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Report of the Panel on Welfare Services for submission to the Legislative Council

Purpose

This report gives an account of the work of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") during the 2025 session of the Legislative Council ("LegCo"). It will be tabled at the Council meeting of 15 October 2025 in accordance with Rule 77(14) of the Rules of Procedure.

Panel

2. The Panel was formed by a resolution of the Council on 8 July 1998 and as amended on 20 December 2000, 9 October 2002, 11 July 2007, 2 July 2008 and 26 October 2022 for the purpose of monitoring and examining Government policies and issues of public concern relating to welfare, rehabilitation services, poverty and social enterprise. The terms of reference of the Panel are in **Appendix 1**.

3. The Panel comprises 20 members, with Revd Canon Hon Peter Douglas KOON Ho-ming and Hon Doreen KONG Yuk-foon elected as its Chairman and Deputy Chairman respectively. The membership list of the Panel is in **Appendix 2**.

Major work

4. During the 2025 LegCo session, the Panel has focused on strengthening support for the underprivileged groups; enhancing the service quality of residential care homes ("RCHs"); optimizing welfare service resources, as well as enhancing resource utilization and accelerating the implementation of legislation.

<u>Strengthening support for the underprivileged groups</u>

Support for elderly persons and carers

5. The Social Welfare Department ("SWD") has launched the District Services and Community Care Teams ("Care Teams")—Pilot Scheme on Supporting Elderly and Carers in Tsuen Wan and Southern District since March 2024 to provide various support services to singleton and doubleton elderly, carers of elderly persons and carers of persons with disabilities ("PWDs") through the Care Teams. SWD extended the Scheme to all 18 districts across the territory in the second quarter of 2025, with the same target beneficiaries.

6. Members stressed that the Care Teams should improve the post-visit records and follow-up mechanism, and suggested establishing systematic reporting to facilitate follow-up support. Noting that only about 17% of the referral cases were followed up by SWD, members recommended a review of the service division between the Care Teams and SWD to avoid overlapping of roles. To improve effectiveness, members also suggested enhancing the training of Care Teams regarding communication, support skills, and Mental Health First Aid. The Administration responded that the Care Teams already had an established workflow, and would prepare post-visit summaries and provide continuous follow up for high-risk cases to ensure timely support. A clear division of labour was established, with Care Teams responsible for neighbourhood care and preliminary assessments, and social welfare organizations tasked with accepting referrals and providing professional support. To further enhance service quality, the training provided to the Care Teams would be continuously enhanced.

7. Expressing concern that some hidden elders had declined visits by the Care Teams, members suggested speeding up the establishment of the Carer Database and ensuring its effective operation to accurately identify high-risk cases. Some members suggested consolidating data from various social security schemes to expedite the creation of a preliminary carer register, with participation being voluntary. The Administration advised that the pilot scheme on Carer Database, implemented since 14 July 2025, would be gradually extended across the territory. Following an evaluation of its effectiveness, a decision would be made on including other groups. Social welfare organizations and the Care Teams would identify, through outreaching work, singleton and doubleton elderly, as well as carers of elderly persons and PWDs in need, and refer these cases to social welfare service units for follow-up. For cases where services were declined, the Care Teams would follow up with the relevant service units, but the wish of concerned persons had to be respected.

Enhance employment and vocational rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities

8. SWD implemented the Pilot Project on Enhancing Vocational Rehabilitation Services ("Pilot Project") in 2023 to build a vocational rehabilitation and training ladder for PWDs by providing diversified vocational rehabilitation and training modules according to the interests and abilities of the service users. The Pilot Project was regularized in the third quarter of 2025, starting with integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres and gradually extending to all sheltered workshops ("SWs").

9. Members pointed out that the number of participants successfully employed after advanced training under the Pilot Project was relatively low. They suggested that the Administration should review the effectiveness of the project and boost the participation rate. With advancement in the educational achievements of PWDs, popularization of assistive technologies, and increasing awareness of social responsibility among enterprises, the Administration should seize the opportunity to promote the employment of PWDs so as to achieve a more comprehensive employment support target. The Administration pointed out that the Pilot Project mainly served persons with moderate intellectual disabilities and those in mental recovery. While retaining simple work types (such as affixing labels) in SWs, new training areas such as art, design and logistics had been added in response to market demand. Training had been provided according to the interests and abilities of the trainees. To promote open employment of PWDs, the Administration would introduce their working abilities to different sectors, encourage employers to offer suitable jobs, and establish a mechanism to commend employers who employed PWDs. In view of the limited abilities of elderly PWDs and persons with moderate intellectual disabilities to work in the open market, it would formulate more realistic training or employment targets for them.

10. Expressing concern about the benefits of the Pilot Project on trainees' daily living skills and personal growth, members suggested strengthening pre-employment training to change public perceptions on the employment of PWDs, and establishing a continuous post-employment counselling mechanism to help trainees adapt to the workplace. The Administration advised that the basic course, which covered life skills training aimed at enhancing trainees' communication skills, emotional management and self-confidence. This training was underpinned by parental counselling to enhance learning effectiveness. Trainees who secured employment would receive on-the-job counselling and follow-up services for at least 12 months to promote labour relations.

