

**Notes of the
Social Welfare Advisory Committee (SWAC) Meeting
held on 19 July 2023 at 10:00 a.m.
in Conference Room 4, G/F, Central Government Offices**

Present

Mr Lester Garson HUANG (Chairman)
Mr Frederick LAI Wing-hoi
Ms Alice LAU Oi-sze
Mr Armstrong LEE Hon-cheung
Dr Wingco LO Kam-wing
Prof Petrus NG Yat-nam
Ms Rebecca TSAI Ching-yu
Ms Eva WONG Ching-hung
Mr John WONG Chung
Prof Frances WONG Kam-yuet
Mr Barry WONG Man-sing
Ms Wendy YUEN Miu-ling

In Attendance

Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)

Ms Alice LAU	Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare (PSLW)
Mr David LEUNG	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1
Mr Tony YIP	Principal Assistant Secretary (Welfare) 1
Miss Karen TING	Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 1B (Secretary to SWAC)
Mr Adams WONG	Executive Officer (Welfare) 1A
Miss Sharon LAM	Executive Officer (Welfare) 1B

Social Welfare Department (SWD)

Miss Charmaine LEE Director of Social Welfare
(DSW)

Mr Alex WONG Deputy Director (Services)
(For discussion of item 2 (DD(S))
only)

Ms Wendy CHAU Assistant Director (Family & Child Welfare)
(For discussion of item 2
only)

Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB)

Mr Wallace LAU Commissioner for Youth
(For discussion of item 1
only)

Mr Henry YIM Acting Principal Assistant Secretary (Youth
(For discussion of item 1 Affairs) 1
only)

Absent with apologies

Dr BAI Xue
Prof Emily CHAN Ying-yang
Miss CHEUNG Sze-wing
Mr Nicholas HO Lik-chi
Mr Andy HO Wing-cheong
Dr LAM James Joseph
Dr Gary NG Ka-wing
Dr PAN Pey-chyou
Dr Ricky SZETO Wing-fu
Dr Rizwan ULLAH

Item 1: Youth Development Blueprint

At the Chairman's invitation, the Government briefed Members on the key content of the Youth Development Blueprint (Blueprint). The Blueprint outlined the overall vision and guiding principles for the Government's long-term youth development work in the future with four chapters summarised below –

- (a) "Exploration" – Encouraging exploration, preparing for the future
- (b) "Hope" – Instilling hope, fulfilling dreams
- (c) "Empowerment" – Resilience building and whole-person development
- (d) "Contribution" – Youth engagement and contribution to society

2. Members welcomed the release of Blueprint and agreed that the implementation of the Blueprint could address the needs of young people in various development stages. Individual members raised the following suggestions / questions –

(a) Addressing housing needs

- i. One member commented that in spite of the Youth Hostel Scheme which focused on single working youth, the housing needs of young couples might not be fully met. In view of an aggregate of maximum five years of tenancy, some members expressed concern on whether five years would be sufficient to bring sufficient positive impacts to one's life. It is suggested that the Government could consider to expand the Youth Hostel Scheme to young couples and extend tenancy to 10 years, and provide relationship counselling as well as child care services to tenants.
- ii. Given the limited land resources in Hong Kong, it was also suggested that the Government could capitalise on the opportunities brought by the Greater Bay Area (GBA) in searching for more potential residential land supply for the youth.

(b) Collecting data / setting indicators

A member noted that there is no official set of data and/or indicators in relation to youth participation in youth-related activities. Recognising the increasing and diversified development needs in various aspects of lives of the youth

including education, employment etc., it would be necessary for the Government to conduct in-depth research to respond to the needs of young generation in a timely manner. Instead of obtaining statistics and research materials from individual non-governmental organisations (NGOs), members suggested that the Government could consider collecting the data on its own and setting its own indicators to keep track of the youth developments and formulate policies.

(c) Strengthening education for youth

- i. Members suggested that education for youth could be strengthened in various aspects including national education, global mindset as well as moral and ethical education. Some members also suggested that the Blueprint might focus more on moral and ethical education in secondary schools to shape their character development.
- ii. Noting that there were no systematic ways for young school leavers to access to national education, the Government should review how to effectively approach these groups of youth and provide adequate support.
- iii. Young adults became more independent and tended to explore different possibilities in life with the emerging world community. It was suggested that the Blueprint could include more elements on global thinking and participation, so as to unleash the young generation's full potential to contribute to the world.

