

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
Response to the Consultation Document on Population Policy

Towards a Balanced Approach to Population Policy

- 1 The Council acknowledges the population trends mentioned in the consultation paper, namely:
 - Ageing population
 - Decrease in the number of labour force (as well as the significance of labour force to economic growth in the past 2 decades)
 - Increase in dependency ratio
 - Increase in the number of Ethnic Minorities
- 2 Our Council understands these trends not just as challenges but also potentials. While we should find ways to ensure a sustainable population for development of our society, we believe that different social groups do have their own unique potentials awaiting development and activation. If the Population Policy can propose a long-term vision of social development for the people in Hong Kong, and devise appropriate strategies, we believe that:
 - Ageing population may be as much a challenge as a potential and an opportunity
 - Decrease in labour force may force us to come up with wiser ways of increasing our productivity, hence maintaining our economic growth
 - Dependency ratio may increase but dependency may not be as high as expected
 - New Arrivals and Ethnic Minorities may not be a threat to social inclusion but sources of social and economic development.
- 3 Overall Comments on “Five Ways to Manage Challenges”
 - 3.1 In spite of the stated objective, the five ways proposed in the consultation paper to manage the challenges remain disproportionately focused on securing adequate labour force for economic productivity and maintain a notion of social development which gives priority concern on economic growth. Our Council thinks that the five ways proposed may risk giving Hong Kong people a feeling that they are instruments for economic production and growth, and it is counter-productive for the society to build positive vision and consensus on our future development.
 - 3.2 Our Council is mindful of the importance of economic development by increasing the quantity of labour, enhancing the quality of labour and maintaining our openness to talents outside of Hong Kong. However, we would like to stress that social development in terms of improvement of quality

of life of the people should also be the core part of a people-oriented population policy. Economic growth does provide a material capacity for social development, but social development is also an indispensable foundation for economic development. We think our population policy should be based on a balanced approach to social development.

3.3 In the past two decades, however, our social landscape has changed significantly that our old approach of fostering economic growth to improve our quality of life may not be convincing. On one hand, the prevalence of poverty in Hong Kong has proven vividly to many people (particularly those of the working poor) that economic growth does not result in the improvement of the quality of life of many people. On the other, Hong Kong people are now living in a time when our society is generally affluent. They have a higher expectation on our affluent society to provide a better opportunity structure for them and their families to develop.

3.4 While talking about ways to manage the challenges, our Council would like the government to pay attention also to ways *to activate and develop the potentials* as a response strategy.

4 Comments and Suggestions on “Objectives of Population Policy”

4.1 In general, the Council supports the objectives stated in the consultation paper. (Para. 1.22) As always, our Council thinks that our population policy should be a mega-level policy which seeks to foster a balanced and sustainable social and economic development of Hong Kong society. A “people-oriented population policy” is what our Council supports.

4.2 We also welcome the Steering Committee’s awareness of the importance of Hong Kong to maintain and further develop a character as well as essential qualities of being a world city. Making Hong Kong a preferred choice of residence in the world capable of creating opportunities and means for the people to attain a good quality of life is what our Council fully supports.

5 Summary of Proposed Strategies and Measures

5.1 A population policy which can foster a balanced and sustainable social and economic development relies on two broad interrelated areas of strategies and measures:

- **Promote Growth in Quantity of Working Population**
- **Enhance the Quality of the Entire Population**

5.2 Promote Growth in Quantity of Working Population

5.2.1. To promote the growth in quantity of working population, there are essentially two directions, namely:

- Ensuring the growth in number of working population
- Reducing or slowing down the growth in adult non-working population

5.2.2. Ensuring the growth in number of working population:

- Natural growth of population relies on new born babies. Measures to create a favorable environment for young adults to form their families and for families to raise children are needed. The government should seek to legislate on standard working hour and promote work life balance.
- Education and employment supports to the ethnic minorities and people with disabilities, whose potentials are currently very much underdeveloped because of the barriers to their full social and economic participation, should be provided. Ensuring equal access to education, adequate education supports for effective advancement should help them build a basic foundation for career development. Employment supports should be rendered, including a quota system, tax incentives as well as concrete service or measures encouraging and assisting employers in recruiting and employing the ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.
- Proactive immigration policy and developmental social policies to actively engage New Arrivals and help them become effectively integrated into Hong Kong society. Equal access to education, affordable housing and medical services are key for these families and babies to choose to come and stay in Hong Kong, and thereby to become active labour and citizens contributing to our society. Similarly, attracting talents from overseas relies more or less the same kind of measures and supports. On top of equal access to education, customized curriculum and schooling for their children, affordable housing and medical services, we should improve air quality and strengthen social, cultural and recreational facilities and encourage people's social participation.
- In principle, our Council does not agree with importation of labor in the context where we have substantial number of working poor in Hong Kong. Talking about importation of labor of occupations at the elementary level while allowing shortage of manpower of

