mechanism after the two-year pilot period, it would not rule out the possibility of making it a statutory mechanism and expanding its scope of work in the long run to cover all domestic violence cases which had caused deaths or serious injuries. SWD launched the pilot project to review cases of children who died of natural or non-natural causes in February 2008.

15. At its meeting on 14 February 2011, the Panel was briefed on the review findings of the two-year pilot scheme. According to the Administration, the

¹ Following the passage of the Domestic Violence (Amendment) Bill 2009, the amended Domestic Violence Ordinance had been renamed as the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance.

pilot project had met its objectives and was effective in facilitating inter-sectoral and multi-disciplinary exchange and collaboration in the prevention of avoidable child deaths. In view of the successful experience and positive feedback received, SWD accepted the recommendation of the review panel of the pilot project and set up a standing Child Fatality Review Panel in June 2011 to continue to review child death cases.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Appendix

Relevant papers on services to support families at-risk

| Committee | Date of meeting | Paper |
|---|-------------------------------|---|
| Panel on Welfare Services | 8 November 2004 (Item VI) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Welfare Services | 8 January 2007 (Item IV) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Welfare Services | 30 October 2007 (Item I) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Welfare Services | 14 January 2008 (Item IV) | Agenda Minutes CB(2)1039/07-08(01) CB(2)1184/07-08(01) |
| Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Family Violence | - | Report |
| Panel on Welfare Services | 22 October 2009 (Item I) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Welfare Services | 12 July 2010 (Item IV) | Agenda Minutes IN05/10-11 |
| Panel on Welfare Services | 20 October 2010 (Item I) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Welfare Services | 14 February 2011 (Item VI) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Welfare Services | 21 October 2011 (Item I) | Agenda Minutes |