11. Regarding skills training, some members suggested that the Shine Skills Centres ("SSCs") should implement parent-child supported employment, promote trainees' work in the market, as well as collaborate with the Education Bureau ("EDB") to organize pre-service courses to help trainees in early career development planning. The Administration advised that it had been promoting the work of PWDs in diversified ways, and some organizations would invite the trainees' parents to visit them. Furthermore, EDB would discuss with SSCs on the articulation arrangements for students with special educational needs, including the feasibility of on-site courses, and would carefully evaluate the implementation plan based on the needs of different schools.

12. Members encouraged the Government to employ PWDs and suggested gradually increasing the proportion of PWDs in the total civil service establishment to 2% to 3%. The Administration responded that, while it had no immediate plans to set such a benchmark for PWD employment, it would strive to ensure equal access to government jobs for applicants with disabilities and would give them appropriate preference in appointments.

13. To facilitate a smooth return to work for individuals injured at work, members suggested closer collaboration between the Labour Department and SWD to provide systematic support, including vocational training, workplace adaptation and employer counselling. The Administration advised that SWD had through the Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprises Project ("the Project") supported non-governmental organizations ("NGOs") to run small enterprises to promote the employment of PWDs. At present, about 300 of the PWDs participating in supported employment under the Project were persons with physical disabilities. It would continue to follow up on their work abilities and assist those qualified for open employment in returning to work.

14. Some members suggested taking the opportunity of the 15th National Games, and the 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games co-hosted by Hong Kong Special Administrative Region for the first time in the end of 2025 to showcase Hong Kong's achievements in rehabilitation services for PWDs and promote the development of rehabilitation services in Greater China. According to the Administration, the organizers were considering inviting PWDs from Hong Kong to perform at the opening and closing ceremonies of the said events. This initiative was viewed as an opportunity for exchanges with relevant Mainland organizations.

Poverty alleviation

15. The current-term Government adopts the strategy of targeted poverty alleviation by directing resources to those most in need. Under the strategy of targeted poverty alleviation, the Government has identified three target groups, namely households living in subdivided units, single-parent households and elderly households. Members suggested that the Administration should set a poverty line and a target of poverty alleviation, and explore ways to lower the proportion of poor population, thereby achieving sustainable long-term outcomes. The Administration advised that the targeted poverty alleviation strategy implemented by the current-term Government focused on alleviating people's hardships and providing targeted support to specific target groups, rather than measuring poverty by income only. While the overall social welfare policy had improved, the focus at this stage was to enhance the effectiveness of the existing measures.

16. Members were concerned about the details on the utilization of funds raised under the Strive and Rise Programme ("the Programme") and asked about the sources of its future funding. The Administration replied that the Government would cover all administrative costs, and that all donated funds would be used entirely on the mentees, for purposes such as seed money and scholarships. The Administration emphasized that the Programme's continuity was not directly tied to community fund-raising results. Furthermore, it would continuously expand the Programme's benefits by promoting it through a cooperative effort between the Government, the business sector and the community.

17. Members suggested that the Programme should include a compulsory module covering patriotism, volunteering, and interactions with other government youth programmes (such as "Youth Link"), as well as life planning education for the Alumni Club, and increased quotas for study and exchange tours to accommodate all mentees. The Administration advised that it would explore ways to strengthen connections between the Programme and the youth development work of various government departments and would cultivate the enthusiasm of the mentees for contributing to society through soft ways such as joint activities. The Alumni Club had currently provided short-term internship opportunities. Considering that young people already had sufficient opportunities for overseas exchanges, it was not necessary to include study and exchange tours as a compulsory module.

18. Expressing concern about the insufficient coverage of Community Living Room ("CLR") service, especially the absence of such facilities in Yau Tsim Mong District, members suggested expanding the service scope

through proactively encouraging venue donations from the business sector, or converting idle government properties into pilot locations. The Administration responded that the core principle of CLR was cooperation of the Government, the business sector and the community. The venue should hence be provided by the business sector; otherwise it would be indistinguishable from general welfare facilities. In addition, as CLR had to be easily accessible, the existing venues of the Government might not be able to meet such a requirement.

19. Members suggested integrating the two after-school support programmes, namely the School-based After-School Care Service Scheme ("SASCS Scheme") and EDB's School-based After-school Learning and Support Programmes. At the same time, the Administration should relax the means test criteria to extend benefits to students from middle-class families. The Administration advised that the SASCS Scheme had been extended to over 120 primary schools across 18 districts in the 2024-2025 school year. It would further encourage participation of the Scheme with an uncapped quota from more schools in the 2025-2026 school year. The SASCS Scheme focused on supporting underprivileged families (especially single-parent families). Should spare quota be available, students who did not meet income requirements might participate at their own expense. A comprehensive review of the SASCS Scheme would be completed in the 2025-2026 school year to determine its future direction.

