

Family Council

Public Engagement Exercise on Population Policy:

Views of the Family Council

PURPOSE

In response to the public consultation document issued by the Steering Committee on Population Policy (SCPP), the Family Council (the Council) plans to make a submission to the SCPP on the basis of the deliberations made at the Council and the Sub-committee on the Promotion of Family Core Values and Family Education (the Sub-committee) meetings held on 21 November 2013 and 9 January 2014 respectively. The purpose of this paper is to seek Members' endorsement of the summary of the Council's views.

CONSULTATION WITH THE FAMILY COUNCIL

2. The Steering Committee on Population Policy (SCPP) released its consultation document on population policy on 24 October 2013 and launched a four-month public engagement exercise (the exercise) until 23 February 2014. The exercise aims to deepen the public understanding of the demographic challenges and facilitate extensive public deliberation and discussion on issues related to population policy with a view to forging consensus on policy directions.

3. The SCPP consulted the Council at its meeting on 21 November 2013. Riding on the preliminary deliberations made, the Chairman of the Council tasked the Sub-committee to further deliberate the related issues and, as appropriate, propose more substantive proposals, particularly on fostering a supportive environment to form and raise families as well as encouraging elderly volunteering. Accordingly, the Sub-committee met on 9 January 2014. A summary of comments as

expressed by Members of the Council during these two meetings is at **Annex**.

ADVICE SOUGHT

4. Members are invited to note the summary of comments at **Annex**. Subject to Members' endorsement, the submission will be made to the SCPP.

**Family Council Secretariat
February 2014**

**Summary of Comments
Expressed by Members at the Family Council
and the Sub-committee on the Promotion of Family Core Values and
Family Education meetings
held on 21 November 2013 and 9 January 2014 respectively**

A. Supportive Environment to Form and Raise Families

- (a) In formulating measures to encourage childbirth, it was essential that more positive message in raising children and formation of families should be brought out in view of the prevailing tendency of over-emphasizing the cost and responsibilities, with the essence of basic family core values being overlooked at times. Engendering a culture of loving family would encourage childbirth.
- (b) Provision of suitable and quality education as well as childcare services were major hurdles for young couples contemplated having children, in addition to the need to balance parenthood and career against Hong Kong's highly competitive and demanding work culture.
- (c) Noting the limited number of Creche Centres in the territory and the statutory provision of maternity leave¹ which compared less favourably with other developed countries, the Government should proactively review the provision of childcare services as well as maternity leave in order to encourage childbirth.
- (d) Given the increasing prevalence of childbirth outside marriage and the practical difficulties for young couples to find affordable housing, the Government should properly address the issues and concerns from a holistic perspective.
- (e) The implementation of family support measures in raising fertility would invariably involve substantial resources. However, it was dubious if the Government revenue generated from collection of tax was able to support the related expenses involved. Besides, its effectiveness was also quite doubtful. To encourage childbirth, it was important to change the mindset of

¹ The statutory provision of maternity leave was 10 weeks with the daily rate of maternity leave pay being a sum equivalent to four-fifths of the average daily wages earned by an employee in the 12-month period preceding the first day of maternity leave.

people through public education in inculcating proper values on family as well as gender equality.

- (f) In encouraging dual parenting, the Government should formulate specific measures and actively promote the implementation of family-friendly employment practices. The Government and public bodies alike should play a leading role to put in place family-friendly measures in the workplace. Job sharing and flex-working hours were some examples worth pursuing. Besides, the experience of overseas countries in operating work-based child care centres provided good insights for Hong Kong to make reference.
- (g) Over-emphasizing academic achievements created undue pressure to parents. This, coupled with long working hours, would bring negative impact on motivation of childbirth. A cultural change through strengthening of public education in inculcating proper family values was necessary.
- (h) In response to the phenomenon of over-emphasizing academic achievements in the society, it was advisable for the Government to make reference to the findings of the study on “The Tenth Phenomenon”² (“第十名現象”) conducted in the Mainland and consider conducting similar study in Hong Kong.

