

LCQ5: Strengthening child care services

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Li and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (October 18):

Question:

The Planning Department updated the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines in 2020 to, in respect of community facilities, incorporate a population-based planning ratio for child care centres (including the provision of 100 aided service places per 25 000 persons), as well as update the floor areas of child care centres. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of communities in the 18 districts across the territory whose child care centres have met or are striving to meet the aforesaid standards through various programmes so far, and set out the details of the relevant programmes by community;

(2) under the aforesaid planning ratio, whether the Government has estimated the additional manpower required for the provision of child care services and whether recruitment difficulties will arise, and whether it has assessed how such planning ratio will alleviate the waiting situation of such services; and

(3) whether it will consider conducting supply and demand surveys in respect of child care services in each district on a regular basis, so as to provide timely support to families in districts where such services are inadequate through service integration?

Reply:

President:

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

(1) The Government incorporated the population-based planning ratio for aided child care centres (CCCs) (i.e. 100 aided CCC service places for children aged below three for every 25 000 persons) into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines in March 2020, with an aim to reserve suitable premises for operating CCCs in different development projects. The standard of this planning ratio mainly applies to new housing development areas. The Government will set up aided standalone CCCs in phases according to the aforementioned planning standard.

For developed areas, apart from referring to the above planning standard, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) will consider the child care service provision in the districts and individual district characteristics

such as CCC places, service utilisation, land supply situation, demand for services arising from changes in demographic structure, etc, in planning aided CCCs.

(2) The Government will continue to reserve suitable premises for operating CCCs in different development projects, in accordance with the population-based planning ratio for the provision of aided CCCs, and to require service operators to hire sufficient qualified child care workers (CCWs) to provide services in accordance with the Child Care Services Ordinance (Cap. 243) and Child Care Services Regulations (Cap. 243A). In 2022-23, there are around 1 600 newly registered CCWs. It is estimated that the number of new registrations in the coming year will be similar and should be able to cope with the additional manpower required for the CCCs that are newly set up in the next two years. The SWD will continue to keep in view the demand and supply of manpower situation of registered CCWs and encourage various institutions/organisations to run relevant programmes or to increase the capacity in accordance with the service demand, in order to meet the service needs. There is no central waiting arrangement for CCC service. Parents can directly apply for the service from CCC service operators according to their needs, and the applications are handled by respective operators.

(3) The Government commissioned the University of Hong Kong to conduct the Consultancy Study on the Long-term Development of Child Care Services (the Study), which took stock of the existing day child care services, made reference to the experiences of other places, gathered the opinions of stakeholders, conducted in-depth analyses on different aspects of child care services, such as objectives, contents, targets, financing modes, service models, demand and supply situation, facility planning, manpower planning and training, and made recommendations on the long-term development of the services. With reference to the main recommendations of the Report of the Study, the Government has implemented a series of new measures in strengthening child care services since 2019-20, including the continuous increase of service places of aided standalone CCCs; the enhancement of Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project in 2020, and the re-engineering of Mutual Help Child Care Centres in phases to provide after school care service for pre-primary children between 2021 and 2024, in order to strengthen the long-term development of child care services. The Government will continuously monitor the operation of various day child care services, understand the demand for such services from members of local communities through District Social Welfare Offices of the SWD, in order to ensure such services can meet the needs in different districts.