

Family Council

Family-related Initiatives in the 2011-12 Policy Address

INTRODUCTION

This paper invites Members to note the family-related initiatives featured in the Chief Executive's 2011-12 Policy Address and the Policy Agenda booklet.

A. PROMOTION OF FAMILY CORE VALUES

(relevant bullets in the Policy Agenda booklet under the section of "Investing for a Caring Society" refer)

"Sharing family responsibilities in love and filial piety" Campaign

2. To foster a more effective coordination of and support to the work on promotion of family values, the Family Council will, together with the Commission on Youth, the Elderly Commission and the Women's Commission, promote a campaign on "Sharing family responsibilities in love and filial piety" ("人人就位 孝愛互傳"). Each commission will launch new initiatives that subscribe to the theme of the campaign in order to promulgate a common message of love and filial piety.

3. The initiatives proposed by the Commission on Youth, the Elderly Commission and the Women's Commission in relation to the campaign are set out as follows –

- (a) **Commission on Youth:** to launch a project to assist young people in re-establishing their respect and filial piety towards senior members of the family;

- (b) **Elderly Commission:** to launch a new phase of the “Neighbourhood Active Ageing Project” to promote harmonious family relationship, and to enhance neighbourhood support network; and
- (c) **Women’s Commission:** to introduce a new module in relation to gender equality and sharing of family responsibilities under the “Capacity Mileage Programme”, and promote relevant messages through public education activities.

Findings and recommendations arising from the family researches

4. The 2009-10 Policy Address pointed out that many social problems including juvenile drug abuse, prostitution and the neglect of elderly people and children could be traced back to the family. To effectively tackle these problems from a family perspective, the Family Council was tasked to conduct focused discussions and research in these aspects, and propose new policy options to alleviate such problems from the family perspective. Towards this end, the Family Council had commissioned the Central Policy Unit (CPU) to co-ordinate work in these areas. Local universities were invited by the CPU to undertake researches focusing on whether and how such social problems were related to families, and make an attempt to come up with solutions. The research teams had submitted reports and presented summaries of major research findings and policy recommendations to the Family Council.

5. The Family Council agreed that it was difficult to generalize the causes of these social problems as they were complicated, multi-layered and multi-faceted. This notwithstanding, the researches had a common finding that many of the causes of the social problems could be traced back to the family. Despite the complicated causes and the fact that these problems could be caused by many factors other than the family, the researches confirmed the need for a “family-based” strategy in order to tackle such problems effectively. In short, not only do we need to target relevant individuals or groups, but we also need to focus on the family. Moreover, while the support of the neighbourhood and local community should be enlisted, we should strive to forge cross-departmental and multi-sectoral collaboration, bringing together input from different professions.

6. To sufficiently and effectively prevent relevant social problems, families and various sectors in the community must work hand in hand. Towards this end, the Family Council recommends three new policy directions as highlighted below -

- (a) Family engagement: “Family-focused”, with emphasis on formulation of project/activity objectives, decisions and expectation-oriented strategy through a mutual communication and partnership mode;
- (b) Preventive strategy: Early identification in different areas of families with greater needs; and
- (c) Community-based family support strategy: Community resources (including retirees, religious bodies and supportive neighbours) should be better utilized.

7. The Family Council will conduct further in-depth discussions with concerned stakeholders on implementation of relevant measures to support the new policy directions, and further step up family education with a view to strengthening family values and evaluating its effectiveness. The Family Council will also continue to disseminate and share family-related information with the community through the “Happy Family Campaign” and “Happy Family Info Hub”, and continue to actively mobilize different sectors of the community to jointly promote family core values and foster a pro-family environment.

B. AGEING POPULATION

(paragraphs 53 to 81 of the Policy Address and relevant bullets in the Policy Agenda booklet refer)

8. Hong Kong’s population is rapidly ageing, yet our fertility rate remains at a persistently low level.

9. In the 2010 Policy Address, the Chief Executive asked the Steering Committee on Population Policy (SCPP) to focus on two topics. First, ways to facilitate and support elderly people to settle in the Mainland after retirement if they so wished. Second, the ramifications of children born in Hong Kong to Mainland mothers returning to study and live in Hong Kong.

