

Commission on Children convenes 12th meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr John Lee, chaired the 12th meeting of the Commission on Children today (November 5).

Members were briefed on the progress of the five-year plan on transformation of some 170 public play spaces (PPS) under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, including some large-scale PPS in a number of old districts. Some projects will also be expedited so that children in the districts can enjoy play equipment with more fun sooner. Members welcomed the Government's initiative in enhancing the PPS in Hong Kong, encouraging and promoting community participation during the process as well as providing venue support to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to enhance the play experience of children and strengthen parent education about quality play.

In addition, members noted that the Education Bureau adopts a multi-pronged approach to prevent and handle school bullying. Measures include nurturing of students' positive values and empathy through school curriculum, learning and teaching resources and diversified student learning activities as well as enhancement of the professional knowledge and capability of school personnel. The Government has implemented the policies of "two school social workers for each school" and "one school social worker for each school" in secondary and primary schools respectively in recent years to better cater for students' needs. Moreover, the Police strengthen the communication with schools and parents with a view to promoting a violence-free campus. The Police also handle cyber bullying behaviour through prevention, promotion, education, intelligence collection and enforcement. The Police also rolled out a seven-week Child Protection Campaign in October to raise public awareness of the welfare of children through large-scale promotional activities.

Members also noted the work progress of its four working groups. Among them, the Working Group on Children Protection held a stakeholder engagement session on October 22. More than 80 primary and secondary school students, parents, principals and professionals providing on-site services to schools, teachers and school social workers attended the session and shared views on promotion of children's joyful learning and healthy development.

At the meeting, the Commission also approved 29 applications for the Funding Scheme for Children's Well-being and Development, with a total funding of about \$9.3 million. The funded projects are implemented by NGOs, schools and child concern groups to undertake promotional and public educational projects on children-related issues with children's participation in various aspects. Amid the COVID-19 epidemic, some projects target at encouraging children to do more physical exercises in many ways through specially designed sports board games, structured play, pastel nagomi art, etc, in order to maintain physical and mental health.

Members welcomed the initiative announced in "The Chief Executive's 2021 Policy Address" that the Government would take forward legislative work on a mandatory reporting mechanism for child abuse cases, with the target of introducing a Bill into the Legislative Council in the first half of 2023, and strengthen appropriate training for practitioners in the relevant professions to enhance their capacity for early identification and handling of child abuse cases. Members also expressed views on the proposal of creating a Commissioner for Children post mentioned in the Policy Address. Members noted that the Labour and Welfare Bureau was considering a suitably ranked official for taking up the post of Commissioner for Children with due consideration to the operation, manpower and resources management, with a view to advocating for the rights and well-being of children in a more effective manner.