professional occupations, which drives their salary and reward higher and higher, is counterproductive to reduce the income gap among different strata. We are of the view that shortage of manpower should be a matter of specific industries and is therefore to be discussed with the industries/sectors concerned.

5.2.3. Reducing or slowing down the growth in economically inactive adult

- Establish a strong system of child care support to all families and child development in an attempt to unleash the labor force of male and female family care takers taking care of children.
- Give the elderly a free choice to stay engaged in the labour market while ensure their full rights to labour protection and benefits. Measures to reduce barriers to such choice, such as lack of employee insurance available for aged workers, should be in place. The government can take the lead to make a flexible retirement policy so as to set a role model for other employers in Hong Kong.
- Develop and manage the soon to be old, to-be-retired or the retired and to leverage their knowledge and experiences for social and economic development

5.3 Enhance the Quality of Different Population Groups

5.3.1. Our Council shares the thought of the Steering Committee that “our long-term sustainability will not only be measured by our economic success. We should nurture a socially inclusive and cohesive environment that provides each of us with equal opportunity to move ahead and excel in life.” (para. 1.20) Also, a preferred choice of residence should be a secure and quality environment conducive for people to realizing their potentials, pursuing their dreams and aspirations, forming families and ageing in comfort. We believe that it is only with such an environment that the potentials of the local people can be activated and developed and the talents can be attracted and retained.

5.3.2. Our Council thinks that the primary strategy to achieve the objectives is to invest in people by developing our innovative capacity to build a sustainable supportive environment:

- for different social groups to realize diverse potentials
- for the young to pursue their dreams and aspirations
- for the families to form and raise families

- for the elderly to enjoy healthy, fulfilling and productive aging

5.3.3. Strategies/Measures for Building a Supportive Environment for Activating and Developing People's Potentials

- Set up a Social Development Commission to engage different sectors to plan for the social development of Hong Kong in the interest of different groups of the population
- Create diverse educational and advancement opportunities and paths for the younger generation so that they can have different chances to acquire relevant educational qualifications at different points of their career journey.
- Provide career-based incubation and broadening the scope of vocational education to personal and career development education.
- Develop and leverage the innovative capacity of the younger generation
- Develop new forms and nodes of economic growth and diversify economic base and industrial structure.
- Strengthen legislation on discriminations against specific population groups e.g. the aged, the New Arrivals, or people with different sexual orientation.
- Community-based services for public education and campaigns championing social inclusion
- Support families which choose to lead a cross-border life
- Reform retirement protection system
- Long-term social service planning to ensure care and social services are available to support the aged and other disadvantaged groups and enhance their economic and social participation, thereby enhancing their quality of life
- Build and support an age-friendly silver hair market and create facilitative conditions to develop new market types (other than the high-end tourist-driven consumption market). The type of product

and service is not the key concern. The focus should be “healthy” and “proper” development of silver hair market which is the age-friendly trade practice and market environment.

- Make retirement in GuangDong a real and welcomed choice, which can adequately address their wish to stay connected with their families and their security need.

All the above strategies and measures will be elaborated in detail in relation to different social groups constituting our population.