<u>Enhancing the service quality of residential care homes</u>

Review of manpower for healthcare services in residential care homes

20. The Chief Executive announced in the 2022 Policy Address the holistic review of the skill and qualification requirements of RCH staff for establishing professional standards and a career progression path. In January 2025, SWD released the report of the consultancy study on "Skill and Qualification Requirements of Residential Care Home Staff providing Health and Rehabilitation Services in Hong Kong", which recommended the establishment of a new professional rank of "Health&Care Practitioner" ("HCP") to attract and retain talents.

21. While members generally supported the creation of the new professional HCP rank, they were concerned that some of its functions might overlap with those of nurses. They also cautioned that the Government's plan to import non-locally trained nurses to Hong Kong might stifle the career development of local nursing staff. Accordingly, members suggested enhancing local training programmes to retain talents while streamlining the hiring process for non-local nurses. This dual approach

would ensure these measures were complementary and effectively address the manpower gap in the industry.

22. The Administration advised that the General Employment Policy and Admission Scheme for Mainland Talents and Professionals (Technical Professionals Stream) covered eight specified skilled trades (including nurses, etc), with an average quota of 1 250 for each skilled trade and a ceiling of 3 000 for any one trade. It would explore with relevant organizations/departments on streamlining the application procedures to facilitate applications where necessary. At present, majority of RCHs had yet to meet the requirements under the Residential Care Homes Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2023 on additional nurses and health workers (to be implemented in phases since June 2028). It was expected that a considerable number of nurses would be required to meet the demand of RCHs in the future. As a brand-new care professional position dedicated to the welfare sector, the HCP rank was intended to avoid drawing manpower resources from the healthcare sector.

23. Members stressed that the nursing industry would be difficult to attract young people if HCP position did not provide a significantly more attractive salary package. The Administration advised that the qualifications of both HCPs and Enrolled Nurses ("EN") were pitched at Qualifications Framework Level 4. It would, through on-the-job training, assist young people in gradually promoting from health workers to HCPs and eventually to Home Managers.

24. Expressing concern about whether the trainees would possess the professional skills to perform invasive medical procedures (such as intramuscular injections and insertion of indwelling urinary catheters) upon completion of the training courses for HCPs, members suggested that the Administration should strengthen the supervision of training institutions, including on-site inspections of the courses by medical professionals and improving the assessment mechanism, so as to ensure that the skills of HCPs met the standards. Members also suggested providing subsidy to the trainees under the Continuing Education Fund.

25. The Administration advised that the contents of the training courses for HCPs were consistent with those of the EN (General) Training Programme for the Welfare Sector ("EN Training Programme"), which would ensure that the trainees possessed the nursing skills for RCHs. The Health Inspectorate Team of SWD's Licensing Office, comprising a team of nurses, was responsible for conducting surprise inspections to RCHs to monitor service quality and handle relevant complaints. In addition, SWD would review the training contents on a regular basis, including the assessment criteria and graduation requirements of trainees, etc.

Special Scheme to Import Care Workers for Residential Care Homes

26. To address the keen demand for care workers in RCHs and assist RCHs in enhancing service quality, the Government, on the premise of safeguarding the employment priority for local workers, launched the "Special Scheme to Import Care Workers for Residential Care Homes" in 2023 to allow RCHs to import care workers. The Government increased the quota by 8 000 in 2024 to bring the total number of quotas for RCHs to 15 000. Additional new quotas would be allocated for application by RCHs by batches over the next three years.

27. Members were gravely concerned about reports of involuntary uncompensated overtime work and wage reductions among imported care workers, and urged the Administration to implement monitoring measures, including verifying local recruitment practices and reviewing entry requirements; regularly assessing the ratio of local full-time employees to imported care workers in RCHs; and ensuring that imported care workers were prioritized for layoffs in RCHs where necessary. The Administration advised that RCHs were required to prove their compliance with the manning ratio requirement[1] at the time of application for quota (including quota renewal), and to confirm that local recruitment had been conducted for a continuous period of 14 days within one month preceding the application. Between 2024 and 2025 (up to April 2025), a total of 47 complaints were received. Following investigation, written warnings were issued to the concerned RCHs in 3 cases, and prosecution was instituted on one case.

28. Some members highlighted the lack of a breakdown of the manning ratio requirement in RCHs by job hierarchies, which might jeopardize local care workers' employment opportunities in the long run. They suggested focusing the manning ratio on specific ranks, e.g. professional ranks such as HCPs. The Administration explained that similar requirements were also found in the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme. As some employees had to take up different postings, it might not be practicable to calculate the relevant ratio on the basis of individual job types. The Administration was conducting a review of the Enhanced Supplementary Labour Scheme and would consider enhancing other labour importation schemes accordingly in the light of the outcomes of the review.

