

**Notes of the
Thirteenth Meeting of the Commission on Children**

Date : 19 May 2022
Time : 2:30 p.m.
**Venue : Conference Room, 5/F, West Wing, Central Government
Offices, Tamar**

Present

Chairperson

Mrs Carrie Lam Chief Executive (CE)

Vice-chairperson

Dr Law Chi-kwong Secretary for Labour and Welfare (SLW)

Ex-officio Members

Professor Sophia Chan	Secretary for Food and Health
Mr Jack Chan	Acting Secretary for Home Affairs
Dr Christine Choi	Under Secretary for Education (for Secretary for Education)
Mr Clement Woo	Under Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs (for Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs)
Mr Gordon Leung	Director of Social Welfare
Dr Ronald Lam	Director of Health
Mrs Alice Cheung	Director of Home Affairs
Ms Chan Yuen-han	Chairperson of Women's Commission
Ms Melissa Kaye Pang	Chairperson of Family Council

Non-official Members

Mr Peter Au Yeung Wai-hong
Miss Bakar Fariha Salma Deiya
Ms Janus Cheng
Mr Winson Chow Wai-chung
Ms Kathy Chung Lai-kam
Mr Dennis Ho Chi-kuen
Dr Patrick Ip
Dr Sanly Kam Shau-wan
Mr Edwin Lee
Mrs Priscilla Lui Tsang Sun-kai

Ms Shalini Mahtani
Mr Kenny Ng Kwan-lim
Dr Halina Poon Suk-han
Ms Michelle Tam Chi-yun
Dr Sandra Tsang Kit-man
Mr Gary Wong Chi-him
Dr Lilian Wong Hiu-lei
Ms Kathy Wong Kin-ho
Dr Wong Kwai-yau

Secretary

Ms Veronica Wong Acting Principal Assistant Secretary for
Labour and Welfare (Commission on Children)

In attendance

Chief Secretary for Administration's Private Office

Miss Carrie Chang Administrative Assistant to Chief Secretary
for Administration

Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)

Ms Alice Lau Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Mr David Leung Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare
(Welfare)¹
Ms Terry Cheung Chief Executive Officer
(Commission on Children)

Food and Health Bureau

Mr Chris Fung Principal Assistant Secretary for
Food & Health (Health)³

Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau

Miss Cathy Li Principal Assistant Secretary
(Constitutional and Mainland Affairs)⁵

Department of Health

Dr Thomas Chung Consultant Community Medicine
(Family and Student Health)

Child Fatality Review Panel

Dr Eva Dunn	Chairperson of the Child Fatality Review Panel
[For Item 3 only]	(the Panel Chairperson)

Social Welfare Department

Ms Wendy Chau	Assistant Director (Family & Child Welfare)
[For Items 3 & 4]	(AD(FCW))
Ms Nancy Kwan	Assistant Director (Licensing & Regulation)
[For item 4 only]	(AD(LR))

Member absent with apologies

Miss Kelly Cheng Hui-kiu

The thirteenth meeting of the Commission on Children (the Commission) was chaired by the Chief Executive as the post of the Chief Secretary for Administration had been left vacant.

Item 1: Confirmation of the Notes of the Twelfth Meeting held on 5 November 2021

2. The draft notes of the twelfth meeting were circulated to members on 21 December 2021 and no comment was received. The notes were confirmed without any amendment.

Item 2: Matters Arising

3. There was no matter arising from the last meeting.

Item 3: Fifth Report of the Child Fatality Review Panel [Paper No. 1/2022]

4. On CE's invitation, the Panel Chairperson briefed the meeting on the observations and recommendations in the Fifth Report of the Child Fatality Review Panel (the Report) released on 23 November 2021.

5. CE expressed concern about the lapse of time between the child death cases under review (2016 - 2018) and the publication of the Report (2021). The Panel Chairperson responded that the Panel's review could only commence after investigation by law enforcement agents and/or related legal proceedings had been completed. This notwithstanding, instead of waiting for the publication of its reports, the Panel would timely put forth its observations to relevant bureaux/departments (B/Ds) during the review process.

6. Members' views and suggestions were summarised as follows –

(a) Review mechanism

(i) The review process should be expedited. Monitoring mechanism should be stepped up to track the progress and effectiveness of follow-up actions on the Review

Panel's recommendations by the relevant parties.

- (ii) The scope of work of the Review Panel should be expanded to cover not only child death cases dealt with by the Coroners but all child death cases; as well as serious injury cases of children.
- (iii) Analysis of the causes of child deaths should be age-specific, as it was noted that children aged below 1 and children aged 15–19 were the age groups with the highest number of deaths.
- (iv) Classification of abuse cases under “assault” should be categorised as “abuse” to better reflect the nature of these cases.
- (v) A separate review on children's mental health should be conducted.
- (vi) The Review Panel should be conferred with statutory powers to investigate each and every child death case to understand the trend and monitor follow up actions.

(b) Children suicide

- (i) The emotional distress caused by cyber bullying and online sexual abuse could contribute to upsurge in suicide cases among children. The Government should strengthen monitoring of these abuses in the cyber world.
- (ii) Children suicide and deliberate self-harm were often associated with child abuse. It would be important to strengthen children's resilience in handling stress from school work and provide support to alleviate parenting stress during examination seasons.