- 6 Building a Supportive Environment for Different Social Groups to Develop Potentials
 - 6.1 Population Policy should be “people-centred,” and it has to spell out how we should build a supportive environment for different groups of the population to fully develop their potentials through economic and social participation, thereby contributing to both their own quality of life as well as social development of the entire society.
 - 6.2 Beyond the concerns of individuals or groups, which we shall be outlining in the following paragraphs, our Council’s core concern is the social development of the society. During the period of consultation, our Council has consistently heard of a number of major overarching concerns which deserve special mentioning:
 - Lack of social development vision in Hong Kong
 - Balance between economic sustainability and social sustainability, particularly in the context of increased social tensions among different groups
 - Diminishing quality of life of Hong Kong people in terms of various domains of social development
 - Opportunities available for people in Hong Kong
 - 6.3 These overarching concerns affect all people in Hong Kong and our Council thinks that there are deep-rooted causes beneath all these economic and social problems. In addition to the Economic Development Commission previously set up by the Chief Executive, our Council believes that it is timely for the government to consider setting up a Social Development Commission to engage people from different sectors for a social planning exercise to address all these issues in the interest of the different groups of people in Hong Kong.

Younger Generation

- 6.4 ***Diversifying Education:*** Expansion of educational opportunities does help to provide a general framework for all young people to have an opportunity to be educated and to obtain relevant qualifications, skills and knowledge for their further advancement. However, it is time our society should think beyond increasing coverage of free education of a rather standard form and content because the qualities and talents of the young people are getting more and more diverse.
- 6.5 The critical issue in the provision of education to the younger generation is the level of diversity of education and the range of choices of curricula/programme

available for young people with different interests and competences. Young people of a different ethnic/cultural background than local Chinese are of course to be concerned (as discussed below). Even among the group of locally born young Chinese who have different backgrounds, hence potentials and competences, they should be given more choices to pursue their own path of educational or career development.

- 6.6 ***Opportunities of Young Girls and Its Impacts on Future Labour Force:*** One among all these different backgrounds of strategic concern in the context of population policy is gender as we talk about unleashing female labour force. Lately, our Council has conducted a research to study how young girls engaged in drinking activity and related work. One of the insights from the research is that increasingly young girls may find themselves having more job opportunities than boys in a service oriented economy but in fact having a narrower range of career choices and shorter career ladder for advancement. One could imagine that 10 to 20 years later when they are to consider giving birth/child care at home or staying in the job, their career prospect could hardly constitute an encouraging factor for them to stay in the labour market. Our Council is concerned how we should now help these young girls to identify their own career interest, provide adequate support and better career opportunity structure for them so that they will choose to stay in the labour market in their birth-giving age.
- 6.7 ***Providing Support for Transition from School to Work:*** One of the biggest difficulties for the young people of different qualifications is their transition from school to work.
- For those who have enjoyed the chance of university education, latest findings from a study by McKinsey (2013) illustrate that university education may be training young people who are not employable. Many of these young people have been wondering whether university education can really help them find a job after their graduation.
 - For those who have not had a chance to study formal undergraduate degree course, their qualifications remain largely unrecognized. Many young people enrolled in Associate Degree courses or other similar or even lower level of qualification are paying substantial amount of money, spending substantial effort to obtain that qualification only to find that the qualification is not even properly recognized by the government.
 - Students with special education needs, who may otherwise be genius, are rendered far less support than what our society should invest.
 - For those who drop out of the formal DSE curriculum, they may perceive that the range of choices available to them is even more limited. For them, development can be something luxurious.

- 6.8 ***Career-based Incubation:*** While we talk about inadequate young talents and labour force in the near future, much of the local talents and labour force remain undeveloped. Our Council is happy that the Steering Committee is aware of the importance of facilitating the transition from school to work of the young people, and of developing vocational training. Our Council agrees that beyond school-based education/training, job/career based training or incubation may be required for the young people to acquire situated career experiences and capacity.
- 6.9 ***Personal and Career Development Education as Foundation of Vocational Education:*** However, our Council believes that vocational education in a narrow sense may not be the full answer to the question. Indeed, at all levels and forms of educations, students should adequately be educated to pay attention to not just the transition from school to work or how they can progress from school to work. It should be a personal and career development education at all levels and forms of education that helps the young people to identify the economic as well as social meanings of school and work. The goal is to nurture students' capacity to appreciate not just the economic value but also the social and cultural values of school and work so that they could identify their own personal development goals and contribute to the society in different ways. It is both a value education and training in the liberal arts form and a vocational training of the technical skills type. The consultation paper stresses that "vocational education and training should not be regarded or perceived as a second-rate option" (para 3.14). Our Council believes that it is not merely a question of "should be or not" but how it can actually be treated not as second-rate option. The values to be reinvented have to be something more than just salary reward or promotion opportunity, but the social or cultural values attached to those vocations.
- 6.10 ***Engaging NGOs and Social Enterprises in Vocational Education:*** In providing vocational education in the broad sense, as specified above, our Council thinks that the government should consider not just the role of the training institutes and the employers, but also that of other stakeholders such as NGOs, social enterprises, and other entities engaging in social innovation who are keen on social and cultural values creation. Effectively engaging these entities may broaden young people's perspective about school, work and themselves, and help them identify and develop a career of unique interest to themselves.
- 6.11 ***Creating Opportunity Structure for Younger Generation:*** Young people requires opportunities of different sorts to develop themselves as much as the society needs them to pursue different paths of career and development to be truly vibrant and diverse. Creating such opportunities for the young people

