

立法會 *Legislative Council*

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Panel on Welfare Services

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 10 July 2023

Support for single-parent families

Purpose

This paper provides background information and summarizes the discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services and relevant Subcommittees on the support for single-parent families.

Background

2. In 2021, Hong Kong had approximately 72 000 single-parent households comprising about 213 300 persons, including 95 300 children. These households constituted about 10.9% of all households with children and 2.7% of all households in Hong Kong. According to the Administration, 8 100 single-parent households were living in subdivided units (“SDUs”). As at December 2022, 22 169 single-parent households were receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (“CSSA”). The Administration endeavours to implement measures to support single-parent families, with a view to achieving the policy objective of promoting employment and supporting families, thereby building a caring and cohesive community.

Social welfare services for single-parent families

3. The Social Welfare Department (“SWD”) operates 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (“IFSCs”) and 2 Integrated Services Centres across the territory, providing a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial welfare services¹ to individuals and families in need, including single-parent families. In 2022-2023, IFSCs and subvented non-governmental

¹ These services include family life education, parent-child activities, enquiry services, volunteer training, outreaching service, groups and programmes, intensive counselling, financial assistance and referral services.

organizations (“NGO”) handled a total of 10 082 cases involving single-parent families.

4. Since October 2019, SWD has subvented NGOs to operate five Specialized Co-parenting Support Centres to provide one-stop specialized services² for separated/divorcing/divorced parents and their children, in a bid to assist the separated/divorced parents in carrying out parental responsibilities under the “child-focused” principle, strengthening parent-child connection and providing support to children affected by parental separation/divorce and family change.

Financial support for single-parent families

5. Single-parent families in financial difficulties can apply for CSSA.³ A monthly single-parent supplement⁴ is also payable to single-parent families to recognize the special difficulties they face in bringing up a family. On the other hand, the Working Family Allowance (“WFA”) covers single-parent households who have at least one child aged below 15.⁵

Employment support for single-parent families

6. The Labour Department (“LD”) caters to the preference of job seekers, including single parents for part-time work by organizing job fairs and setting up a dedicated webpage on part-time job vacancies. Moreover, the Administration has been promoting family-friendly employment practices, including flexible work arrangements (e.g. flexible working hours, five-day work week and remote work or hybrid work model), additional leave benefit to cater for family needs (e.g. parental leave) and living support (e.g. child care services), to encourage employers to support their employees’ well-being.

² The specialized services include professional counselling, parenting coordination services, groups activities and programmes, children contact service as well as child-focused counselling, groups activities and programmes for children.

³ The asset limit as at 1 February 2023 is \$35,000 for able-bodied adult and \$52,000 for child, elderly person, disabled person or person medically certified to be in ill-health.

⁴ HK\$405 per month with effect from 1.2.2023.

⁵ Single-parent household with aggregated monthly working hours not less than 36 hours may be granted Basic Allowance; if the aggregated monthly working hours are not less than 54 hours, the household may be granted Medium Allowance; and if the aggregated monthly working hours are 72 hours or more, the household may be granted Higher Allowance.

Child care support

7. SWD provides different kinds of child care services for parents who are unable to give proper care to their children because of work, job search or other reasons, such as standalone child care centres, the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project⁶, and the After-School Care Programme (“ASCP”)⁷/ Enhanced ASCP etc.

Deliberations by Members

Employment support

8. Taking the view that CSSA recipients, particularly those with working ability, should be encouraged to move towards self-reliance, Members suggested regularizing Self-reliance Scheme (“SFS”) and enhancing the Employment Support Services (“EmSS”) under SFS. Besides, employment support measures such as child care services, skill enhancement and employment counselling should be implemented to facilitate unemployed grassroots and single-parent families to leave the safety net.

9. The Administration advised that EmSS targeted at employable CSSA recipients who were unemployed persons, single parents and child carers. The Administration would review and enhance EmSS as and when necessary. It would also explore ways to increase the provision of child care services to unleash parents from family commitments for joining the workforce.

