

LCQ12: Child-minding services

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Leung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (November 29):

Question:

The 2023 Policy Address has mentioned that the Government will strengthen support for working families in childbearing by, among others, setting up 10 more aided standalone child care centres (CCCs) in phases over the next three years starting from next year, providing about 900 additional places for day child care services. Regarding child-minding services, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on (i) the aforesaid aided standalone CCCs and (ii) the newly-built standalone CCCs which will commence operation in each of the next three years: their numbers, service places and geographical distribution;

(2) as the Government indicated in December 2020 that it would purchase premises in batches for accommodating 28 CCCs in the 18 districts across the territory, whether the authorities will expedite the relevant work or convert other suitable government sites into CCCs in order to achieve such a target, thereby increasing the service places of aided CCCs to meet the relevant requirements under the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines;

(3) as it has been reported that quite a number of kindergartens are facing the problem of under-enrolment, whether the authorities will consider providing resources to assist aided CCCs attached to kindergartens in setting up baby care services;

(4) as some operators of standalone CCCs have relayed a high wastage rate of child care workers (CCWs) in recent years and their difficulties in recruiting sufficient CCWs, whether the authorities will consider enhancing the remuneration package of CCWs and reviewing the manning ratio of CCWs for children aged zero to two, so as to alleviate their workload; and

(5) as it is learnt that the Mainland has proactively promoted "smart child care" in recent years, enabling parents and staff members of the centres concerned to better grasp the daily lives and health conditions of infants and children, and to conduct the relevant statistical and monitoring work via the information management system for infant and child care services, whether the authorities will draw reference from the relevant work and technologies, so as to step up the use of technology in the provision of child care services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The consolidated reply to the Member's question, in consultation with the Education Bureau (EDB), is as follows:

(1) Over the next three years starting from 2024, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will set up 10 more aided standalone Child Care Centers (CCCs) in phases to provide about 900 additional service places. Among them, the CCCs in Queens Hill Estate (100 places) and Wah Ming Estate (56 places) in Fanling would commence service in 2023-24 whereas the CCCs at the Treasury Building in Sham Shui Po (100 places) and Shun Lee Estate in Kwun Tong (88 places) are scheduled to operate by 2024-25. The remaining six planned aided standalone CCCs (totally 560 places) in Sham Shui Po, Kwai Tsing, Kwun Tong and Kowloon City, etc, are targeted to be completed and launched within 2027.

(2) With the assistance of the Government Property Agency (GPA), the SWD has been striving to identify suitable premises for purchase through different channels for the provision of welfare facilities, including aided CCCs. The progress of the purchase of premises will be subject to the availability of suitable properties in the market and various external factors, including whether suitable fire safety and barrier-free access facilities are available in the premises, whether their size and location meet the operational requirements, whether the surrounding land uses are compatible with welfare uses, and whether the prices offered by owners are within the acceptable price ranges determined by GPA with reference to market value. The SWD and GPA are continuing to identify suitable premises for purchase. In addition, the SWD will make the best use of vacant government premises, vacant non-domestic premises in public housing estates, etc, and explore suitable premises among them for the use of welfare facilities, including aided CCCs.

(3) Under the prevailing arrangement, the Joint Office for Kindergartens and Child Care Centres (JOKC) of the EDB manages operators setting up service units of CCC and kindergarten (KG) in the same place. The JOKC is staffed with officers of the EDB and the SWD, jointly regulating the care and education services of these service units in accordance with the requirements on premises design, staffing, and safety measures, etc, under the Child Care Services Ordinance (Cap. 243), the Education Ordinance (Cap. 279) and the Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions, providing one-stop services to applicants for CCC registration. If operators of existing aided CCC attached to KG intend to increase CCC service places for children under the age of three in the premises, the operators may apply to the JOKC. If the application complies with the aforementioned requirements, the Government will provide relevant subsidies for the aided CCC attached to KG.

(4) In order to retain and attract qualified child care workers, the SWD has provided Subsidy for Manpower Enhancement to service units of day and residential child care services and pre-school rehabilitation services since September 2017 to ease the pressure of serving staff. Besides, the SWD has enhanced the manning ratio for qualified child care workers taking care of children aged zero to below two from 1:8 to 1:6, and enhanced the manning ratio for taking care of children aged two to below three from 1:14 to 1:11 starting from the 2019/20 school year.

(5) Currently, all CCC services must comply with the relevant requirements

under the Child Care Services Ordinance, the Child Care Services Regulations (Cap. 243A) and the Operation Manual for Pre-primary Institutions to ensure that the service quality are maintained at a reasonable standard, for the balanced development of the infant and young children's physical, social and emotional aspects, etc. Subject to their compliance with the requirements of the Funding and Service Agreement and the relevant statutory staffing requirements, non-governmental organisations operating aided CCC service may determine their staffing establishment in accordance with their human resources policies, flexibly deploy resources and employ staff, and adopt different measures in meeting their centre operations such as streamlining the work procedures, making good use of smart value-added services and information technology support, as well as developing information technology system, etc, so as to strengthen the technology application in child care services and to achieve the service output and effectiveness required.