29. Members were concerned that despite the total number of care workers rising to about 17 000 since the gradual increase in the quota of imported

[1] Subvented/Contract RCHs: For every two full-time local employees (regardless of post), a RCH may apply to import a maximum of one care worker (i.e. 2:1). Private/Self-financing RCHs (including those participating in Bought Place Schemes): For every full-time local employee (regardless of post), a RCH may apply to import a maximum of one care worker (i.e. 1:1).

care workers in 2024, the number of local care workers had decreased. This indicated that the additional quotas had not succeeded in attracting local people. Members suggested adjusting the retirement age of care workers to 65; developing key performance indicators ("KPIs") for the number of local care workers in the next three years; and setting a timetable for resolving the manpower shortage problem in the RCH sector, with a view to phasing out the importation of care workers.

30. The Administration emphasized its commitment to prioritizing employment for local people, but due to ageing population and manpower shortages, care workers currently faced a vacancy rate of about 10%. In order to stabilize manpower supply, importing care workers was essential. Despite ongoing efforts to recruit local care workers, their numbers were insufficient to offset retirement, resulting in a slight decline in the number of local workforce.

31. Members noted that the median wage of imported care workers (about \$15,000) was lower than that of local care workers (about \$17,000 to \$20,000), which might affect the recruitment strategies of RCHs. Some members suggested relaxing the salary requirements for imported workers to alleviate cost pressure on the industry, while still prioritizing local employment. The Administration advised that between 2019 and 2024, the median wage of local care workers had increased by 2% or more each year, except for 2021, when there was no increase due to the pandemic.

Expand the resources of residential care homes

32. In 2023, the Government launched the Incentive Scheme to Encourage Provision of Residential Care Home for the Elderly Premises in New Private Developments ("the Incentive Scheme") to meet the demand for residential care places for the elderly. Developers may be exempted from payment of land premium on compliance with certain conditions and with the support of SWD. In the 2023-2024 Budget, the Financial Secretary announced the enhancement of the Scheme to increase the area of RCHs for the elderly ("RCHEs") in each development project and exempt their gross floor area ("GFA"). The enhanced Scheme will be reviewed after a three-year trial period.

33. To improve the enforcement mechanism of the Incentive Scheme, members suggested strengthening collaboration among Government, business sector and community; streamlining the administrative procedures; enabling concurrent cross-departmental vetting and approval of applications; establishing specific KPIs, etc. to speed up the projects. The Administration advised that after enhancing the Scheme, the number of applications had increased significantly from 8 cases in the past 20 years to

10 cases in the past two years. As a "promoter" and a "facilitator", the Government was market-oriented and provided incentives for the developers to provide RCHEs. The Planning Department and the Lands Department had streamlined their procedures and put in place an enquiry mechanism for pre-submission planning applications. However, the progress of the project was dominated by the developer and was also subject to other factors. It was planned that the effectiveness of the enhancement measures would be reviewed in 2026.

34. To boost developer participation in the Incentive Scheme, members suggested using the number of beds as a basis for land premium concessions, modifying permanent binding clauses to allow for short-term land premium waivers of 10 to 20 years, and extending the GFA exemption of 12 000 square meters ("sq m") to include leisure facilities. The Administration responded that an exemption flexibility of 10% of the total GFA or 12 000 sq m (whichever was larger) had been provided under the current policy, but most developers had not yet fully utilized this upper limit.

Implementation progress of new legislative requirements

35. Residential Care Homes Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2023, passed in June 2023, seeks to strengthen the supervision of RCHs and enhance the service standards. Save for the requirements for enhancing staffing and area of floor space per resident, which will have a longer transition period, majority of the new requirements have come into effect since June 2024. The Panel was briefed on the implementation progress of the various new requirements under the Ordinance in July 2025.

36. Expressing concern about the effectiveness of SWD's supervision on RCHs (particularly on RCHs' staffing), members suggested increasing inspections and imposing stricter regulatory requirements for repeated non-compliant RCHs. The Administration advised that SWD would formulate risk-based inspection plans, including unannounced inspections outside office hours, and take actions against non-compliances, such as issuing advice, warnings, or instituting prosecutions. Over the past five years, SWD had issued a total of some 500 warning letters and successfully prosecuted a total of about 100 cases, of which about 80 involved non-compliant private RCHEs in respect of staffing. However, no RCH had their licences revoked during the period, and no RCH for PWDs ("RCHD") was prosecuted for staffing issues. Relevant warning records were uploaded to SWD's website.

37. Members noted that the implementation of the new staffing requirements would significantly increase the number of care workers, thereby enhancing service quality, but they stressed that the Government

should also safeguard the career development of local care workers while importing care workers. The Administration advised that although unemployment rate had slightly risen, the number of practitioners in the RCH sector had not increased. It had adopted a multi-pronged approach to increase staffing, including encouraging RCHs to arrange "institution-based" training for care workers and increase the quota for imported care workers by 8 000 over three years starting in 2024.