B. Embracing Opportunities in an Ageing Society

- (a) With a view to minimizing the labelling effect, the term “熟年族”, instead of “elderly people” should be used to name those aged 50 and above.
- (b) Recent surveys indicated that 10-15% of people aged 65 and above were dependents and only 7% of them required services from care homes. To make good use of their wealth of experience and knowledge, elderly volunteerism was worth promoting. Experience of the Mainland through the

² “The Tenth Phenomenon” was raised by a primary school teacher in Hangzhou (杭州市天長小學老師周武). Subsequent to attending a graduates’ reunion gathering in 1989, the teacher studied the career development of 150 graduates of his primary school in the 1990’s. He found that students’ development was a dynamic process and students with moderate academic performance had more potentials than those elite students in the primary school and had better performance in terms of career development after graduation.

implementation of the “Eleventh Five-year Plan for the Development of China's Undertaking for the Aged” (《中國老齡事業發展“十一五”規劃》) and the “Twelfth Five-year Plan for the Development of China's Undertaking for the Aged” (《中國老齡事業發展“十二五”規劃》) in mobilizing retired civil servants to serve the community voluntarily provided good insights for Hong Kong to make reference.

- (c) Noting the achievements of the “Elder Academy” launched by the Elderly Commission in fostering sense of worthiness amongst elders and promoting harmony between the elders and the youth, the Government should explore more opportunities for the elder academies to team up with schools for school-based activities.
- (d) Consideration could be given to enhancing collaboration between the elder academies and non-government organizations with a view to promoting intergenerational harmony as activities of elder academies were well-received by young students. Through activities organised by the elder academies, the younger generation could learn from their experience.
- (e) As some social enterprises had successfully established a solid footing in Hong Kong, they provided good opportunities for retired people to serve the community as volunteers. With suitable training, elderly people as well as other underprivileged groups were a potential source of labour supply.
- (f) The “Guangdong Scheme”³ introduced by the Government in 2013 was a good attempt to encourage some of the elderly people to retire in Guangdong because of its proximity to Hong Kong. Riding on the experience, the Government should explore the idea further. Consideration should also be given to ensuring the availability of affordable and quality healthcare.
- (g) With better health and higher education levels among the current and future elderly generations, more and more mature workers might be willing to stay longer in the labour force. The Government should take the lead in revisiting the issues on the extension of the service of civil servants beyond retirement age by incorporating more flexibility into the system. On one hand,

³ To allow eligible elderly people who chose to reside in Guangdong to receive the Old Age Allowance without the need to come back to Hong Kong.

it would allow the Civil Service to better respond to the economic and social challenges arising from the demographic changes, and on the other hand, it set an example to the private sector and other public bodies to follow.

- (h) To make good use of the experience and expertise of the elderly, the Government should encourage the setting up of district-based committees (區會) so as to provide a platform for the promotion of elderly volunteerism. In implementing the proposal, interests of the elderly volunteers should be catered as far as practicable.
- (i) To better prepare the economy of Hong Kong for the challenges arising from the ageing population, the Government should encourage further development of the tertiary industry, particularly the creative industries, so that Hong Kong would be in a better position to respond to the structural transformation of the economy.

C. Others

- (a) With a view to increasing the quantity and enhancing the quality of the labour force, the Government should encourage female homemakers with grown-up children to re-join the labour force through introduction of incentive schemes (such as providing free retraining opportunities, coaching and counselling services to female homemakers). In parallel, the Government should also take the opportunity to refine the “Quality Migrant Admission Scheme”, so that more high-skilled or talented persons would be attracted to migrate to Hong Kong. It was worth noting that insufficient places in international schools to cater for the needs of their children were also a matter of concern.
- (b) Given that issues such as re-joining the labour force by female homemakers and forming families with children were matters of personal choice, the Government should strike a careful balance in fostering a supportive environment, without too much intervention.