

LCQ5: Family Council

Following is a question by the Hon Frederick Fung and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (December 5):

Question:

In his Policy Address delivered in October, the Chief Executive said that a Family Council would be set up this year. It has been reported that the Council will coordinate and oversee the three Commissions currently responsible for matters concerning the elderly, women and youth respectively. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) of the specific terms of reference and work schedule of the Family Council, its organisational structure and membership list, and how it will interface with the existing consultative framework and government departments concerned;
- (b) given the circumstances and needs of families of different compositions are not entirely the same, whether the Family Council will give priority in the provision of support to high-risk families that are in dire need of help, for instance, by allocating additional resources for remote areas and expediting the legislative work on a statutory minimum wage, so as to assist low-income families; and
- (c) given that there is currently no independent commission responsible for matters concerning children, whether it will concurrently set up a commission on children to be responsible for the formulation of policies on the protection of children's rights, or it will simply include the work in this regard directly in the terms of reference of the Family Council?

Reply:

Madam President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Frederick Fung on the issue of Family Council is as follows:

- (a) In his Policy Address delivered in October 2007, the Chief Executive stated that the Government was committed to promoting the family as a core social value and

strengthening the family will be the primary consideration in formulating social policy and planning various services. It was announced in the Policy Address that a high-level Family Council chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration would be set up. The membership of the Family Council was just announced on 3 December 2007. In addition to five government officials, namely the Chief Secretary for Administration, Secretary for Education, Secretary for Home Affairs, Secretary for Labour and Welfare and the Head of the Central Policy Unit, there are 16 other members who come from the social welfare, professional, commercial and industrial, and academic sectors. (The membership is listed at Annex.)

The Family Council will advise the Government on the formulation of policies and strategies for supporting and strengthening the family and on the development of related programmes and activities, and will monitor the progress of implementation of such programmes and activities. The Family Council will also advise the Government on the integration of the family policies and related programmes across different bureaux/departments, including the work of the Elderly Commission, Women's Commission and Commission on Youth, in order to ensure good co-ordination and thus greater effectiveness.

(b) The Family Council will convene its first meeting this month, and will discuss the work ahead.

Regarding family services and support, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) currently provides a continuum of one-stop preventive, supportive and therapeutic services to families in need through 61 Integrated Family Service Centres in the territory. In the past three years, the Government has also taken proactive measures and allocated additional resources to strengthen the support for those affected by domestic violence.

In addition, to provide early assistance to socially isolated families or vulnerable families that are unwilling to receive services, including those at risk of domestic violence or are affected by mental health problems, SWD has launched a "Family Support Programme" since early 2007 with a view to building a mutual-help network in the community. Volunteers are recruited as Family Support Persons to work with professional social workers so as to keep in touch with the vulnerable families and connect them to appropriate support services.

In providing strengthening support services, we actively promote family

education and the development of mutual support network in the community, to build up social capital and create a society of mutual care and stronger resilience. In this regard, the "Community Investment and Inclusion Fund" has been promoting the development of a community safety net based on mutual help in the neighbourhood. It has supported projects which mobilise residents in the housing estates to set up a "house captain" system to connect with the families, such that timely assistance can be provided to the families in need.

As regards wage protection, the Labour and Welfare Bureau briefed the Legislative Council Panel on Manpower on the latest development on 15 November 2007. The Government would step up the promotion of the "Wage Protection Movement" for cleaning workers and security guards to garner more support from different sectors of the community, and would identify possible areas for improvement to enhance the effectiveness of the Movement. At the same time, the Government would study various issues relevant to introducing a statutory minimum wage for cleaning workers and security guards. In case the overall review scheduled for October 2008 indicates that the Movement has failed, a bill on this will be introduced into the Legislative Council as soon as possible in the 2008-09 legislative session.

(c) The family is a basic component unit in our society. The purpose of establishing the Family Council is to use the family as the core in formulating and implementing policies and initiatives relating to family support, to ensure effective coordination among these policies and initiatives.

The Family Council will consider effective ways to deal with child development policies and related issues. We have no plan at this stage to set up additional independent commissions for individual age or sex groups.

Ends/Wednesday, December 5, 2007