38. Members expressed concern about the progress of implementing the new HCP rank, and enquired how the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Regulation (Cap. 459A) and the Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) Regulation (Cap. 613A) would be amended to meet the minimum staffing requirements under the Residential Care Homes Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Ordinance 2023. The Administration advised that the Panel was expected to be consulted on the amendments to these sets of subsidiary legislation in 2026. Discussions were underway with training institutions and the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications on the curriculum arrangements, with the first cohort of trainees expected to graduate in 2027.

39. Members suggested that enhancing secondary school curricula and strengthening school-enterprise collaboration would help increase the retention rate of EN Training Programme graduates in the welfare sector, thereby addressing the long-term manpower shortage problem. The Administration advised that as a condition of government sponsorship, graduates were required to work as ENs in SWD-recognized institutions for a minimum of three consecutive years. According to a survey conducted by SWD, over 90% of respondents remained employed as ENs in the welfare sector.

40. Expressing concern that the new requirement of increasing the living space for residents would raise RCH's operational costs and potentially leading to cost transfers to residents or closures of RCHs, members suggested establishing a monitoring mechanism and providing transitional support. Furthermore, noting that the new requirements would eliminate about 5 000 residential care places and likely lengthen the waiting time, members urged the Administration to conduct advance planning to mitigate the impact. The Administration responded that the new requirements included an eight-year transitional period, and the majority of RCHs had submitted renovation plans, with only two planning to close down. SWD would continue to provide support. As of March 2025, there were about 15 000 vacant residential care places across the territory. Coupled with the fact that the number of Mainland RCHs participating in the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong had increased to 15, the overall supply remained adequate.

Optimizing resources for welfare services

Dedicated Fund to support the development of social welfare organizations

41. The Chief Executive announced in the 2023 Policy Address the setting up of a dedicated fund of $500 million to assist NGOs in staff training and system enhancement. Following its consultation with the Panel on the funding arrangements in May 2024, the Administration reported back to members in February 2025 on the developments regarding the implementation of the Dedicated Fund.

42. As of January 2025, SWD has received 53 applications (funding application of about $34.8 million). Expressing concern about the lower-than-expected number of applications, members urged the Administration to step up publicity and invite subvented welfare service operators which had not yet applied to participate. The Administration advised that it had been encouraging organizations providing similar services to submit joint applications for system development, and additional resources would be provided to organizations for hiring executive personnel to manage the projects. Applications under vetting and approval mainly focused on projects on information technology ("IT") systems. So far, no application had been rejected.

43. Members requested details on the mechanism for evaluating the effectiveness of funded projects. The Administration explained that organizations applying for the Fund were required to set out the project's objectives and performance indicators, and submit an evaluation report within three months after completion of the project to state whether the objectives had been achieved and its effectiveness.

44. Members suggested that the Administration should review the operation of various funds to avoid duplication of resources. The Administration responded that it would review the existing funding arrangements, and would not permit NGOs to apply for both the Social Work Training Fund and the Dedicated Fund concurrently, to ensure effective use of resources.

45. Given the low uptake of Mainland exchange and national studies (only three cases), members suggested mandating the participation of all funded organizations and enhancing the monitoring of activity expenditures, beneficiary numbers and effectiveness indicators. The Administration advised that the exchange tours should meet the requirements published by SWD, including the number of days, scope of the visit and the number of activities. As Mainland exchange tours were highly valued by participants for broadening their horizons, the experience, particularly in IT application

and system integration, was deemed worthy of reference. Continuous exchanges between the two places would promote the development of technology application and information transparency in Hong Kong.

46. Members welcomed the valuable reference of Mainland's experience in IT application and system integration. They suggested that beyond funding support, the Administration should leverage the Mainland's advanced IT system and big data platforms to deliver more effective welfare services, so as to save public money and enhance service efficiency. The Administration advised that organizations could acquire innovative products or IT systems through the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care. SWD had developed a number of systems for use by social welfare agencies, including the Voucher Information System for the Elderly, the Online Platform for Residential Care Homes for the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities, and the Service Performance Management Information System.

Enhance the Purchase of Premises for Provision of Welfare Services Scheme

47. LegCo Finance Committee allocated $20 billion in 2020 to implement the "Purchase of Premises for Provision of Welfare Services" Scheme ("Purchase Scheme") to provide more welfare facilities. After reviewing the Purchase Scheme, the Administration proposed to reduce the financial commitment to $5 billion and implement two enhancement measures, including (a) introducing a swapping arrangement to relocate facilities that were not subject to height restrictions to new sites to make room for facilities with special requirements; and (b) dispensing with the Proposed List of Welfare Facilities to be Accommodated in the Premises to be Purchased ("the Proposed List") and the requirement of maximum area of premises.[2]

48. Members noted that as of March 2025, SWD had purchased only five properties under the Purchase Scheme, falling short of the original target of 158. In order to speed up the progress of the Scheme, members suggested relaxing the size restrictions and technical requirements; utilizing refurbishment and conversion of the purchased properties; announcing the technical requirements in advance; and reviewing standards such as statutory height restrictions for welfare facilities. The Administration advised that it would introduce a property-swapping arrangement and explore relaxing height restrictions for welfare facilities with the Fire Services Department. Concurrently, it proposed dispensing the Proposed List and the requirement of maximum area of premises, opting instead for a flexible "site selection

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[2] Finance Committee approved the relevant financial proposal on 11 July 2025.

before conversion" reprovisioning model. However, some conversion works required prior consent from relevant owners' corporations.