Ways to facilitate elderly people to settle in the Mainland after retirement

10. For our elderly people retiring in the Mainland, the SCPP suggested the provision of better financial support and services in the Mainland. The Government will introduce a new “Guangdong (GD) Scheme” under the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme to allow eligible Hong Kong elderly people who choose to reside in GD Province to receive Old Age Allowance (OAA) there. Paragraphs 20 to 22 below sets out the rationale and the key features. For medical and health services, the Government will continue to strengthen co-operation between hospitals in Hong Kong and the Mainland, and negotiate with the Mainland measures to streamline the formalities for setting up clinics and hospitals there. The Government will also explore with GD Province the cross-boundary patient conveyance arrangements to make it more convenient for Hong Kong patients residing in the Mainland to return to Hong Kong for medical treatment.

The ramifications of children born in Hong Kong to Mainland mothers returning to study and live in Hong Kong

11. With regard to Mainland women giving birth in Hong Kong (which has raised public concern), the basic principle is that Hong Kong residents receive priority for healthcare services. Therefore, the number of non-local women giving birth in Hong Kong must be capped to avoid overloading our healthcare services. On the other hand, these children may replenish our ageing population given our ageing trend and persistently low fertility rate. While the Government does not encourage Mainland women to give birth in Hong Kong, these children, as long as they are Hong Kong permanent residents, are considered as a valuable human resource for Hong Kong. In this regard, the Government would plan the relevant public services and make more realistic projections of the number of children who

may come to settle or study in Hong Kong. The SCPP will continue to co-ordinate these efforts.

12. In view of the rapid increase in the number of babies born in Hong Kong to Mainland women in the past few years and the expected continuation of the trend, the Education Bureau has been implementing a number of measures in seeking to meet the education needs of these children, while ensuring that there would be adequate provision of education services to cater for the demand from local children.

13. The challenge being faced by the Government is the uncertainty as to whether or not these babies would settle in Hong Kong eventually and if so, when and at what age they would come to Hong Kong for living and study. For those who do not live in Hong Kong, some of them may be attending or may wish to attend schools in Hong Kong by daily commuting to Hong Kong as cross-boundary students (CBS). Apart from children of Hong Kong residents who have moved to live in the Mainland, an increasing proportion of CBS are children born in Hong Kong to Mainland parents. In recognition that some parents may have genuine needs to arrange for cross-boundary schooling of their children to facilitate early adaptation to the local education system, the Government has been putting in place various measures with a view to enhancing and maximizing as far as practicable the flow of CBS at the various land boundary control points without compromising the safety of the students concerned and the border security concern of the law enforcement agencies. These bring about the need to even out the commuting flow amongst various boundary control points and in particular, to further divert the CBS from Lo Wu Station Road and Lok Ma Chau Spur Line to other boundary control points.

14. To address the projected increase in demand for school places in local schools particularly primary schools in those districts which may expect to have more rapid growth in school-age population, we will monitor closely and if necessary increase the supply of school places such as providing additional classrooms within the existing school premises and recycling suitable school premises for school use. We will also search for additional school sites and make plan for new school building programme as necessary to meet local demand.

15. In addition, we will enhance dissemination of information, in particular that on the issues relating to cross-boundary schooling and the transportation arrangements at various boundary control points, to families with children born in Hong Kong to Mainland women to facilitate their informed decision on early integration of their children into Hong Kong including the local education system.

Enhancing support to the elderly

16. The Elderly Commission has examined how community care services (CCS) in Hong Kong could be strengthened to provide better support for elders who age at home. It recommends, among other things, that the Government introduces a CCS voucher scheme which provides subsidy directly to eligible elders and allows them to choose CCS that suit their needs. The Government has accepted this recommendation and plans to introduce a pilot scheme to test this idea and will work out the implementation details in the coming year.