10. Members were concerned that some families applying for WFA failed to meet its working-hour requirements due to various reasons, such as the need to take care of children and the elderly, which prevented them from working longer hours. The Administration advised that it had fully reviewed and made several improvements to the WFA Scheme. These measures included relaxing the eligibility criteria (such as extending the Scheme to singleton households), substantially increasing the rates of allowances twice, and allowing household members to aggregate their working hours to apply for WFA.

⁶ Service operators of the Project recruit child carers to provide families in their neighbourhood with flexible day child care services at home, as a way to foster the spirit of mutual help in the community.

⁷ The Programme provides services for primary school students including homework guidance, parental guidance and education, skill learning as well as social activities.

Child care services

11. Members noted that single parents faced difficulties in participating in the labour market due to family commitments, and had a more pressing need for poverty alleviation measures to improve their livelihood. In light of the increasing number of single-parent families, Members expressed concern about the inadequate provision of child care services and the lack of family-friendly policies.

12. The Administration explained that SWD subsidized NGOs to provide various child care services, including increasing aided standalone child care centre places, enhancing Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, implementing the Enhanced ASCP⁸ and re-engineering Mutual Help Child Care Centres by phases to provide ASCP for pre-primary children. The Administration also provided support services for carers of children and people in need, including emotional support and relevant referrals to support services such as child care, residential care, and respite services through IFSCs/Integrated Services Centres. This helped families with welfare needs to cope with the mental and financial pressures of caring for their children and allowed temporary relief for carers while alleviating their stress.

13. Apart from the above, the Administration planned to launch a one-year On-site After School Care Service Pilot Scheme to provide care and learning support for primary school students in need, especially for underprivileged families, including single-parent families, to enable parents to work and improve their livelihood.

14. Members expressed concern that the on-site after school care service, which was mainly provided on weekdays, might not be able to render assistance to parents who had taken up part-time jobs on weekends and public holidays. To better accommodate the needs of these parents, Members suggested that the Administration should consider providing after-school care service on weekends and public holidays, or allocate some of the existing service places to after-school care service provided on weekends and public holidays. The Administration advised that it would consider the suggestion.

Financial assistance

15. Members suggested providing subsidies through the Community Care Fund for children from single-parent families whose parents were ineligible

⁸ The Social Welfare Department has implemented the Enhanced After School Care Programme (“ASCP”) by extending the service hours on weekday evenings, Saturdays, Sundays and school holidays in some ASCP centres and providing additional fee-waiving/reduction quotas.

for CSSA. The Administration advised that WFA helped alleviate the financial burden of eligible low-income families outside the safety net by providing a child allowance for families with children aged below 15, or aged between 15 and 21 receiving full-time education (but not post-secondary education). The Administration would continue to provide fee-waiving or fee-reduction subsidies to child care services for families in need to alleviate the financial burdens of grass-roots families.

Latest developments

16. The 2022 Policy Address announced some welfare measures to strengthen child care by:

- (a) increasing the number of beneficiaries under the Fee-Waiving Subsidy Scheme of the After School Care Programme for low income families to 4 600 by end-2026-2027 school year, an increase of more than 60% over 2021-2022 school year; and
- (b) increasing the number of Aided Standalone Child Care Centre service places for parents who cannot temporarily take care of their young children to 1 440 by end-2026-2027, an increase of nearly 70% over 2021-2022.

17. The Administration has identified three specific target groups for targeted poverty alleviation, namely SDUs households, single-parent households and elderly households. It will brief the Panel on the support provided to single-parent families at the meeting held in July 2023.

Relevant papers

18. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

Appendix

Relevant papers on Support for single-parent families

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	14 November 2022 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Subcommittee on Poverty	23 June 2014 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
	28 April 2015 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Subcommittee on Reforming the Poverty Alleviation Policies and Strategies	14 June 2022 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	23 May 2018	Question raised by Hon Chan Hak-kan on “Support for single-parent families”
	11 January 2023	Question raised by Hon Tony Tse on “Assistance for single-parent families”
	26 April 2023	Question raised by Hon Holden Chow on “Improving Working Family Allowance Scheme”
	21 June 2023	Question raised by Hon Peter Douglas Koon on “Supporting single-parent families”

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