49. Members proposed a more proactive acquisition strategy, including establishing a systematic mechanism to collect property information; leveraging the network of social welfare organizations to identify suitable premises; re-engaging property owners whose previous sales were not completed due to high asking price; adjusting the Government Property Agency ("GPA")'s rigid online requirements (such as space standards and user restrictions) to more flexible standards; and adopting a phased negotiation approach to engage property owners before discussing details.

50. The Administration explained that premises were identified through various channels, including open invitation of sale proposals from property owners; direct outreach to targeted property owners; looking up real estate advertisements and conducting on-site visits. However, only a limited supply of premises met the requirements. Previous attempts to commission NGOs in identifying rental premises were ineffective, primarily due to their limited understanding of the property market and the terms of the Deed of Mutual Covenant. Property owners who had previously been unable to complete the sale due to high asking price were re-engaged, but the latest asking price remained above reasonable market level, creating further obstacles to the transaction.

51. Members emphasized that in addition to purchasing premises, the Administration should adopt a multi-pronged strategy, including reserving space in public housing projects; purchasing premises in urban renewal projects; incorporating conditions in land leases of private developments for welfare provisions; revitalizing old school premises and old community centres; and adopting a leasing model. Considering the Government's purchase budget of $20 billion might lead to price-gouging by property owners, alternative options should be explored concurrently to ensure the effective use of public funds. Any savings from this approach should be allocated to social welfare services.

52. The Administration indicated that various measures had been implemented to increase the supply of welfare facilities, including exempting the land premium payments for RCHE and RCHD premises in new private developments; incorporating conditions in the land leases for the provision of welfare facilities; utilizing vacant government properties and school premises; providing additional welfare facilities in urban renewal projects, and purchasing divested projects from the Hong Kong Housing Society, Urban Renewal Authority, etc. Meanwhile, about 5% of the total GFA in suitable public housing projects would be reserved for welfare facilities, with the first batch of projects expected to be completed in

2026-2027. A flexible strategy of "acquisition and leasing in parallel" had been adopted, allowing the Administration to support subvented organizations in service provision through leasing premises while continuing to identify suitable properties with a view to balancing regional demand and ensuring service stability.

53. Members also suggested that GPA should regularly review the use of government premises, and consider providing welfare facilities in vacant government premises. The Administration stated that GPA and various policy bureaux/departments would conduct an annual review of government premises usage, and no surplus space had been identified in any of the 46 joint-user government office buildings. The Administration had also reviewed 38 vacant school premises, 29 surplus premises and 380 vacant government sites available for application, but they were unsuitable for use as welfare facilities due to constraints such as remote locations, insufficient size and lack of barrier-free facilities.

Funding arrangements for the construction of welfare facility projects

54. Given that the available balance of the Lotteries Fund ("LF")[3] is insufficient to cater for the necessary ancillary welfare facilities for future public housing; NGOs' projects under the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses; the maintenance of existing facilities and upgrading of equipment, etc., the Administration proposed that starting from the financial year 2025-2026, the funding for pre-construction activities, construction, fitting-out and the purchase of furniture and equipment by the Government and NGOs would be financed by the Capital Works Reserve Fund ("CWRF").

55. While recognizing that the new funding arrangement helped LegCo monitor the project costs, members raised several concerns, including (a) scrutiny by relevant LegCo committees might prolong the approval process and delay the commissioning of social welfare facilities, they suggested incorporating welfare facility expenditures into the funding for housing projects to streamline the process; (b) the Administration should provide assistance to NGOs as they were not familiar with the vetting and approval procedures; and (c) clarification should be made about the transitional arrangements for new requirements in projects at different stages to ensure a smooth interface of policies.

56. The Administration responded that the Lotteries Fund Advisory Committee normally met bi-monthly to examine funding applications. In

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3 Lotteries Fund allocations are used primarily for welfare facility projects, maintenance of existing facilities and grants for experimental projects.

future, funding applications under CWRF would be processed according to established procedures, subject to the Government's priorities and resources allocation. The same practice would apply to funding applications for university student hostel projects. The Administration would closely liaise with NGOs to assist in securing Members' support for funding.

57. Regarding ongoing projects under the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses, members were concerned whether LF had sufficient resources to complete the approved projects, and enquired about the funding arrangements for the implementation of such projects in the future. The Administration replied that of the 58 ongoing projects, 3 had entered the construction stage and would proceed as originally planned without being affected; 11 projects were at the stage of detailed design; 24 projects were at the stage of technical feasibility study; and 20 projects were at the project formulation and preliminary planning stage, the cost of which (including expenditures on procuring consultancy services, construction, fitting-out, procuring furniture and equipment) would be financed by CWRF. In addition, LF would continue to fund projects which were at the project formulation and preliminary planning stage to undergo technical feasibility study. The Administration confirmed that LF's existing fiscal reserves were sufficient to meet the expenditures of all the approved projects for achieving the designated objectives as planned.

