

**The Hong Kong Council of Social Service**  
**NGOs' Views on the Interim Report of the Implementation of Family Services Review**

## **1. Foreword**

**From the launching of the pilot projects of integrated family service centre (hereinafter the "IFSC") last year to the current discussion on the Interim Report, the sector shows enthusiasm and support for the development of IFSC. We support that the IFSC could be further developed. However, in considering the future development of IFSC, we uphold the following 3 principles:**

### **1.1 Sufficient evidence support and consultation is required in making any conclusive recommendations at this stage**

As the present report is an interim report covering only 9 months statistics (from April, 2002 to Dec., 2002) and half yearly self assessment report (April, 2002 to September, 2002). **NGOs consider that further examination with statistics support is required before making any concrete and conclusive recommendations on the operation mode and the pooling of resource for the formation of IFSC. Besides, as the recommendations will affect the future service delivery modes and other service settings, sufficient consultation and discussion with the sector are required.**

The IFSC model is developed basing on 4 principles namely accessibility, early identification, integration and partnership. According to the Interim Report, **“Taken together, the pilot projects showed remarkable achievements in most areas.”** (for output and outcome of the pilot projects, please refer to para. 37 and para. 24 in p. 30 and p.36 respectively). **. Therefore, we have reservation on concluding on the operation mode at this stage. We hope that the Consultant would further identify success factors and limitations of the different operation modes in achieving the 4 principles for future reference.**

### **1.2 Formation of IFSC and efficiency savings should be handled separately**

We understand that the SWD is working out options for efficiency savings at this moment. **However, the formation of IFSC is an issue of service development instead of an exercise to achieve efficiency savings. In this regard, we propose that the formation of IFSCs and the resource pooling not to be considered from a cost savings angle, but on the basis that how resources can be best deployed to meet a range of community needs.** While resources may be saved in the formation process of IFSC, it should not be an objective of the exercise.,

### **1.3 Service gap should not be incurred in the process of formation of IFSC**

In the pooling of resources to form IFSC, it is important that service gaps will not be created after resources are pooled out. **Due consultation with the relevant stakeholders, including**

**the users and the service operators of the affected services should be conducted.**

Apart from the above principles, there are some issues of concern which have to be resolved before any further development of IFSC. **This paper has consolidated the sector's views and we hope that they will be duly considered and addressed by the Government.**

## **2. Issues to be worked out before further development of IFSC**

### **2.1 Planning of IFSC**

#### **2.1.1 Establish a blueprint to steer the formation of IFSC**

- (a) To facilitate the transparency in the planning of the IFSCs, it is proposed the Government to work out together with the sector a planning blueprint, including the planning criteria, the optimal size of IFSC, number of IFSC in each district and etc.. The districts needs and characteristics e.g. areas with sparsely distributed population, could be duly considered in the drawing up of the overall blueprint.**

We appreciate that the SWD has worked out the social indicators and their weightings in the 13 districts. **However, we hope that the SWD would discuss with the sector the implication of these social indicators on the formation of IFSC.**

- (b) Referring to the serving population of an IFSC, we would like to understand the rationale of the proposed population ratio, i.e. an IFSC serving 100,000 to 150,000 population.** According to frontline experience, it will be difficult for an IFSC to serve as a neighborhood-based service in a large population area. **In fact, we consider the proposed serving population of 80,000 to 100,000 of an IFSC in the Report of the Review of Family Services released in June, 2001 and of which the majority of the IFSC pilot projects are following could serve as a reference in planning.**

Besides, we understand that the number of social workers in existing pilot projects range from 8 to 31 but we estimate that excluding the extreme cases, on average, there are 10 to 12 social worker units in an IFSC pilot project currently. **Hence, 10 to 12 social worker units in an IFSC serving 80,000 to 100,000 population could serve as a planning reference. Similar to the formation of integrated children and youth service centre, we urge for a flexibility of 20% variation in the resource pooling.**

**The feasibility of the planning ratio and manpower provision in catering for community needs should be reviewed regularly to ensure that service gap does not exist.**

- (c) **We propose that the development of a blueprint for the future formation of IFSC would be entrusted to the Working Group on the Implementation of the Review of Family Services which comprises members from policy bureau, SWD, independent individual and NGOs.**

### **2.1.2 Specialized service to meet special needs**

There are some specialized service developed in the past few years e.g. post-migration center and single parent centre. **Though according to the Interim Report, a high proportion of the IFSC users are new arrivals and persons without spouses, it does not necessarily imply that IFSC could replace the function of these specialized services. Further examination is required.** For example, whether there is any duplication in the nature of service or the service recipients of IFSC and the specialized services.

Besides, some agencies have established their expertise and reputation in providing a particular service, e.g. marital counseling, sex therapy. **There should be flexibility for an IFSC in serving a larger population outside their service boundary to cater the needs for these services.**

## **2.2 Resource pooling in the formation of IFSC**

### **2.2.1 Adopting a bottom-up approach**

It is understood that the Government would adopt a bottom-up approach in the formation of IFSC. **We appreciate such a direction as it permits agency to mobilize their resources according to their understanding of community needs as well as service mission and strategies.**

### **2.2.2 Partial merging should not be ruled out**

**It is suggested that it is not necessary for NGOs to pool all the manpower of a service setting to form IFSC as long as they have met the manpower requirement of future IFSC.** For example, an agency could pool part of their manpower of a community centre to merge with a FSC in forming an IFSC while with the remaining manpower, agency could continue to provide partial service of a community centre.

### **2.2.3 Formation of IFSCs not to be limited to agencies with FSCs**

Some agencies though not operating subvented family service centre have developed their expertise and strong experience in providing counseling service **We suggest that the SWD to open up opportunity for these agencies to form IFSCs. The increased diversity of operating agencies in the family service settings will encourage innovation and new synergy.**

#### 2.2.4 Hiving off SWD's FSC

At present, the SWD is operating two-third of family service centres. We understand that it is the Government's direction to contract out direct services to NGOs as far as possible. **With the current major revamping of the family services, it would be an opportune moment for the Government to consider hiving off some of the family service centres to NGOs and focusing Government's role in service planning and policy formulation.** NGOs will be ready to take up some family service centres and form IFSCs in the process.

### 2.3 Function of IFSC

#### 2.3.1 IFSC cannot replace function of community development service

NGOs are very concerned with the possible total pooling of resources of community centre and neighbourhood level community development project (NLCDP) to form IFSC. **We view that the scope of these community development services is beyond the service provision from a family perspective.** They aim at building up the strength of the community and to solve community problems. Though the re-engineering of traditional family service to IFSC could generate synergies, it could not replace the function of community development services.

#### 2.3.2 Detailed delineation between IFSC and other service settings should be worked out

The delineation among community centre, children and youth centre and IFSC should be elaborated **so that workers of different service settings could better position themselves in the community and could provide service with a clear mission.**

### 3. Conclusion

We support the need to expand the function and service of traditional casework service and **we hope that the Government would resolve the above issues and work out the blueprint for formation of IFSC with the sector as soon as possible prior to the re-engineering of family services.**