

**For discussion
on 21 February 2017**

**Legislative Council House Committee
Subcommittee on Children's Rights**

Residential Child Care Services

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the recent developments and current position in respect of residential child care services (RCCS), as well as the new initiatives announced in the 2017 Policy Address.

Service Objectives

2. To support children who cannot be adequately cared for by their families because of various reasons or young persons under the age of 21 with behavioural and/or emotional problems, the Government has been subsidising non-governmental organisations to provide various types of 24-hour free residential care services. RCCS could be categorised into two types, namely institutional and non-institutional care services. Institutional care services include residential child care centres (also known as residential creches and residential nurseries), children's homes, children's reception centres, boys'/girls' homes and boys'/girls' hostels. Non-institutional care services include foster care and small group homes, where home-like environment is provided for children with residential care needs. Details on the target service users of various types of RCCS are set out in **Annex**.

Service Operation

3. All applications for RCCS have to be referred by social workers upon confirmation of service needs or as ordered by the court. Having regard to the circumstances of individual cases and in accordance with the long-term well-being of the children concerned, social workers work out appropriate care arrangements and permanency plans for the children, which include arranging suitable types of residential care services and the duration of stay, as well as formulating other long-term arrangements (e.g. the

arrangement of adoption), etc. Caseworkers regularly follow up on the conditions of the children and assess their welfare needs, with a view to revising and adjusting their existing residential care arrangements. As far as practicable and for the best interests of the children, caseworkers strive to facilitate the children concerned to have reunion with their families or other relatives.

4. In the course of the children receiving residential care services, caseworkers regularly follow up on the conditions of the children concerned and conduct case review meetings with the children, their families and the social workers of the relevant RCCS units to assess and discuss the children's welfare needs, so as to refine or adjust their permanency plans in accordance with the children's best interests. According to the existing mechanism, caseworkers and the management officers concerned review the cases of the children receiving RCCS every three to six months from the case management perspective, which includes the implementation schedules of permanency plans, the progress and the approach of case handling, and adjust the children's permanency plans having regard to the circumstances and needs of individual cases.

Central Referral System for Residential Child Care Services

5. To enhance the efficiency of processing applications and service matching for RCCS with a view to shortening the waiting time, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) set up the Central Referral System for Residential Child Care Services (CRSRC) in May 1995, and has been enhancing the service workflow and the information system concerned on an ongoing basis in recent years so as to strengthen the monitoring of the demand for and utilisation of various types of RCCS as well as to improve the service delivery.

6. Moreover, SWD has, together with the welfare sector and The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, set up the Residential Child Care Services Development Committee (the Committee) to regularly review the operation and waiting situation of relevant services. In December 2009, the Committee completed a review on streamlining the application and admission to residential homes for children, and a number of enhancement measures have been implemented in phases since February 2010. The measures include imposing the requirement for RCCS units to notify CRSRC within one working day after a child has left the service so that another child on the waiting list can be admitted at the earliest possible time and, for better use of resources, imposing the requirement of obtaining approval from the relevant management staff of the referring units where it is necessary for children

under residential care services to take home leave for more than one month or where it is necessary for children under emergency residential care to extend placements beyond the maximum period of stay. Another measure is to upload onto websites the information about vacancies of emergency placements of RCCS. Operators of emergency residential care services are required to upload their latest information as soon as possible, so that referring social workers may approach them direct for enquiries and referrals. All the enhancement measures have achieved satisfactory results.

7. In 2015-16, the average waiting time for RCCS was about three months. The average waiting time for different types of RCCS is as follows –

Service Types	Average waiting time for RCCS (month)
Residential child care centres (Aged below 6)	2.8
Foster care	1.6
Small group homes	4.0
Children's homes	5.4
Boys'/girls' homes and Boys'/girls' hostels	1.4

As at 31 December 2016, there were a total of 575 applications for various above-mentioned types of RCCS. Regarding emergency residential care services (such as emergency/short term care in small group homes, foster care (emergency) and children's reception centres), caseworkers may approach the service units concerned direct for enquiries and referrals, and arrange for admission as soon as vacant places are available.

Development in Recent Years

8. As at 31 December 2016, there were a total of 3 676 places of various types of RCCS, involving annual recurrent expenditure of about \$700 million in total. SWD has been monitoring and reviewing the demand for and utilisation of various types of RCCS, providing additional places when necessary and is committed to enhancing residential child care services.

