

LCQ4: Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (June 26):

Question:

It has been reported that in January this year, a child abuse case took place in the Tuen Mun District involving a nine-month-old baby girl who was taken care of by a home-based child carer (HCC) recruited by a non-profit-making organization under the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (the Care Project). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it has been reported that the baby girl involved was the first child entrusted to the care of the HCC involved in the case, whether the authorities will consider rendering more assistance to novice HCCs with less experience in the future by, for example, deploying another experienced HCC or professional child carer to accompany them to take care of children for several times until they are experienced enough to take care of children on their own; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) of the respective numbers of profit-making and non-profit-making organizations providing home-based child care services under the Care Project in the Tuen Mun District in each of the past five years, and the details of training provided by these organizations for recruited HCCs; and

(3) given that in reply to a question raised by a Member of this Council on March 27 this year, the Government indicated that since the launch of the Care Project, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) had received four reports of accidents leading to the injury of young children, of the number of accidents proved to be caused by the negligence of HCCs after investigation, and the improvement measures taken by the SWD after each accident?

Reply:

President,

The reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Social Welfare Department (SWD) subsidises non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to operate the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP), which includes home-based child care service (HCCS) provided by the home-based child carers (HCCs) at their own residence or a suitable place as approved by the service operators for children aged under nine, and the centre-based care groups (CCGs) provided at the service centres set up by the service operators for children aged three to under nine. At present, there is

one service team, operated by an NGO, set up in each of the 18 districts of Hong Kong (including Tuen Mun district) under NSCCP.

The SWD has all along required service operators to establish mechanisms to recruit, assess, screen and train up HCCs, and arrange service matching. At present, HCCs are required to receive four hours of basic training, covering infant and child growth and development and care skills, child nutrition and home safety, etc, as well as one hour of professional child care training provided by child care workers. Besides, social workers of the service operators are required to conduct monthly home visits to HCCs who are providing services, and the child care workers of the operators are also required to provide them with individual training/supervision on a monthly basis. Depending on the background and abilities of HCCs, the service operator will also provide them with enhanced training or retraining courses (including training on the identification of child abuse), and continuously assess and follow up on their performance.

To enhance NSCCP, the SWD will strengthen the training for HCCs starting from the fourth quarter of this year, the content of which is standardised and formulated by the SWD. Trainees are required to undergo 14 hours of basic training, including infant and child physical and psychological development, special development milestones and needs of growth, care and communication skills, home safety and hygiene, handling of accidents/special incidents, etc, and HCCs who are arranged to take care of children with special learning needs must receive an additional four hours of advanced training to acquire relevant knowledge and skills. Service operators are required to evaluate the child care skills and knowledge of HCCs after completing the training, their confidence in providing care services, and whether the home environment is suitable for providing care services, before arranging them to provide services.

Under the enhanced NSCCP, apart from the existing home visits, training/supervision, and continuous evaluation and follow up on the performance of HCCs, relevant figures on training/supervision will also be included in the service quality indicators, and the service operators are required to submit relevant statistical information to the SWD on a quarterly basis. The SWD will also conduct regular and surprise visits to assess whether service operators are in compliance with the requirements of the Service Agreement.

(3) Regarding the reports of four accidents leading to the injury of young children mentioned in the Government's reply to a Member's question on March 27, 2024, after investigation, the four incidents were merely accidents (i.e. excluding suspected child abuse incidents) and did not involve negligence of HCCs. In response to each incident, the SWD has instructed the relevant service operators to take corresponding improvement measures, including enhancing CCG's environmental safety, enhancing HCC's home safety awareness as well as the precautions and care skills in taking care of children of different ages at the same time, and strengthening their safety knowledge in arranging outings for children. The SWD will continue to remind various service operators of the need to continuously examine the assessment and

service matching arrangement of HCCS and to strengthen the training for HCCs.