17. Meanwhile, the Government will continue to strengthen conventional subsidised services, by increasing the provision of residential care, day care and home care places. The Government will also upgrade the residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and increase higher-quality subsidised places under the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme (EBPS).

18. To enhance the support for demented elders, the Labour and Welfare Bureau will increase the amount of Dementia Supplement provided to subvented RCHEs, private EBPS homes and subsidized day care centres/units which take care of demented elders.

19. As many elders still reside in non-subsidised residential care homes, the Government will also introduce a Residential Care Supplement of \$250 per month for recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) aged 60 or above who occupy non-subsidised residential care places, so as to ease their financial burden. Persons with disabilities or in ill health, who are on CSSA and occupy non-subsidised residential care places, irrespective of age, will also be eligible. This is on par with the Community Living Supplement (currently \$250 per month) under the CSSA

Scheme for the same groups of recipients who live in the community.

Make preparation for a new scheme for the provision of OAA to Hong Kong elders who choose to move to Guangdong

20. Most of the Hong Kong elders who choose to retire on the Mainland reside in GD. Indeed, the relationship between Hong Kong and GD is unique, given our close geographical, logistical, economic and social ties. As we take forward the Framework Agreement on Hong Kong/Guangdong Co-operation and major transport infrastructure projects come on stream, the two places are moving towards greater integration. In view of the above, we propose to introduce a GD Scheme under the SSA Scheme, such that Hong Kong elders who reside in GD can receive OAA there.

21. The GD Scheme has basically the same eligibility criteria as the OAA in Hong Kong, except that after joining the Scheme, the 60 days' residence requirement for receiving full-year payment will be a requirement to reside in GD instead of Hong Kong. Present recipients of OAA, or elders who intend to apply for OAA, may opt for the GD Scheme instead. We will also consider putting in place a special one-off arrangement at the initial stage of the GD Scheme, to facilitate eligible elders already residing in GD to join the Scheme without having to first return to stay in Hong Kong.

22. We are drawing up the details of the proposal, and aim at developing more concrete plans between the end of 2011 and early 2012.

C. WOMEN'S ISSUES

(paragraph 102 of the Policy Address and relevant bullets in the Policy Agenda booklet refer)

23. Insofar as women's issues are concerned, the Government will continue to support the Women's Commission (WoC) in promoting the interests and well-being of women through the provision of an enabling environment, empowerment of women and public education. Besides, the Government will continue to apply the Gender Mainstreaming Checklist in

different policy areas progressively and work with WoC to further promote gender mainstreaming.

24. To enhance support for women in pursuit of continuous learning and help them establish a positive mindset, the Government has been providing funding support to WoC to implement the Capacity Building Mileage Programme in recent years. Given the success of the Programme, the Government will turn it into a recurrent project so as to enable it to operate on a continuous basis. Courses in English and Mandarin will be introduced to encourage new arrivals and ethnic minority women to join the Programme.

D. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

(relevant bullets in the Policy Agenda booklet under the section of “Developing Democracy and Enhancing Governance” refer)

25. The Government will continue to support youth development activities through the district network of the Commission on Youth with a view to helping youths cultivate a positive approach to life and fulfill civic duties. Besides, the Government will continue to enhance communication with youths and encourage them to participate in community affairs, including organising more exchange sessions with them. The Government will also provide opportunities for youngsters, with a token stipend, to serve in under-privileged areas in the Mainland for six to twelve months under the “Service Corps” Programme.

E. ENHANCING SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

(paragraphs 101 and 103 of the Policy Address and relevant bullets in the Policy Agenda booklet refer)

Enhancing residential child care services

26. In order to strengthen the support for children who are not adequately cared for by their families and young people with behavioural or emotional problems, we will further enhance our residential child care services. In particular, we will increase the number of residential child care places (including service places of foster care service, small group home,

children's home, boys/girls' home and boys/girls' hostel). We will also raise the foster care allowance, including the maintenance grant for foster children and incentive payment for foster parents.

