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Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Health Services

Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for
the meeting on 19 May 2020**

**Long-term care services,
including daytime, home-based and residential care services,
being affected under the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic**

Purpose

This paper provides background information on long-term care services, including daytime, home-based and residential care services, being affected under the Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic and summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by members during previous discussions on the subject.

Background

Special arrangements for subsidized welfare services during the epidemic

2. According to the Administration, while ensuring that essential and urgent services are maintained, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") has from time to time adjusted the scale of operation of subsidized welfare facilities, including long-term care facilities, by reducing the scale of or suspending certain services in order to reduce the risk of infection arising from the gatherings of people during the epidemic. In this connection, SWD has issued a number of press releases in January and February 2020 to announce special arrangements for subsidized welfare services, including service suspension or provision of limited services for certain centres and

suspension of groups and programmes.¹

Support provided by the Social Welfare Department for social welfare service units to strengthen preventive measures

3. In order to assist welfare service units to strengthen their anti-epidemic measures, SWD has provided relevant service units, including all residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs") and residential care homes for persons with disabilities ("RCHDs"), with three rounds of special allowance (at a rate of \$5,000 or \$3,000 for each of the first two rounds; at a rate of \$10,000 or \$6,000 for the third round) for the procurement of personal protective equipment and sanitizing items. The allowance will benefit about 3 500 service units.

4. The Administration has also provided 1 million face masks for the staff of a total of 1 277 subvented, contract, self-financing and private residential service units, including RCHEs and RCHDs licensed by SWD, in end-February and early March 2020. In late March 2020, the Administration has pledged to provide 2 million face masks each month for the staff of the above service units.

Deliberations by members since 2019-2020 session

Provision of long-term care services during the epidemic

5. Noting that some service units might provide services for persons with special needs during the epidemic, some members sought the number of persons who had received such services. According to the Administration, the caseloads of Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities and Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities in February 2020 were around 2 500 and around 860 respectively, and around 10% to 15% of the service users had visited day care centres for the elderly during the epidemic.

6. Members enquired about the measures adopted by the Administration to ensure that services for the elderly, such as district elderly community centre ("DECC") service and meal delivery service, would not be affected during the epidemic. The Administration advised that although some service centres were not open to the public during the epidemic, these centres were still manned by staff to answer telephone enquiries and contact

¹ For details of the special arrangements starting from 2 March 2020, please refer to the press release of the Government at:
<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202002/28/P2020022800467.htm>.

service users by phone. To meet the needs of elderly persons for meal services, DECCs and neighbourhood elderly centres had prepared meal boxes for elderly persons to take home.

7. Members opined that bathing service for elderly persons and persons with disabilities should be fully resumed. The Administration advised that bathing and shopping services were provided for elderly persons on a need basis. SWD would remind service providers that such services should be provided if necessary. Besides, the Administration would discuss with service providers the timing for service resumption having regard to the development of the epidemic and the service needs.

8. Given that provision of many welfare services had been suspended during the epidemic, some members suggested that the Administration should provide resources for social welfare service units to set up visual communication system to facilitate them to maintain some of their services. The Administration advised that it would consider members' suggestion having regard to the service provision during the epidemic.

Visiting arrangements of residential care homes during the epidemic

9. As no visitor was allowed in residential care homes ("RCHs") during the epidemic, some members urged the Administration to keep family members of RCH residents abreast of the residents' conditions so as to ease their worries. The Administration advised that some RCH operators had made use of telephone and video communication to facilitate residents and their family members to maintain contact. SWD would remind RCH operators to enhance their communications with family members of residents.

Support provided by the Social Welfare Department for social welfare service units to strengthen preventive measures

10. Members expressed concern that the numbers of face masks provided by the Administration for RCHEs and RCHDs were inadequate to meet the needs of staff and residents of these RCHEs and RCHDs. They opined that the special allowance for procurement of personal protective equipment and sanitizing items might not be sufficient for these RCHEs and RCHDs to strengthen epidemic preventive measures.

11. According to the Administration, SWD had provided 1 million face masks for the staff of residential service units (including RCHEs/RCHDs licensed by SWD) in February and March 2020, so as to facilitate these units to continue their provision of services. Around 60% of these face masks were provided for subvented residential service units and the remaining 40%

were distributed to other residential service units. The face masks and the special allowance for procurement of personal protective equipment and sanitizing items would help address the needs of RCHEs/RCHDs for face masks. SWD would provide RCHEs/RCHDs with more face masks when there was an increase in the supply of face masks.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
14 May 2020

**Relevant papers on long-term care services, including daytime,
home-based and residential care services, being affected under the
Coronavirus Disease 2019 epidemic**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	9 March 2020 (Item III)	Agenda

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