9. Concrete measures to increase the provision of RCCS in recent years include –

- (a) Providing 153 additional residential child care places from

July 2007 to September 2012;

- (b) Providing in phases 130 additional residential child care places starting from 2012-13;
- (c) Funding allocation for providing 30 additional small group home places in 2015-16;
- (d) Providing five additional places for emergency/short-term care in small group homes in 2017-18; and
- (e) Providing about 80 additional places of girls' home with school for social development on-site in the 2017/18 school year.

10. As regards service enhancement, in view of the increasing complexity of emotional and behavioural problems of children and young persons receiving RCCS in recent years, SWD provided additional funding in 2013-14 to strengthen professional support for residential care homes through enhancing the manpower of social workers and introducing clinical psychological service. The measure incurs an annual recurrent expenditure of about \$19.65 million, and benefits a total of 131 RCCS service units.

11. In 2014-15, SWD strengthened the supervisory and paramedical support under the enhancement of the Lump Sum Grant Subvention System. The supervisory support for small group homes and emergency/short-term care in small group homes and boys'/girls' hostels has been enhanced on all aspects, while the additional funding for nurses in residential child care centres and children's reception centres as well as clinical psychologists in residential homes for children is calculated on the basis of two additional points above the mid-point salaries.

12. SWD regularly reviews foster care allowances and makes adjustments annually according to the Composite Consumer Price Index. In April 2012, SWD raised foster care allowances, including the incentive payment for foster parents and maintenance grant for foster children (an increase of over 30%), to enhance the support for foster children and recruit more suitable foster parents.

New initiatives promulgated in the 2017 Policy Address

13. To provide more support to families in need, the Chief Executive announced in the 2017 Policy Address that SWD would increase the level of

various foster care allowances and provide 240 additional foster care places in phases, including 60 foster care (emergency) places. The total number of foster care places will increase from 1 070 at present to 1 310, among which the number of foster care (emergency) places will increase from 95 at present to 155. To encourage foster families to take care of young children, SWD will introduce a new item of extra incentive payment for foster parents taking care of children under the age of three. Details of the relevant measure will be announced upon the passage of the Appropriation Bill. To enhance public awareness of foster care service, SWD will launch a series of Television and Radio Announcements in the Public Interests and posters in April 2017 about foster care service to encourage and recruit more suitable persons to participate in foster care service.

14. In view that the Education Bureau will implement the policy of Free Quality Kindergarten Education starting from the 2017/18 school year, the sector is concerned about the impact of the policy on the operation of units of day and residential child care services and pre-school rehabilitation services. To alleviate the problems of staff recruitment and retention of the services, the Chief Executive announced in the 2017 Policy Address that SWD would provide additional resources for the service units concerned (including residential child care centres) for enhancing the remuneration of qualified child care staff, so as to retain and attract such staff. SWD will discuss with the sector the relevant arrangements in regard to the measure upon the passage of the Appropriation Bill.

Way Forward

15. SWD will closely monitor the demand for and utilisation of various types of RCCS, explore with the sector new service enhancement measures, and increase the service provision as necessary through re-prioritisation or allocation of additional resources.

Advice Sought

16. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
February 2017

Target Service Users of Residential Child Care Services

The target service users of residential child care services are children and young persons under the age of 21 who cannot be adequately cared for by their families due to various reasons, or those who have to stay away from their families temporarily because of their behavioural and/or emotional problems.

Service types	Age of target service users
Institutional care services	
Residential child care centres (also known as residential creches)	0 - 3
Residential child care centres (also known as residential nurseries)	3 - 6
Children's homes	6 -21
Children's reception centres (note 1)	0 - 18
Boys' /Girls' homes (note 2)	7 - 21
Boys'/Girls' hostels (note 2)	14 - 21
Non-institutional care services	
Foster care & Foster care (emergency) (note 1)	0 - 18
Small group homes & Emergency/Short-term care in small group homes (note 1)	4 - 18

Note 1 : The services concerned provide placements for children whose families are in emergency situations.

Note 2 : Boys'/Girls' homes and Boys'/Girls' hostels provide services for young persons with behavioural or emotional problems who are studying or working.