Enhancing integrated family services

27. Integrated Family Service Centre (IFSC) is the backbone of Hong Kong's family welfare services. The 61 IFSCs over the territory have all along been providing a continuum of preventive, supportive and remedial family welfare services in a one-stop manner. To more effectively avoid and address family problems, the Government will allocate additional resources to set up four new IFSCs in districts with greater service demand to provide services for needy families. This will bring the total number of IFSCs from 61 at present to 65.

F. ONE-OFF RELIEF MEASURES FOR SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFICIARIES

(paragraph 85 of the Policy Address and relevant bullets in the Policy Agenda booklet refer)

Providing an extra allowance to CSSA, OAA and Disability Allowance recipients

28. The Government will implement short-term measures to ease the burden on the grassroots next year, which include providing an extra allowance to CSSA recipients, equal to one month of the standard rate CSSA payments; and an extra allowance to OAA and Disability Allowance recipients, equal to one month of the allowances. This proposal will involve an additional expenditure of more than \$1.9 billion. We estimate that about 1.1 million people will benefit. When preparing the Budget for the next financial year, the Financial Secretary will assess the prevailing economic situation and our financial position to work out the implementation details.

HOUSING

(paragraphs 22 to 38 of the Policy Address refer)

29. The Chief Executive sets out the re-positioned housing policy in the Policy Address, reiterating the long term commitment of the Government to provide public rental housing (PRH) to low income families and persons who cannot afford private rental accommodation, and complete around 15 000 PRH units on average per year to meet the target of maintaining an average waiting time of three years for General Waiting List applicants.

30. In response to the aspirations of low and middle-income families to buy their own homes, the Government has put forward buffering measures, including a new policy for the resumption of the Home Ownership Scheme and enhancement measures for the “My Home Purchase Plan”.

New Home Ownership Scheme (HOS)

31. The new HOS will be targeted at families with a monthly household income under \$30,000, mainly first-time home buyers. The Government will allocate sites for this scheme to provide units about 400 to 500 square feet in saleable area. With the sites identified at this stage, the Government plans to provide more than 17 000 flats over four years from 2016-17 onwards, with an annual production of between 2 500 and 6 500 flats. For the first year, 2 500 flats can be made available. As more sites become available, the Government will set the planning target at 5 000 flats a year on average. To be flexible, the actual number of flats to be built or put up for sale each year will depend on demand at the time.

32. The Housing Authority (HA) will be responsible for producing the new HOS flats. The first batch is expected to be ready for pre-sale in 2014 or 2015. The prices of new HOS flats will be set with reference to the mortgage repayment ability of eligible households. Flats sold under the new HOS will be subject to resale restrictions. The HA will work out implementation details of the new HOS.

33. An “adjustment” mechanism has been incorporated into the new HOS. When there are sufficient reasonably priced small and medium sized flats in the private market, the number of subsidized flats to be built and sold for the year will be adjusted. The Government may even stop building and selling such flats.

My Home Purchase Plan (MHPP)

34. Apart from the new policy for the resumption of HOS, the Government, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS), will continue to implement the MHPP to help families earning up to \$40,000 a month who can afford a property in the long run but do not have enough savings for a down payment. They may rent an MHPP flat first before making a decision of whether and when to buy a flat (the “rent-and-buy” mode). To enhance the flexibility of the MHPP, a “buy-or-rent” option is introduced to allow eligible families to buy MHPP flats without going through a rental period.

35. The initial market selling price of an MHPP flat will serve as the ceiling price of that flat. When the prevailing market price is higher than the “ceiling price”, a participant choosing the “rent-and-buy” option will be guaranteed to purchase the flat at the “ceiling price” which will be fixed at the outset if he purchases a flat within two years after the termination of tenancy. This will protect participants from soaring property prices which may disrupt their plan for home ownership, and enable them to set more specific saving targets. When the prevailing market price is lower than the “ceiling price”, they can buy MHPP flats at the prevailing market price. The Transport and Housing Bureau will discuss the implementation details with the HKHS.

ADVICE SOUGHT

36. Members are invited to note the above for information.

Family Council Secretariat
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