(c) Child abuses

- (i) Carers suffering from mental health issues were more prone to become perpetrators in child abuse cases. The Government should step up efforts in early identification

of carers with mental health issues for the sake of protecting children.

- (ii) Experts and practitioners should be culturally sensitive and avoid stereotype when handling child abuse cases involving ethnic minority (EM) communities. Child abuse cases in EM communities were seldom reported and generally not easy to identify. EM girls had a higher risk of physical and mental abuse in early marriages.

(d) Preventive measures

- (i) The Government should address the needs for public space by children to improve their mental health, in particular underprivileged families which were most affected by the closure of public space during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (ii) While academic pressure was one of the major sources of stress, a holistic review of the root causes of students' stress would be conducive to the formulation of effective measures against the problems.
- (iii) The Government should strengthen education on positive values, emotions, social skills and digital literacy for students to handle challenges at different stages of their development.
- (iv) The Government should enhance publicity of the key findings and recommendations of the Review Panel's Report, targeting at parents and carers of children in particular. Education should be strengthened to enhance their awareness of children protection, prevention of avoidable child death and alertness to seek help where necessary.

7. The Panel Chairperson made the following responses –

- (a) The great majority of the child death cases reportable to the Coroner had to go through legal proceedings in the Coroner's Court and for those cases that involved criminal and civil legal

actions, a lead time of several years was not uncommon. The Review Panel was exploring ways of expediting the review, including the possibility of conducting the review after completion of legal proceedings in the Coroner's Court, without awaiting the completion of other legal proceedings.

- (b) The Review Panel would step up efforts in following up with B/Ds and relevant organisations on the progress and evaluation of effectiveness of actions taken in response to the Review Panel's recommendations.
- (c) The Review Panel had worked in collaboration with the Commission in promoting prevention of avoidable child deaths and would take forward more promotional plans to disseminate messages in this respect. SWD also helped disseminate messages on the recommendations of the Review Panel through their community networks.

8. USEd made the following responses –

- (a) When schools reported a student suicide case, the school-based educational psychologist would work with school social worker(s) to provide support to staff and students. The school crisis management team would consider appropriate follow-up actions according to the standing guidelines and procedures.
- (b) EDB had all along encouraged schools to adopt the Whole School Approach directed at three levels, namely “Universal”, “Selective” and “Indicated”, to promote mental health amongst students and enhance support for students with mental health needs. To address emotional distress experienced by students, EDB would maintain close contact with schools and remind them to beware of students' emotion during critical periods, such as suspension of face-to-face classes amidst the pandemic and resumption of classes after long holiday.

9. DS(W)1 made the following responses –

- (a) The Working Group (WG) on Children Protection had deliberated thoroughly the review mechanism of child fatality. The WG would keep track of the progress of B/Ds' follow-up

actions in respect of the recommendations proposed by the Review Panel.

- (b) The WG on Promotion of Children's Rights and Development, Education and Publicity helped publicize the Review Panel's key recommendations, including production of easy-to-understand one-minuter for dissemination through different media platforms. Following the publication of the Fifth Report, the WG would work with SWD to formulate a publicity plan for promoting the key messages on prevention of child fatality and child abuses.

10. CE thanked the Review Panel for the considerable efforts that it had made. She advised that the Commission should prioritise and identify the Review Panel's key recommendations to facilitate the monitoring of follow-up actions to be taken by relevant B/Ds.

Item 4: Review of the Residential Child Care Services [Paper No. 2/2022]

11. On CE's invitation, DSW, AD(FCW) and AD(LR) briefed members on the Government's review of residential child care and related services (the Review) with a view to strengthening monitoring, enhancing service quality and protecting the well-being of children.

12. CE expressed concern about the effectiveness of the existing monitoring mechanism on residential child care services (RCCS), and was worried that the Children's Residential Home (CRH) Incident was only the tip of an iceberg. She directed SWD to step up monitoring efforts for protecting the children at-risk and complete the service review in a timely manner.

13. DSW accepted that there was room for improvement in the monitoring mechanism. In this respect, one of the key elements of the review being conducted would cover service regulation and monitoring of RCCS, with a focus on the effectiveness of inspections, as well as the manpower and professional support required, etc.

14. SLW said that the high staff turnover rate and burnout phenomenon among staff reflected the problems of undesirable work

environment and manpower shortage. Special attention should be given to these areas when considering enhancement to the monitoring of these service units.

15. The views and suggestions of members were summarised as follows –

(a) Scope of review

- (i) The review should cover issues pertaining to how to ensure the quality of staff; mobilise community resources to complement RCCS services; strengthen collaboration among service operators in the industry; enhance corporate governance, and nurture a positive culture of child care.
- (ii) In addition to imposing the proposed strengthening of the penalty mechanism for serious non-compliance of service operators, there should be early intervention to identify signs of substandard performance. Priority should be given to improving and sustaining the quality of service and manpower.

