

Family Council

Synergy among the Family Council, the Elderly Commission, the Women's Commission and the Commission on Youth

Purpose

This paper invites Members' views on the proposed way forward to achieve greater synergy among the Family Council, the Elderly Commission ("EC"), the Women's Commission ("WoC") and the Commission on Youth ("CoY").

Background

2. CE's Policy Address in 2006-07 suggested, amongst other things, that the Family Council "would bring under one roof the various commissions and committees currently responsible for handling issues regarding different age groups and genders; and it would be able to pool resources, and study and address problems from a cross-policy perspective with a view to achieving more effective co-ordination".

3. At the first meeting of the Family Council on 14 December 2007, Members exchanged views on their expectations of the work of the Family Council and specific issues to be addressed in the months ahead. Members agreed that one of the priority issues to be deliberated would be to map out the future structure of the Family Council and the three Commissions by March 2009.

4. At the meeting of the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Welfare Services on 14 February 2008, LegCo Members and non-government organizations (NGOs) urged the Government to, amongst other things, retain the existing three Commissions which could continue to advise the Administration on matters concerning the interests of individuals/groups belonging to particular age/gender groups but not

directly related to the family. We have also received submissions from NGOs and concern groups which expressed similar views.

5. The feedback we collated so far from the various stakeholders on the future relationship between the Family Council and the three Commissions is that while a fragmented or compartmentalized approach to tackling family problems should be avoided, and that the Family Council should advise on strategic directions and priorities on family-based policies, the three Commissions should retain their existing status to focus on sector-specific work.

6. At the same time, there have been requests from children concern groups for setting up a new and independent Children's Commission to look after children's interests. The children concern groups have, at the above LegCo Welfare Services Panel, expressed again their strong objection against "subsuming" children's interests under a youth-centred advisory body such as the CoY.

Recommendations

Functional Integration of the Family Council and the Commissions

7. Taking into account the sentiments and strong wish of the stakeholders, **it is recommended that functional integration should be achieved between the Family Council and the three Commissions.** The EC, WoC and CoY should form a close alliance with the Family Council through cross-membership and operational work arrangements as detailed below.

8. The proposed functional integration will have the following features –

- (a) The Family Council will provide a central steer on strategic directions and priorities on family-based policies in order to achieve coordination and synergy;

- (b) The Family Council provides a high-level platform for cross-bureau and cross-sectoral discussion of major issues from the family perspective, and for monitoring the implementation of policies and programmes relating to family support by relevant Bureaux and Departments and the Commissions. The subject Bureau(x) and Department(s) and the Commission(s) will continue to deliver services or programmes related to family issues and take on as appropriate new family support services and programmes endorsed by the Council;
- (c) The Family Council advises the three Commissions on matters pertaining to family core values and family-based programmes, and the three Commissions will take the advice into account in launching their programmes. Should the Family Council wish to initiate collaborative projects to foster family-related support measures, the three Commissions would support the Council and devise relevant projects where resources permit;
- (d) The three Commissions could propose family related issues for discussion at the Family Council;
- (e) The three Commissions would identify and set deliverables to meet the objectives on family-related matters set by the Family Council through their on-going programmes as appropriate, and report the outcome to the Family Council. Other Bureaux and Departments will also take up programmes and implement initiatives advocated by the Family Council as appropriate;
- (f) The Chairpersons of the Commissions would be appointed as ex-officio members of the Family Council to facilitate communication and co-operation between the Commissions and the Council. The three Commissions will thus be officially represented on the Family Council.

9. In working out this new mode of operation, due recognition has been given to the respective sectoral interests of the three Commissions. **While supporting that the Family Council should be responsible for family-related policies, it is recommended that the Commissions will continue to perform their role as follows –**

- (a) the WoC will, inter alia, maintain its autonomous status with regard to women-specific subjects including the promotion of gender mainstreaming and gender equality, enhancing women's participation in government advisory and statutory bodies and monitoring of implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- (b) the CoY will, inter alia, continue its work in the areas of promotion of national education amongst our young people; nurturing of international perspectives and leadership qualities and the fostering of post-Olympics legacy amongst our younger generation; and
- (c) the EC will, inter alia, continue with its initiatives to improve the quality of life of our elderly population and to provide them with a sense of security, a sense of belonging and a feeling of health and worthiness (for example, through the Elder Academy Scheme) and look into the long-term planning of residential care services for the elderly with a view to enhancing the support for elders in need.

10. **The operation of this functional integration in respect of family-based policies and cross-sector issues from the family perspective will be kept under review.**

Children's Commission

11. Children's issues cover wide-ranging policy and programme areas including child welfare, fatality, abuse, neglect, education, health, development and children's rights, etc. These are currently taken care of by the relevant Bureaux and Departments. To facilitate better co-ordination, **it is recommended that the Family Council will provide a common platform for deliberation of children related policy issues, and that the relevant Bureaux and departments will report progress of their work in respect of children's issues to, and seek advice thereon from, the Family Council.** It is not recommended that a separate commission be set up on children's issues, as this is against our intention to put family related commissions under the roof of Family Council. Consideration has been given to expanding the purview of the CoY to cover children's issues. However, this is not a viable or palatable option as the proposal is not supported by the stakeholders, and is also strongly opposed by the pressure groups who have expressed over the years that a dedicated focal group should be set up. Attempts to expand the purview of CoY to cover children matters would undermine the work of the CoY on the one hand, and defeat award of dedicated attention to children issues on the other hand. The children concern groups have, at the LegCo Welfare Services Panel meeting in early 2008, expressed again their strong objection against "subsuming" children's interests under a youth-centred advisory body such as CoY.

Advice Sought

12. Members are invited to comment on the recommendations set out in paragraphs 7 to 11 above.