

## **Family Council**

### **2015 Policy Address Family-Related Policy Initiatives of The Labour and Welfare Bureau**

#### **Introduction**

The Chief Executive delivered his 2015 Policy Address on 14 January 2015. This paper sets out the new and on-going family-related initiatives pertaining to the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB), Social Welfare Department (SWD) and Labour Department (LD), as set out in the 2015 Policy Address and Policy Agenda.

#### **Making arrangements to introduce Low-Income Working Family Allowance**

2. The Government has proposed to introduce the Low-Income Working Family Allowance (LIFA). The aim is to relieve the financial burden of non-Comprehensive Social Security Assistance low-income working families (especially those with children), as well as to promote self-reliance and upward social mobility. The working hour requirement applicable to single-parents is substantially lowered than that for other LIFA applicants. Our latest estimate is that over 200 000 low-income households (involving 710 000 persons, including over 170 000 eligible children) could benefit from the LIFA Scheme. The overall poverty rate is estimated to be reduced by 2.1 percentage points, and the child poverty rate is estimated to be reduced by 4.3 percentage points.

3. Following the Legislative Council Finance Committee (FC)'s funding approval on 16 January 2015, LWB is earnestly taking forward the preparatory work. Barring unforeseeable circumstances, the LIFA Scheme will be implemented within 15 to 18 months from the date of FC's funding approval. The Government will invite the Community Care Fund to consider providing one-off special subsidy for primary and secondary students on full grant under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme in the 2015/16 school year before the implementation of LIFA.

## **Assisting Families Most in Need of Support**

4. Currently, the 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) over the territory and the two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) in Tung Chung have been providing a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial family welfare services for individuals and families in need. To more effectively support individuals and families in preventing and handling problems, the Government will increase the number of professional social workers in IFSCs and ISCs to provide early identification and intervention and strengthen the support for families and children who are vulnerable to domestic violence and have other welfare needs, at-risk pregnant women, mothers suffering from postnatal depression, and children with development problems and their family members, etc.

## **Supporting Residents of Public Rental Housing Estates with Intakes**

5. Family problems may arise from the lack of support when residents move into newly built or redeveloped public rental housing estates. Having regard to the experience of building community networks in Tin Shui Wai, the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund Committee will deploy resources to public rental housing estates with intakes to support residents in building mutual help networks. This aims at developing social capital by way of promoting cross-sectoral collaboration among the Government, community organisations, welfare organisations, schools and medical organisations, etc.

6. Four projects will be rolled out in 2015 in public rental housing estates completed or redeveloped in recent years. These projects, together with other existing social services, will support residents more effectively. Upon completion of the projects, the relevant mutual help networks will complement mainstream services in continuing to become the support network for the community in helping families in need.

## **Strengthening Child Care Services**

7. To support parents who are unable to take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons, SWD has all along been providing subsidies to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to run a variety of child care services for children below the age of six. To remove the barriers for women to enter or stay in employment and to further respond to the community demand for child care services, the Government will launch a series of measures to enhance child care

services helping women balance their work and family commitments, including –

- (a) from 2015-16 onwards, increasing, by phases, the provision of places of Extended Hours Service (EHS) at aided child care centres and kindergarten-cum-child care centres in districts with high demand, thus increasing the total provision of such EHS places from about 1 200 to over 6 200 places, representing a fourfold increase. This could help alleviate the pressure on working parents by allowing more needy pre-primary children (aged below six) to remain in the service units that they attend for longer hours to receive care;
- (b) in 2017-18, providing about 100 additional aided long full-day child care places for children aged below three;
- (c) inviting NGOs to establish work-based child care centres through the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses (Special Sites Scheme). Two NGOs have responded positively proposing to provide a total of about 100 self-financing places. The Government will also explore, on a pilot basis, the feasibility of providing about 100 NGO-operated child care places for staff members in the proposed Government Complex in Tseung Kwan O;
- (d) providing resources for aided standalone child care centres and service units providing Occasional Child Care Service and EHS to enhance supervisory and administrative support; and
- (e) launching a pilot project to help grandparents become well-trained child carers in a home setting in order to strengthen the support to nuclear families.

8. The Government will also commission a consultancy study in 2015-16 to advise on the long-term development of child care services with a view to providing services that meet the needs of the families in Hong Kong.

