

Women's Commission

Long-term planning for provision of child care services

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the measures to strengthen child care services as set out in the Chief Executive's 2021 Policy Address.

Background

2. The Government commissioned the Consultancy Study on the Long-term Development of Child Care Services (the Study) in December 2016, and the Study was completed in 2018. The Government accepted in principle the recommendations put forward in the Study Report and, after making reference to the major recommendations, proposed a series of initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2018 Policy Address to promote the long-term development of child care services.

3. The Government understands that the key of early child care/ education is to meet children's developmental needs, and agrees with the recommendation of integrating "care" with "development". To further tie in with this concept, the Government has initiated a series of measures to enhance child care services since 2019-20 to further address the development needs of children through re-engineering child care services, increasing service provision and providing additional professional manpower resources, etc. These measures are summarised in the Chief Executive's 2021 Policy Address and details are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Measures to Strengthen Child Care Services

Formulating Planning Ratio for the provision of Child Care Centre (CCC) places

4. To promote the long-term planning of child care services, the Government has made reference to the recommendations of the Study and formulated a population based planning ratio for aided CCC places, i.e. 100 aided CCC places for children aged below three per 25 000 general population, with a view to reserving suitable premises in housing development projects for CCC

operations so as to better meet the service demands in the new community. The planning ratio has been incorporated in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines since March 2020.

Increasing Aided CCC service places

5. To enhance day child care services, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will set up ten CCCs and provide about 900 aided CCC service places in the coming three to four years from 2020-21 through different development projects, such as Land Sale Programme, Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses, public housing development or redevelopment projects and urban renewal projects. Among them, an aided standalone CCC in Sha Tin providing around 100 places has commenced service in March 2021. In addition, SWD also planned to provide long full day child care service places through purchase of premises.

Enhancing the manning ratio for qualified Child Care Workers (CCWs) serving in day and residential CCCs

6. The Government has enhanced the existing manning ratio of qualified CCWs in day and residential CCCs. With effect from September 2019, the manning ratios for CCWs serving in aided day and residential CCCs have been enhanced from 1:8 to 1:6 for children aged 0 to below two; and from 1:14 to 1:11 for children aged two to below three. The enhanced manning ratio has exceeded the minimum statutory requirement.

Increasing the Level of Subsidy for CCC Service

7. The Government has introduced the Child Care Centre Parent Subsidy in February 2020 to directly subsidise partial CCC service fees afforded by parents to alleviate their financial burden, and also introduced the Subsidy for Further Manpower Enhancement in 2019-20 in light of the enhanced manning ratios, as well as raising the subsidy level of aided standalone CCCs from 20% to 40% in 2020-21.

Enhancement measures of the Fee-Waiving Subsidy Scheme for After School Care Programme

8. To provide further support to the families in need of After School Care Programme (ASCP) for primary students, the Government announced in the Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address that there would be a host of enhancement measures on the Fee-Waiving Subsidy Scheme (FWSS), including regularising the Pilot Scheme of ASCP under the Community Care Fund, adding 2 500 full

fee-waiving subsidy places, relaxing application eligibility of FWSS, increasing subsidy level, streamlining means-test procedures and providing extra subsidy for children with special educational needs, etc. The enhancement measure has been implemented since October 2020. As at October 2021, the full waiving places have been increased from around 2 100 before enhancement to more than 4 200.

Enhancing the Service Quality of Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP)

9. To enhance the service quality of NSCCP, SWD has provided additional provision to operating non-governmental organisations (NGOs) since January 2020 to increase professional and supporting staff to strengthen the training of home-based child carers, and raise the level of incentive payment for home-based child carers to a standard level of \$25 per hour in order to encourage more volunteers to join.

Re-engineering existing Mutual Help Child Care Centres (MHCCCs) by Phases

10. MHCCCs, which are operated by NGOs on a fee-charging and self-financing basis, provide flexible child care service to children aged below three (if necessary, children aged below six could also use the service) and facilitate mutual help and care within the community. SWD has completed a feasibility study in April 2020 on the provision of after school care service for children aged three to six in suitable welfare facilities and will re-engineer MHCCCs to provide after school care service for pre-school children. SWD has originally planned to re-engineer the 19 MHCCCs in phases from 2020-21 onwards through additional provision of social workers and supporting staff to further meet the child care needs in the community. In view of the latest situation of the Coronavirus Disease 2019, the first phase of the re-engineering was deferred to 2021-22. As of now, four MHCCCs have been re-engineered.

Advice sought

11. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
December 2021