(b) Monitoring mechanism

- (i) SWD's inspectors focused too much on prevailing rules and regulations when conducting inspections, with insufficient attention to children's development and well-being. Multi-disciplinary collaboration would be necessary to strengthen support and monitoring.
- (ii) As residential child care centres (RCCCs) operated 24-hours a day, the inspection visits should be conducted flexibly to cover different hours of the day.
- (iii) SWD should make adjustments to the requirements in the Funding and Service Agreements with service operators to strengthen the monitoring system.

(c) Quality of service

- (i) The coordination among Government B/Ds should be strengthened in terms of the provision of support services to children in RCCCs. The provision of on-site and one-stop training and rehabilitation service to children in needs would be an example.
- (ii) Training for the management staff of service operators should be strengthened. Consideration could be given to implement staff rotation among different service operators to facilitate sharing of experience and skills, good practices and culture.
- (iii) There should be a long-term plan on the manpower supply of child care workers. As a short-term measure, allowance could be an incentive to attract new blood. Training should be provided to equip child care workers with necessary knowledge and skills to handle children from different backgrounds and with different needs.
- (iv) A new child care service model should be adopted to enhance the quality of RCCS. Best practice should be established for sharing among RCCS operators.

(d) Well-being of children

- (i) Public education should be enhanced to create a caring culture in the society. The Government should promote and facilitate participation of the community in child care work, such as foster care services.
- (ii) For children from high risk families, provision of support to their families to restore and reinforce the capacity in raising their own children would be a better solution than accommodating the children in RCCCs.
- (iii) The Government should consider conducting a review on other service units including the non-residential child care service units to examine if the services were up to requirements and standards.

16. In response to a member's enquiry on the progress of the legislation on mandatory reporting requirement for suspected child abuse cases, SLW said that the Government would consult practitioners in the relevant professions, at both the management and frontline levels. The Government would then work out the implementation plan.

17. CE thanked Members for their valuable comments and advised DSW to complete the service review as scheduled, taking into account members' suggestions and reporting the progress to the Commission at a suitable juncture.

**Item 5: Proposal on the Reform of the Commission on Children
[Paper No. 3/2022]**

**Item 6: Achievements of Commission on Children (June 2018 –
May 2022)
[Paper No. 4/2022]**

18. Noting that the two agenda items (i.e. Items 5 and 6) were of similar nature, CE suggested and members agreed that the discussion of Agenda Item 5 and Item 6 should be combined.

19. Members' views and suggestions were summarised as follows:

- (a) An annual work plan with focus on two to three major items should be formulated.
- (b) Collaboration and interaction among different B/Ds should be strengthened to enhance and monitor integration and rationalisation of children-related policies and initiatives.
- (c) A study on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on children's health and learning difficulties, etc. should be conducted in future.
- (d) Non-official members should be engaged to help explain to the public the implementation of new children initiatives and policies to gain wider support.

- (e) A regular reporting mechanism on the follow-up actions taken by B/Ds on policies deliberated by the Commission and the views gathered at the Commission's engagement sessions should be established.
- (f) The Commission should be converted into an independent statutory body with the mandates and resources to drive child's policies.
- (g) A Commissioner for Children post, not being housed under any bureau, should be created to co-ordinate and take forward existing children related policies and measures straddling across different B/Ds.
- (h) The profile of the Commission among the public and stakeholders should be raised through the use of social media platforms and collaborations with NGOs and children groups.
- (i) There should be child impact assessment during the formulation of policies to ensure that the best interests of children were taken into account and respected.

20. CE made the following responses –

- (a) Members' proposal of converting the Commission into a statutory body might not bring about their envisaged benefits as the child's welfare cut across a large number of bureaux and departments. The current design of the Commission (i.e. a high-level Commission chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration) should best ensure that children-related policies and programmes straddling across different B/Ds would be taken forward in a coordinated and systematic manner. It would be more fruitful for Members to prioritise and focus on pertinent issues affecting the well-beings of children for deliberation at the Commission meetings and to monitor closely follow-up actions by the relevant B/Ds.

- (b) The creation of dedicated commissioner posts with specific responsibilities in recent years, such as Commissioner for Heritage and Commissioner for Sports, was bearing fruit. A Commissioner for Children at an appropriate rank and with a clear mandate to advocate for the child's benefits should be conducive to helping promote child protection so long as the post holder has a sense of mission and passion to play an advocacy role.
- (c) The Government would continue to step up efforts in enhancing the capability in information dissemination and communication with the public.
- (d) Family education was fundamental to children's development and growth. Protection of children should be the priority and obligation of not only the Government, but also all quarters of society, particularly parents.

21. Members extended their heartfelt appreciation to CE for her staunch support in the establishment of the Commission and the importance she attached to safeguarding the rights, interests and well-being of children. They also thanked the support by SLW, various B/Ds and Commission Secretariat in the work of the Commission.

22. CE expressed her gratitude to the Commission for its dedication over the years and members' views and suggestions to strengthen support and protection for children. She said that the secretariat would convey members' views to the next-term Government.

Item 7: Any Other Business

23. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5:35 p.m..

**Commission on Children Secretariat
June 2022**