

Commission on Children convenes 14th meeting (with photo)

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Chan Kwok-ki, today (August 18) chaired the 14th meeting of the Commission on Children.

Chairing the meeting of the Commission for the first time, Mr Chan said, "The Government attaches utmost importance to the well-being of children and is committed to providing a safe and nourishing environment for the healthy and happy growth and optimal development of our children to achieve their fullest potential. Together with members of the Commission, we would make the best effort to harness the combined strengths of various government bureaux and departments and team up with different sectors and professions in society, in order to safeguard the well-being of children and build a pro-child Hong Kong."

At the meeting, members were briefed by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) on the Interim Report of the Committee on Review of Residential Child Care and Related Services (Review Committee) on its first-phase review, which focused on the services of Residential Child Care Centres (RCCCs) and Residential Special Child Care Centres for children aged under 6. Members noted that the Review Committee had made 31 recommendations for improvement. On service quality, the report recommended to enhance the manning ratio of child care workers in RCCCs and additionally provide Child Care Aides; introduce cross-disciplinary professional support; strengthen training for staff; introduce a registration mechanism for superintendents under which applicants should complete training courses on child protection when joining the service, receive ongoing training after joining the service, and bear the responsibility of reporting suspected child abuse cases, etc. On service regulation and monitoring, the report recommended to step up efforts of inspection, including incorporating health inspectors served by nurses and former law enforcement agency staff in the Child Care Centres Advisory Inspectorate of the SWD, setting up service quality groups formed by the Justices of the Peace and persons from different professional sectors for surprise inspections; introducing new technologies to the closed-circuit television system in RCCCs to promptly identify any improper behaviour by staff, etc. On service planning, apart from increasing the provision of more residential child care services premises, the report recommended to strengthen recruitment and support to foster care parents for providing more family-based care services. Members welcomed the various recommended measures and offered views on their implementation. They also noted that the Government would follow up on the recommendations formulated in the review report in order of priority; and that the Review Committee would commence the second phase of the review on other types of residential child care services with a targeted completion by next March.

Members were also consulted on a proposal to mandate designated professionals to report suspected child abuse cases to the relevant government authorities' specified categories of child abuse/neglect cases,

the non-compliance of which will lead to criminal liability. Members noted that the Labour and Welfare Bureau has commenced the relevant legislative work and expressed views on five key parameters, including the target to be protected; categories of practitioners to be designated as mandated reporters; types of suspected cases to be reported; level of penalty; and safeguard provisions for mandated reporters. Members also noted the proposed reporting channel, training for the mandated reporters and administrative support measures on child protection. The Government would organise stakeholder engagement sessions on the proposal in September for the social welfare, education and healthcare sectors. Subject to the outcome of the consultation, the Government plans to take forward the proposal by introducing a bill to the Legislative Council within the 2023-24 legislative session.

