

## Family Council

### Minutes of 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting held on 21 November 2013

Date: 21 November 2013 (Thursday)  
Time: 2:30 p.m.  
Venue: Room 6, G/F, Central Government Offices,  
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong

#### Attendance

##### Chairman

Prof SHEK Tan-lei, Daniel

##### Official Members

Mr TSANG Tak-sing, Secretary for Home Affairs

Ms Doris CHEUNG, Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare  
(Welfare)<sup>1</sup>

*(attended on behalf of Secretary for Labour and Welfare)*

Mrs Michelle WONG, Deputy Secretary for Education (4)

*(attended on behalf of Secretary for Education)*

Dr Florence FONG, Senior Researcher (5) /Central Policy Unit (CPU)

*(attended on behalf of Head/CPU)*

##### Ex officio Member

Mrs LAU KUN Lai-kuen, Stella, Chairperson of the Women's  
Commission

##### Non-official Members

Mrs CHU YEUNG Pak-yu, Patricia

Dr KOONG May-kay, Maggie

Prof LAM Tai-hing

Ms LAW Suk-kwan, Lilian

Mr LEE Luen-fai  
Dr LI Sau-hung, Eddy  
Ms LOO Shirley Marie Therese  
Miss TANG Pui-yee, Phoebe  
Dr TSUI Luen-on, Gordon  
Ms WONG Pik-kiu, Peggy  
Miss WONG Siu-ling, Gabriella  
Mr YIU Tze-leung, Ivan

Secretary

Ms Aubrey FUNG, Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs  
(Civic Affairs) 2

In attendance

Ms Gracie FOO, Deputy Secretary for Home Affairs (1)  
Ms Jessica CHENG, Chief Executive Officer (Family Council)

Absent with apologies

Mr CHAN Chun-bun, Bunny, Chairperson of the Commission on Youth  
Prof CHAN Cheung-ming, Alfred, Chairperson of the Elderly  
Commission  
Prof AU Kit-fong, Terry  
Ms YAU Oi-yuen, Irene

For agenda item 3

Miss Agnes WONG, Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing  
(Housing)  
Mr Manfred WONG, Chief Executive Officer (Long Term Housing  
Strategy)

For agenda item 4

Ms Doris HO, Head, Policy & Project Co-ordination Unit, Chief  
Secretary for Administration's Office  
Ms Joyce CHEUNG, Senior Economist (Policy & Project Co-ordination

Unit), Chief Secretary for Administration's Office

## **Welcome Remarks**

The Chairman welcomed all to the 20<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Family Council (the Council).

## **Item 1 – Confirmation of Minutes of the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Family Council**

2. The minutes of the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting were confirmed without amendments.

## **Item 2 – Matters Arising from Last Meeting**

3. The Chairman informed the meeting that the progress report prepared by the Secretariat had been circulated to Members for information and consideration. Members noted the progress report.

## **Item 3 – Briefing on Long Term Housing Strategy (Paper FC 18/2013)**

4. The Chairman invited Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Housing) (DSTH (Housing)) to take Members through the powerpoint presentation on the consultation document of the Long Term Housing Strategy. DSTH(Housing) briefed Members that the Long Term Housing Strategy (LTHS) Steering Committee was formed in September 2012 to make recommendations on the LTHS for the next ten years. The LTHS Steering Committee had issued the consultation document on LTHS on 3 September 2013 for three months' public consultation.

5. In gist, the presentation covered the following major areas –
- (a) an overview of the housing problem;
  - (b) the vision of the long term housing strategy;
  - (c) proposed strategies to address the housing problems;
  - (d) projection of the long term housing demand;
  - (e) housing needs of specific groups in the community;
  - (f) measures to maximize the rational use of public rental housing resources;
  - (g) implications of providing rent assistance, rental control and home purchase assistance; and
  - (h) importance of timely planning and supply of land and implications of future development on planning and environment issues as indicated in the consultation document.
6. Members expressed their views, which were summarized as follows –
- (a) according to the prevailing allocation policy of public rental housing (PRH), the maximum monthly income limit of non-elderly one-person applicant was \$8,880 which was considered low in light of the recent revision of the rate of the statutory minimum wage. To reflect realistically the increasing cost of living and rise in income, the Housing Authority (HA) should consider reviewing the current income limit for PRH application. Besides, the HA should take proactive steps in reviewing the arrangements on under-occupation (UO) and overcrowding tenants in PRH and consider if flexibility could be exercised in

implementing UO policy by taking actual circumstances of the affected PRH into account;