requires proactive government policies in industrial development, education and career development.

- From top down, one major initiative to consider for this supportive environment to build up is to diversify our industrial structure. Our Council welcomes the Steering Committee's considerations to diversify our economic base (para. 35 & 3.6). However, we think it is important to engage the young people to think about this diversification. On the other hand, the consultation paper mentions that the Economic Development Commission has identified 4 industry clusters, namely, Transportation, Convention and Exhibition Industries and Tourism, Manufacturing Industries, Innovative Technology and Cultural and Creative Industries, and Professional Services. If these are the new industries that the government would like to develop, our Council thinks that the government should also let the people understand its master plan, with resource and policy input, and project or set a target of how many business and job opportunities are to be generated.
- From the bottom up, how to make necessary support available to young people when they choose to venture into any particular industry or career. For example, it has already been said that young people who are growing up in the IT era is very IT competent. While they are skillful in using tools of IT, how these skills can be turned into assets that help them shape their career and life chance is something that we should be looking into.

6.12 ***Modifying Social Expectations/Values on Career Development:*** Creating opportunities is one thing, whether and how young people will choose among those opportunities is quite another. A supportive social environment is also required so that they feel less pressurized in making those choices. With our economic capacity nowadays in Hong Kong, we should be asking: what should be done to make those career choices real ones that look good, feel good as well as paid good. Young people are not living in social vacuum, but within an expectation structure that their being open-minded simply does not suffice. What equally matters is how their families and our society at large look at and have to say about the choices they have made.

6.13 ***Boosting Innovation Capacity of the Society:*** Revamping those career choices so that they are more socially recognized requires innovative capacity. At the core of this issue, for Hong Kong to develop in the globalized world, is therefore how we can boost the innovative capacity of Hong Kong people that we do not always stick to the old pattern of development, low added-value mode of economic production and do not trade off the long-term development needs of Hong Kong for the short term benefits deriving from the current industrial structure.

- 6.14 The growing gap in the transition from school to work is rightly pointed out, in the consultation paper, for young people and the need to align the rising job aspiration of the future generation that is highly educated, with good jobs that have improved work place conditions, job prospect and pay. The importance of *first career experience, equality of opportunities* among youth of varying capacities and gender, *leveraging the IT savvy and innovative capacities* of the younger generation should be explored. Our society should go beyond seeing this kind of supports only as measures for individual interests, as if we were asking the society to meet the interests of individual young people. These supports are in fact realizing a strategy of investing in the innovative capacity of the society which is core to our vision of developing Hong Kong as a knowledge-based society.

Disadvantaged Groups and Minorities

- 6.15 ***Creating Room for Social Differences:*** For the minorities and disadvantaged groups, innovative ways of developing potentials means, in general, getting rid of using a single standard or social expectation against which their potentials, competences and needs are assessed. How can Hong Kong create more diverse standards of qualification assessment and attainment so that these diverse potentials and competences can be effectively developed? How can we assess and understand the needs of different groups of people, create opportunities or render relevant assistance and support for them to realize their potentials as well as that of Hong Kong society? This is one of the biggest population questions of social inclusion that we need to ask for deliberating and planning for the development of Hong Kong and the people.
- 6.16 ***Diversifying Education Structure and Curricula for the Ethnic Minorities:*** Education concerns the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong most as it shapes their life chance in Hong Kong. As our education structure and curricula are based heavily on local Chinese culture, the ethnic minorities have experienced a lot of difficulties in language and schooling. The fundamental problem lies in the lack of policy to diversify our education structure and curricula such that people of the ethnic minorities, including those who may be coming to Hong Kong, can be better educated and obtain a culturally relevant education qualification for their development in Hong Kong.
- 6.17 A more diverse education structure and curricula implies taking special considerations of the different backgrounds of different cultural/ethnic groups in the planning and policies related to school placement, curricula and qualification standards.
- In the long run, our Council believes that schools designated for ethnic