(d) Retaining young talents

- i. One member noted that there was an insufficient supply of youth manpower in Hong Kong. In addition to increasing the fertility rate in general, the Government should also explore ways to attract foreigners studying in Hong Kong to settle in the city as another source of stable workforce.
- ii. It was anticipated that some industries in Hong Kong, such as the retail industry and the construction industry, would face acute manpower shortage. The Government should formulate a comprehensive publicity plan to attract young people to join these industries.

(e) Providing training opportunities

- i. Regarding the training for local young talents, members worried that the current allocation of training resources could not match with the needs of society. The Government should revise the current youth training policies so that it could better accommodate the manpower needs of Hong Kong in the long run.
- ii. To provide secondary students with diversified learning and career planning, one member suggested that the Government should include career planning in the curriculum, and organise more career-oriented workshops and internship opportunities, so as to guide them to integrate their academic aspirations with career planning.
- iii. In view that most young people from low-income families were less likely to access to academic resources, the Government should consider formulating appropriate policies to assist the low-income youth.

(f) Stepping up publicity

- i. Noting that most young people were not familiar with the youth welfare services, members generally agreed that it would be necessary for the Government to step up publicity and promotion, with the help of innovation and technology, to ensure that such information could reach the intended audience precisely and concisely.
- ii. Members appreciated the proposed Youth Dashboard, which serves as a gateway for the youth to access to youth-related information. Apart from obtaining information, some members suggested that the Government might consider exploring ways to enhance the functions of the Dashboard so that users would know where to seek further assistance if needed.

(g) Strengthening resources coordination

- i. To better cater for the needs of youth, members suggested that the Government should closely liaise with relevant stakeholders involved in youth work including NGOs and the schools' alumni associations to encourage youth participation

and strengthen youth welfare services.

- ii. It was also suggested that there should be better collaboration and cooperation among the bureaux in order to implement youth policies more effectively and efficiently.

3. The Government noted members' views, and made the following responses –

- (a) The Government strived to meet the housing needs of the public, including those of the young people. Meanwhile, the Youth Hostel Scheme was a youth development initiative that sought to not only address young people's housing needs, but also provide youth tenants with various support and training activities so that they could achieve self-enrichment. The Youth Hostel Scheme not only catered for the housing needs of singleton youths. All youth hostel projects also had double rooms to cater for the needs of different tenants, including young couples. The Government would continue to work with the NGOs who share the same vision with the Government and implement the Youth Hostel Scheme.
- (b) In response to collecting data and setting indicators, HYAB had been working on the Youth Dashboard to consolidate youth-related data and trends so that the Government could keep better tabs on the pulse of young people. There would mainly be two types of data in the Dashboard, namely hard data and soft data. The former would comprise youth-related statistics, while the latter would comprise youth-related trends gathered from surveys. The Youth Dashboard would provide information for the Government's reference to facilitate policy-making. It would also be published for public's reference.
- (c) The Government noted the importance of promoting national identity among young people and equipping them with a global mindset. As such, the Government had all along been searching for more channels to expand youth's exploration in the global community. For example, to foster young people's participation in international affairs, HYAB implemented the United Nations (UN) Volunteers - Hong Kong Universities Volunteer Internship Programme in partnership with the UN Volunteers and other organisations, under which over 20 youths would serve in different UN entities this year.

- (d) To facilitate the training of young people, HYAB would closely liaise with relevant stakeholders including the Education Bureau to ascertain the development needs of secondary school students and to consider the necessity to include career guidance in the school curriculum. Meanwhile, the Government would also encourage the private sector to offer internship and training opportunities to the youth and the young school leavers so as to train their generic skills and to broaden their exposure.
- (e) The Government had been promoting the Blueprint at schools through liaising with the schools' administrations. The Government noted members' suggestion of promoting the Blueprint through the alumni associations and would consider how best to reach out to them.
- (f) On enhancing youth participation in community services and activities, the Government has been committed to providing more channels for youth to voice their opinions. For instance, the Member Self-recommendation Scheme for Youth had been further expanded to engage more young people in public affairs. The Government also organised the annual Youth Festival (under the name of "youthfest@HK") in collaboration with youth organisations, NGOs and the business sector to arrange a wide spectrum of activities for young people to nurture positive thinking, realise their potentials and facilitate cross-fertilisation of knowledge and experience.
- (g) The Blueprint would be a living document, reviewed and updated on an on-going basis having regard to the latest development of society.

4. The Chairman thanked Members for their suggestions and views. He invited the Government to consider Members' views in implementing the Blueprint and its related measures.

Item 2: Review of Residential Child Care and Related Services

5. At the Chairman's invitation, the Government briefed Members on the implementation work of the review on residential child care and related services by the Government to strengthen service interfacing and protecting the well-being of children. The Chairman then invited Members to offer comments.