### **Enhancing After-School Care Services**

9. Supportive after-school care services have been provided by NGOs for children aged 6 to 12 so that children whose parents are unable to care for them during after-school hours owing to work, job-search or

other reasons could receive proper care. Through the Fee Waiving Subsidy Scheme for After School Care Programme, SWD provides assistance to needy families by waiving or reducing the fee of after-school care services. The Government will continue to strengthen the After School Care Programme by extending the service hours on weekday evenings, Saturdays, Sundays and school holidays in some after-school care centres and provide additional fee-waiving and fee-reduction quotas. From December 2014 onwards, SWD has been providing subsidies to 34 after-school care centres to set up the above-mentioned enhanced services, providing a total of 299 full fee-waiving places.

10. In addition, the Government will provide \$200-million matching grant via the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged to encourage the business sector and organisations to work with schools to launch more after-school learning and support programmes for primary and secondary school students from grassroots families to facilitate their whole-person development.

### **Strengthening Residential Child Care Services**

11. To support and protect children who cannot be adequately cared for by their families, as well as young people with behavioural or emotional problems, the Government has been providing subsidies to NGOs to provide various types of residential child care services. We will increase the number of residential places in small group homes to provide temporary accommodation and emotional support for children and young people who have been abused or affected by domestic violence or other family problems.

### **Following up on the Law Reform Commission (LRC) Report on Child Custody and Access**

12. In its Report on Child Custody and Access, LRC recommended the introduction of a new “parental responsibility model” into Hong Kong’s family law to replace the custody and access arrangements under the existing family law. LWB, the Department of Justice and other departments concerned have now commenced the initial law drafting work to consolidate the provisions dealing with disputes relating to children, including arrangements on divorce, guardianship, disputes with third parties, or disputes between parents without accompanying divorce proceedings, into one ordinance. The public will be consulted on the draft legislation in the latter half of this year. In parallel, SWD will

continue to provide various publicity, educational or training programmes to help divorcing/divorced parents and the general public to understand that children would continue to require care from both parents on divorce and that parents would also need to take up continuing parental responsibilities even after divorce. SWD will also explore ways to strengthen support services for divorced families.

### **Combating Domestic Violence**

13. The Government does not tolerate domestic violence and has been dealing with the problem through a three-pronged strategy, viz. preventing domestic violence, supporting victims of domestic violence and providing specialised services and crisis intervention. The Government will continue to allocate resources in enhancing the specialised and support services, including providing various support services for victims of domestic violence as appropriate as well as providing counselling and psycho-educational services for batterers to change their abusive attitude and behaviour.

### **Providing Paternity Leave to Eligible Male Employees**

14. The Employment (Amendment) Ordinance 2014 (Amendment Ordinance) on statutory paternity leave was passed by the LegCo on 18 December 2014 and will become effective on 27 February 2015. Male employees with child born on or after the commencement date of the Amendment Ordinance will be entitled to three days' paternity leave with pay at four-fifths of their average daily wages if they fulfil other requirements as stipulated in the law. We will review the implementation of statutory paternity leave one year after its coming into operation.

### **Enhancing Publicity and Education Efforts to Encourage Wider Adoption of Family-Friendly Employment Practices (FFEP)**

15. FFEP are good people management measures adopted by employers to help employees balance their roles and responsibilities in work and family. Making the workplace family-friendly is a shared responsibility of the whole society. Employers may adopt different types of FFEP having regard to the size, resources and culture of their organisations.

16. LD has been acting as a facilitator in promoting FFEP. Relevant information has been disseminated to the community through a

wide range of publicity channels and various educational and promotional activities to publicise relevant messages across the community and encourage employers to adopt FFEP at workplaces.

17. LD will enhance its publicity and education efforts in this respect by collaborating with employers and employees in individual industry to devise practical guidelines in implementing FFEP for reference of employers in the industries. To encourage more employers to adopt FFEP at workplaces, LD will also publish a series of news supplements by conducting case interviews with various enlightened organisations to share their experiences in implementing FFEP. The series will be compiled into a booklet for wide distribution to related parties to enhance the promotion of FFEP.

### **Advice Sought**

18. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau  
Social Welfare Department  
Labour Department  
February 2015**