<u>Enhancing resources utilization and advancing the implementation of legislation</u>

Review of the Traffic Accident Victims Assistance Scheme

58. The Traffic Accident Victims Assistance Scheme ("TAVA Scheme") has been implemented since 1979, providing timely financial assistance to victims of traffic accidents on a non-means-tested basis, regardless of accident liabilities. The expenditures of TAVA Fund have soared by 62.5% in recent years, and the balance of the Fund was expected to deplete in 2032-2033. In this connection, the Administration has intended to merge the grants; reduce the assistance amounts; raise the application threshold; and restrict the number of repeated applications within two years.[4]

59. Members supported the Administration's proposed adjustments to the TAVA Scheme, but raised concern about abuse, including staged accidents, medical certificate forgery and even organized fraud. Members suggested establishing a stringent random checking mechanism to proactively verify the authenticity of accidents and medical certificates;

[4] Finance Committee approved the relevant proposal on 27 June 2025.

enhancing prosecution efficiency for fraudulent claims; instituting injury assessments by designated medical institutions; and mandating rehabilitation courses at District Health Centres for applicants who had made misrepresentations of injuries.

60. The Administration advised that SWD had been strictly verifying every application involving traffic accidents, including checking the authenticity of the accidents and verifying medical certificates issued by registered medical practitioners. SWD would also focus its investigation on high-risk cases. Given that over 90% of applicants had sought medical treatment from institutions under the Hospital Authority, and considering that the objective of the TAVA Scheme was to provide timely assistance, the Government had no plans to introduce an assessment mechanism or to mandate that applicants seek medical treatment from the public healthcare sector.

61. Members suggested shortening the time limit for applying for assistance to minimize the risk of fraudulent activities by intermediaries during the application process; excluding persons involved in unlawful activities, such as illegal motor racing, white licence cars, and electric mobility devices, from eligibility; and including drone incidents within the scope of protection. The Administration advised that approval would be based on applicants' medical and living needs, with procedures independent of the determination of accident liabilities. Furthermore, sufficient time should be allowed for victims of traffic accidents to submit applications.

62. Regarding the reduction in the merged Compassionate Grant to $330 per day, a decrease of 65%, as well as the reduction in the maximum grants from $165,000 to $19,800, some members suggested implementing graded grants based on family needs. In addition, members pointed out that the proposed mechanism might affect the rights and benefits of victims of no-fault accidents, such as those injured by drunk drivers, as well as professional drivers.

63. The Administration advised that professional drivers employed under continuous contracts would still be entitled to paid leave, and would not be affected by the proposed policy change. For self-employed persons and other victims of traffic accidents with genuine financial needs, SWD would assist them in applying for the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme and seeking emergency financial assistance from relevant charitable trust funds. The Administration aimed to prevent abuse by raising the application threshold while also encouraging high-risk industries to enhance road safety awareness.

64. Members suggested that SWD should establish a real-time notification mechanism with insurers to enable immediate post-approval alerts and direct deduction of corresponding amounts from claim payouts for reimbursement to the Government to ensure the proper use of public coffers. The Administration advised that SWD had strengthened communication with the insurance industry, and would inform relevant insurance companies in writing of the amount granted to the persons concerned when assistance payment was released.

Preparation for the implementation of the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance

65. The Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance (Cap. 650) ("Mandatory Reporting Ordinance") will come into operation in January 2026. The Administration updated members in July 2025 on the preparatory work for implementing the mandatory reporting regime for child abuse cases, including a presentation of the electronic version of the Decision Tree from the Guide for Mandated Reporters ("the Guide").

66. Members were concerned that the number of reported cases would significantly increase after the implementation of the Mandatory Reporting Ordinance, and enquired about the Administration's preparation in respect of the reporting regime, staffing arrangement, psychological support, case screening strategies and investigation timeline to ensure early intervention and safeguard the abused children and their families.

67. The Administration advised that upon receiving a report, the Police would conduct criminal investigations while SWD would simultaneously provide protective, supportive and therapeutic services for the children. The timeline for follow-up actions would depend on the severity of each case. To cope with the anticipated increase in reported cases, it had created 41 permanent posts and established six service teams under the Child Protection Support Service, comprising clinical psychologists and social workers, to enhance psychological support. In addition, there would be two new residential child care centers providing an additional 96 emergency places.

68. In respect of training, the Administration had established an e-learning platform to provide training, reference materials and other information on child protection for mandated reporters. Members were concerned about how the Administration would ensure that all mandated reporters, particularly those with less direct contact with children, would complete the online self-learning course and master the contents of the Guide before the Mandatory Reporting Ordinance came into effect. They suggested setting a deadline for course completion to fulfil the training

requirement. The Administration advised that as of May 2025, over 50 000 people had completed Module One of the online self-learning course, with the platform recording over 1 million accumulated views. Module Two and the Guide were launched in July 2025, and information had been disseminated to mandated reporters through professional bodies.

