

SLW responds to incident in Children's Residential Home

In response to the submission of an Independent Review Committee (IRC) review report by the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children (HKSPC) on its Children's Residential Home (CRH), the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, today (January 26) said that the incident revealed severe deficiencies in extensive areas of the HKSPC, from daily operations, supervision to staff training of the CRH, breaching requirements of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and falling short of public expectations.

The Government noted that the HKSPC had accepted the IRC's recommendations and pledged to take a series of actions, including replacing members of the senior management and enhancing its corporate governance and daily supervision, with the commitment to rebuild public confidence. The SWD has demanded the HKSPC to implement all the recommendations as soon as possible, and will closely monitor the effectiveness of the measures after implementation in order to protect the well-being of children. Moreover, the SWD will continue to keep in view the outcome and recommendations of the IRC's review on the HKSPC's other services, as a basis to consider whether the organisation is still fit to provide SWD-subsidised services in future.

During the process of handling the incident, the Government has also identified room for improvement in the SWD's regulatory mechanism. The SWD will adopt a risk-based approach, and enhance inspections with extended breadth and depth to ensure the child care service providers meet the service quality standard and statutory requirements, with effective internal control and monitoring mechanism in place.

"We will invite the Working Group on Children Protection of the Commission on Children to supervise a review on children welfare services, covering the residential child care and related services, with an aim to complete the review by March next year," Dr Law said.

In addition, the Government will take forward the legislative work on a mandatory reporting mechanism for child abuse cases, under which practitioners in the professions subject to mandatory reporting obligations will receive appropriate training to enhance their capacity for early identification and handling of child abuse cases. The target is to introduce the bill into the Legislative Council (LegCo) in the first half of next year. The Government is also considering how to take forward the recommendations as set out in the Law Reform Commission's report on causing or allowing the death or serious harm of a child or vulnerable adult published last September.

"The Government attaches great importance to protect the best interests of children and firmly believes that every child has a right to protection against harm and abuse. This requires the concerted efforts of the

Government, related sectors as well as the entire community to work together to achieve this goal. Special tribute should be paid to various welfare organisations with children service units for their offer of assistance and essential helping hands by seconding or recommending personnel to deal with the untoward situation," Dr Law said.

The Labour and Welfare Bureau is prepared to attend a special meeting of the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services to brief Members and harness collective wisdom and insights to improve welfare services for children.