

## SWD responds to views expressed by some members of welfare sector on welfare services arrangements

In response to the views expressed by some members of the welfare sector recently on the arrangements for welfare services subsidised by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) having regard to the latest developments of the spread of the novel coronavirus, a spokesperson for the SWD gave the following response today (February 11):

The SWD understands the difficulties being faced by the welfare sector, and has been closely monitoring the operation of subsidised welfare services. While ensuring that essential and urgent services are maintained, the SWD has from time to time adjusted the scale of operation of subsidised welfare facilities by reducing the scale of or suspending certain services in order to reduce the risk of infection arising from the gatherings of people.

In the light of developments, the SWD issued a number of press releases earlier to announce special arrangements for subsidised welfare services including service suspension or provision of limited services for certain centres and suspension of groups and programmes. The SWD has kept the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and service units concerned informed of the arrangements. In the press release issued by the SWD on February 7, the department further announced that more day centre facilities would not be open to the public. The SWD will continue to announce changes to service arrangements in the light of the latest developments.

Regarding the SWD's services, alternative means of providing services, such as by way of drop-in boxes, audio/video calls, have been adopted to replace face-to-face contacts wherever possible. It is understood that many NGOs are adopting similar approaches. In view of the impact caused by the epidemic, the SWD will exercise flexibility on individual service units' attainment of service requirements under the relevant Funding and Service Agreements.

Regarding the provision of resources, the SWD provided the first tranche of grants in late January for day and residential service units to procure sanitary and personal protective items. The second tranche of grants was provided yesterday (February 10) for the same purpose. In addition, the department is considering to provide funding for relevant residential homes and home-based service units, which face manpower difficulties arising from the quarantine arrangements required of some of their regular staff, to hire relief workers or pay overtime allowances.

Regarding sanitary and personal protective items, the Government and different quarters in the community are procuring from different sources and producing locally to increase supply, and the department helps donors to

distribute donations in accordance with their wishes.

The SWD is grateful to all welfare sector colleagues for holding the fort during this very difficult time. The department will continue to provide support in different ways to the best of its abilities.