- (b) to help resolve the existing housing problems, the Government should consider utilizing existing resources in a more comprehensive and holistic manner by leveraging on private sector's capacity to provide housing. This could be done through relaxation of the development parameters (such as plot ratio, building height restrictions, etc). Separately, relevant works departments, such as Lands Department, Planning Department and Building Department, should explore how to cut red tape and expedite approval process for housing development;
- (c) to help PRH tenants strengthen their family ties, HA had implemented a four-pronged policy, viz Harmonious Families Priority Scheme, Harmonious Families Transfer Scheme, Harmonious Families Addition Scheme and Harmonious Families Amalgamation Scheme. Notwithstanding its good policy intent, other existing PRH policies (including "well-off tenant" policy and UO policy) might undermine its objectives by discouraging the younger generation living together with and taking care of their elderly family members;
- (d) to cater for the housing needs of specific groups in the community, HA should consider according priorities to those PRH applicants on the Waiting List who had children, particularly those living in the subdivided units (SDUs);
- (e) in tackling the housing problem, the Government should adopt a holistic approach by engaging all relevant bureaux as the construction of public and private housing on a massive scale hinged upon the timely planning and supply of land which required the co-ordinated efforts of the Government as a whole. Besides, given the long period of time required for development, the proposed housing

supply target for just the next ten years might be inadequate to facilitate long-term planning;

- (f) the recommendation of adopting the ratio of 60:40 as the public/private split for the housing supply and 470,000 units to be the supply target in the next ten years might not be realistic in meeting the actual housing demand. On a related note, measures of extending the holding period in respect of the Special Stamp Duty and introduction of a Buyer's Stamp Duty in combating the exuberant property market might distort private housing market;
- (g) to solve the housing problem from a holistic perspective and to prevent excessive intervention in the supply of private housing market, it might worth exploring the option of segmentation of the housing market in order to meet the respective housing needs of the grassroots and low-income people through PRH and Home Ownership Scheme;
- (h) given the population policy was a wide-ranging subject heavily entwined with many aspects of public policies, the Government should take note of its interface with housing policy, especially on matters relating to ageing population. Priority should be given to PRH applicants on the Waiting List who were elderly singletons. Besides, more incentives should be provided to encourage the younger generation to move closer to their elderly parents;
- (i) consideration might be given to encourage private developers to provide rental housing at an affordable price level. In tackling the problem of SDUs, the Government should explore the possibility of providing incentives to landlords of SDUs to participate in the proposed landlord registration system. Consideration could be given to providing subsidies to landlords of SDUs if the SDUs

concerned were able to meet certain prescribed requirements;

- (j) the term “household” was used throughout the consultation document. While the meanings of “household” and “family” were different, emphasis should be placed on the concept of “family” in taking forward the LTHS; and
- (k) the LTHS should be part and parcel of the overall public policies, with the involvement and co-ordinated efforts of different bureaux. In formulating the LTHS, the Government should also take into account relevant demographic changes, especially on ageing population and increasing number of singletons.

7. DSTH (Housing) thanked Members for their views. She clarified that the current LTHS was not reviewed by THB alone. The Permanent Secretary for Development (Planning and Lands) and the Government Economist were also members of the LTHS Steering Committee, as well as non-official members with background of the private sector and the Hong Kong Housing Authority. Therefore, relevant parties had been involved in formulating the recommendations in the consultation document.

8. The Chairman thanked DSTH(Housing) for her presentation and Members for their comments. Members were welcome to give further comments to the Secretariat for onward transmission to the LTHS Steering Committee, if any.