69. Members suggested that the Administration clarify the legal effect of the Guide, particularly its basis for defence, and improve the design of the Decision Tree, including streamlining its options, highlighting keywords, enhancing user-friendliness, and regularly updating its analytical framework to reflect the latest case law and legal developments. Furthermore, members suggested establishing a dedicated hotline for mandated reporters seeking guidance on their reporting obligations.

70. The Administration responded that the Guide had incorporated the views of the Department of Justice, setting out relevant factors and providing recommendations for reference. To support their reporting decision, mandated reporters could make use of the up-to-date Decision Tree, or consult the Police or SWD directly. Furthermore, the Guide's utility was affirmed under section 8 of the Mandatory Reporting Ordinance, which established its admissibility. The applicability of the Decision Tree as a defence depended on the actual circumstances of each case, and was ultimately a matter for the court to decide.

71. Some members suggested an early launch of the trial version of the Decision Tree. These members also called on the Administration to clarify public reporting channels for serious child abuse cases and to define the access rights for the Decision Tree. The Administration advised that professional consultative panels from the social welfare, education and healthcare sectors had been invited to try out the Decision Tree. While the trial version was scheduled for launch in the second half of 2025, the full Decision Tree, including a mobile app version, would be officially launched concurrently with the implementation of the Mandatory Reporting Ordinance. The Administration stressed that the Decision Tree was intended exclusively for mandated reporters, and the information entered would not be shared with the Police or SWD. Users might enter their considerations in the remarks column of the Decision Tree and save the downloaded record. While anyone could report child abuse cases to the Police or SWD in person or by phone, mandated reporters had to complete the reporting process in the specified manner.

72. To enhance public awareness and professional engagement, some members suggested further promoting the Mandatory Reporting Ordinance through teachers and healthcare professionals, as well as disseminating the message of child protection to hidden families. The Administration

responded that the Child Protection Campaign had been launched since January 2025, with intensified promotion through television, radio, public transport, EDB, schools, and the website "Smart Parent Net" since June. At the same time, publicity materials for social media and messaging apps had been produced to disseminate child protection messages comprehensively.

Meetings held

73. During the period between January to September 2025, the Panel held a total of eight meetings and has scheduled another meeting to be held on 13 October 2025 to receive the Administration's briefing on the implementation progress of the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong and the Pilot Scheme for Elderly CSSA Recipients to Reside in Residential Care Homes in Guangdong.

Local visit

74. On 15 April 2025, the Panel and the Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Support for Persons with Disabilities jointly visited the Siu Lam Integrated Rehabilitation Services Complex, which was opened in late February of the same year, to gain insights into the residential care and day training services provided for PWDs.

Council Business Divisions
Legislative Council Secretariat
3 October 2025

Appendix 1

Legislative Council

Panel on Welfare Services

Terms of Reference

1. To monitor and examine Government policies and issues of public concern relating to welfare, rehabilitation services, poverty and social enterprise.

2. To provide a forum for the exchange and dissemination of views on the above policy matters.

3. To receive briefings and to formulate views on any major legislative or financial proposals in respect of the above policy areas prior to their formal introduction to the Council or Finance Committee.

4. To monitor and examine, to the extent it considers necessary, the above policy matters referred to it by a member of the Panel or by the House Committee.

5. To make reports to the Council or to the House Committee as required by the Rules of Procedure.

Appendix 2

Panel on Welfare Services

Membership list for the 2025 session*

Chairman	Revd Canon Hon Peter Douglas KOON Ho-ming, SBS, JP
Deputy Chairman	Hon Doreen KONG Yuk-foon
Members	Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan, GBM, GBS, JP Hon Michael TIEN Puk-sun, BBS, JP Hon Stanley LI Sai-wing, MH, JP Dr Hon TIK Chi-yuen, SBS, JP Hon Stanley NG Chau-pei, GBS, JP Hon CHAU Siu-chung Hon LAM So-wai Hon LAM San-keung, JP Hon Andrew LAM Siu-lo, SBS, JP Hon Kenneth LEUNG Yuk-wai, MH, JP Hon CHAN Pui-leung Hon Judy CHAN Kapui, MH, JP Hon Lillian KWOK Ling-lai Hon Benson LUK Hon-man Hon TANG Ka-piu, BBS, JP Dr Hon NGAN Man-yu Dr Hon TAN Yueheng, JP Prof Hon CHAN Wing-kwong (Total : 20 members)
Clerk	Ms Joyce KAN
Legal adviser	Ms Clara WONG

* Change in membership is shown in Annex to Appendix 2.

Annex to Appendix 2

Panel on Welfare Services

Change in membership
(Year 2025)

Member	Relevant date
Dr Hon TAN Yueheng, JP	Since 14 January 2025