6. Individual members raised the following views / suggestions –

(a) Recruiting the right person

One member considered that recruiting the right person for the child care job would be the key to success in preventing child abuse. Noting that Sexual Conviction Record Check was conducted in the recruitment process for foster parents, it was recommended that the Government should impose a mandatory requirement for the certificate of No Criminal Conviction in the recruitment process for all staff providing child care services.

(b) Manpower shortage

- i. Some members were concerned about the manpower shortage in the child care sector, including both child care workers (CCWs) as well as social workers. It was suggested that the Government should capitalise the opportunities brought by GBA such that GBA cities could serve as training bases for local CCWs while at the same time including the child care sector in Sector-specific Labour Importation Schemes to attract more potential CCWs to work in Hong Kong.
- ii. The Government should also devise a mechanism to arrange on-the-job learning and continuous professional training for both management and frontline staffs, with a view to enhancing their professional knowledge and skills.

(c) Service regulation and monitoring

- i. A member shared that many residential child care service (RCCS) operators and staff faced huge pressure at job and resigned since the child abuse scandal in 2021. Notwithstanding the good intention of the Mandatory

Reporting of Child Abuse Bill, members concerned that overemphasis on monitoring and regulations might affect the efficiency of daily operation of the RCCS units and aggravate the burden of the service operators, which could intensify the manpower shortage of the sector. Members suggested the Government should allow some flexibility in the implementation of the new legislation.

- ii. Members agreed that a caring and supportive organisational culture at RCCS units played an important role in protecting the well-being of the children. In view of the growing complexity of the duties of superintendent as well as the frontline staff, it was suggested that the Government should come up with measures to keep good staff morale of the RCCS units.

(d) Others

One member raised a concern that the recommendations of the Review Report focused primarily on the sanction of the service operators or the staffs who misbehaved while neglecting the education and caring needs of children. The Government should put forward proposals to cultivate and strengthen the promotion of child protection when providing child care services.

7. The Government thanked Members for their views and suggestions, and made the following responses –

- (a) On the aspects of manpower supply, SWD had reviewed the staffing condition of RCCS units and would consider creating additional assistant posts to alleviate the burden of CCWs, thereby encouraging them to stay in the RCCS sector.
- (b) It was recommended to increase the manning ratio of CCWs working in a residential child care centre (RCCC) from 1:6 to 1:4.5, and that the manpower of senior CCWs be increased proportionally to strengthen the supervision / training of CCWs such that they could receive appropriate support and training in taking care of children with special needs.
- (c) The community had high expectation on the work of the superintendents of RCCS, in particular on their roles in providing appropriate supervision to staff in handling child care-related

matters and leadership to create a pro-child culture in the centres. Therefore, the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Bill proposed the superintendents as one of the professionals who would be required to make report on those known suspected child abuse and neglect cases, to ensure early and effective detection and intervention of the cases.

- (d) SWD had established service quality groups for RCCCs, comprising members from the Justices of the Peace, district leaders and individuals from different professional sectors to offer constructive suggestions to RCCS operators.

8. The Government noted Members' views and supplemented that –

- (a) Notwithstanding the responsibilities of the superintendents in managing and supervising their staff, the Government was well aware of the heavy workload faced by the existing staff and hence, an increase of resources allocation was proposed in the Review Report.
- (b) As for attracting new blood to join the child care sector, SWD had been encouraging institutes to collaborate with RCCS units to offer internship opportunities to students with a view to improving their understanding of the career prospects.
- (c) To proactively engage society in helping children in need, there were about 12 recommendations in relation to foster care service in the Second Phase of the Review.
- (d) Heightened public expectation on the quality of RCCS called for more and better staff in service delivery. Compared to service for residents in residential care homes which tended to be more homogenous, child care services had to be tailored to meet the needs of children in different age groups and with different development needs. In view of this and the current overall manpower situation, the Government would not consider devising a special scheme to facilitate the importation of child care workers at this stage. Instead, the Government would explore measures such as maintaining a reasonable manning ratio, and improving the career prospects of and training for existing staff so as to retain talents and attract new blood into the sector.

- (e) The Government shared Members' view that while there should be effective monitoring, it was equally if not more important to inculcate in operators a sense of responsibility and commitment to provide quality service.
- (f) In devising the bill to introduce a mandatory reporting regime for suspected child abuse cases, the Government was keenly aware that the level of penalty for failure to report should be proportionate to the nature of the offence. In other words, one must differentiate failure to report from the far more serious offence of causing harm to a child. The proposed legislation had been crafted with this in mind.

9. The Chairman thanked Members for their views, and invited the Government to consider Members' comments.

SWAC Secretariat
August 2023