#### **Item 4 – Public Engagement Exercise on Population Policy (Paper FC 19/2013)**

9. The Chairman briefed Members that the Steering Committee on Population Policy (SCPP) had released its consultation document on population policy on 24 October 2013 and launched a four-month public engagement exercise (exercise) until 23 February 2014. The

exercise aimed to deepen the public understanding of the demographic challenges and facilitated extensive public deliberation and discussion on issues related to population policy with a view to forging consensus on policy directions. Riding on the preliminary deliberations at this meeting, the Chairman considered it advisable to task the Sub-committee on the Promotion of Family Core Values and Family Education to further deliberate the related issues and, as appropriate, propose more substantive proposals for submission to the SCPP.

10. Upon invitation of the Chairman, Head, Policy & Project Co-ordination Unit of Chief Secretary for Administration's Office (H(PPCU)) took Members through the powerpoint presentation. The salient points made by H(PPCU) were set out as follows –

- (a) the demographic challenges – rapidly ageing population, shrinking labour force, increasing dependency ratio as well as population growth mainly led by new arrivals from Mainland; and
- (b) five policy strategies to manage challenges – (i) increasing the quantity of the labour force, (ii) enhancing the quality of the labour force, (iii) adopting a more proactive strategy and targeted approach for talent admission and considering a more effective importation of labour system without jeopardizing the interests of local workers, (iv) fostering a supportive environment for young couples to raise children, and (v) helping the elderly stay active in the community.

11. The Chairman thanked H (PPCU) for her presentation. In light of the presentation, Members made the following comments –

- (a) in formulating measures to encourage childbirth, it was essential that more positive messages 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 the 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 leave<sup>1</sup> 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) 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 flexi-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;
- (e) 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;
- (f) the implementation of family support measures in raising fertility would invariably involve substantial resources. However, it was dubious if the Government revenue

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<sup>1</sup> 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 the maternity leave.

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

(g) as future generations of elderly people would be fitter, better educated and better informed than any previous generations, the Government should make reference to the successful experience of Japan in making good use of the elderly population by promoting elderly volunteerism; and

(h) 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 scheme (such as providing free retraining opportunities to female homemakers). In parallel, the Government should also take the opportunity to refine the “Quality Migrant Admission Scheme”, so that more highly skilled or talented persons would be attracted to migrate to Hong Kong. It was worth noting that insufficient places in international school to cater for the needs of their children were also a matter of concern.

12. The Chairman thanked Members for their comments and concluded that the Sub-committee on Promotion of the Family Core Values and Family Education would further deliberate the related issues and propose implementable measures to foster a supportive environment to form and raise families.

(Action: Sub-committee on the Promotion of Family Core Values and Family Education)

## **Item 5 – Progress of Work of the Sub-committees (Paper FC 20/2013)**

13. The Chairman invited the Convenors of the two Sub-committees to report work progress.

14. Regarding the work progress on the promotion of family core values and family education, Ms Shirley LOO reported that the Council had launched the “2013/14 Family-Friendly Employers Award Scheme” on 18 September 2013. As at 20 November 2013, about 690 applications had been received. The Secretariat would continue its endeavour to appeal for enrollment from different sectors of the community, including business companies and non-governmental organisations. On the side of promotion of family education, new family education packages addressing the needs of young families (新手父母家庭) and New Arrival families would be produced. They were expected to be available in the third quarter of 2014.

15. On the Sub-committee on Family Support, Mrs Patricia CHU reported that the Sub-committee had monitored the progress of “Family Survey 2013”. Besides, approval-in-principle had been given to four non-governmental organizations, namely Caritas Hong Kong, Hong Kong Catholic Marriage Advisory Council, Hong Kong Family Welfare Society and Yang Memorial Methodist Social Service, at a total amount of \$1.18 million as sponsorship under the “Pilot Scheme on Family Mediation Service” (the Pilot Scheme). The Sub-committee would review the cost-effectiveness towards the end of the Pilot Scheme in the third quarter of 2014.

16. The meeting noted the progress reports made by the Convenors of the two Sub-committees.

## **Item 6 – Any Other Business**

17. There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 4:40 p.m. The next meeting would be held on 20 February 2014 (Thursday)

at 4:30 p.m. at Room 2, G/F, Central Government Offices, Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong.

**Family Council Secretariat  
February 2014**