minorities should be phased out to promote ethnic/racial integration, though we consider individual designated schools may still be needed for the newly arrived ethnic minority for transitional purpose. All schools have to be provided with adequate resources to be ready, in terms of facilities and professional inputs (in language, teaching, and social service), to take students of different ethnic groups and render them with adequate supports.

- We welcome the newly announced Policy Address has clearly stated that from 2014/15 school year, the government will implement a “Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework with supporting learning and teaching materials as well as assessment tools for ethnic minority students in primary and secondary school”. Our Council believes that the problem of access of adequate and equal education opportunities for the ethnic minorities can only be resolved with clear policy goal and sustained efforts. In the context of Population Policy, our Council hopes that the government can state a long-term goal of this policy and development target in terms of social inclusion. For example, school attendance of the ethnic minorities at university level is significantly lower than that of the general population, pre-primary education support and senior secondary education support are of particular importance to the children of the ethnic minorities. Access to basic information of school and admission, qualification standard, curriculum and teaching support and so on are to be strengthened to ensure the ethnic minorities have equal access to education of all levels.
- The curriculum and qualification standard under the policy of “Chinese as second language” are to be made also available to ethnic minority adults who are not in schools but in need of a proper Chinese language qualification for education or career advancement of various kinds.
- We believe that the knowledge, skills and attitude of teachers matter in the provision of education to ethnic minorities. If we are to build an inclusive society, the government should ensure that systematic training for teachers to develop cultural sensitivity is in place. We suggest that at least in the near future, NGOs with rich experiences in working with the ethnic minorities can be engaged to develop and provide the training.

6.18 ***Support for Career and Advancement of Ethnic Minorities:*** As the Steering Committee notes, the ethnic minority groups in Hong Kong constitute a significant quantity of labour force in our economy. As much as our economy needs this labour force, the ethnic minorities are in need of opportunities for them to participate and contribute to our society and to develop their own potentials. Ethnic minority groups face many problems in employment. Part of these problems is related to their language and qualifications resulting from barriers to education advancement. Others are related to stereotypes and

discrimination. Our Council thinks that to develop and activate the potentials of the ethnic minorities, the following long-term strategies have to be considered:

- Enhance the incentive structure for employers to employ the ethnic minorities. Employers should be given more opportunities to broaden their experiences in working with the ethnic minorities. Promoting partnership between schools/universities and the employers can help create such opportunities.
- The government should be a role model as the biggest employer in Hong Kong.
- The Qualification Framework specifying how we would recognize overseas qualification and professional experiences may help the newly arrived ethnic minorities in employment.
- The government has mainly relied on the Labour Department as the first point of contact for the ethnic minorities. However, not many ethnic minorities are informed of the services provided by the Labour Department. The success rate of Labour Department in helping them to find a job has always been very low. It shows that formal channel itself may be necessary but not sufficient. The government should seek to work with NGOs and community entities working with the ethnic minorities to provide information and training for the ethnic minorities to enhance their chance of being employed.

6.19 ***Social Participation of the Ethnic Minorities:*** In many other aspects of basic livelihoods and social participation, the ethnic minorities have experienced a lot of barriers and discrimination. Due primarily to language barrier, they have great difficulties in getting access to information about education, health, housing, and social service. Although Radical Discrimination Ordinance is enacted, equal access to information and hence services has yet been achieved. Language support is the most basic service that they are in need of. On top of this, many public services, which have long been designed based on the culture and social practices of local Chinese, are yet fully accessible to them due to social and cultural reasons. A lot more have to be done in those service settings and public facilities to accommodate the unique set of needs of the ethnic minorities before they can fully participate in our society.

- Community-based service should be enhanced, seeking to actively engage the ethnic minorities as well as the local Chinese to establish community mutual help network.
- Other than the Ethnic Minorities Forum at the Home Affairs Bureau, there is no formal broad-based channel for the government to directly listen to the voices and experiences of the ethnic minorities. Our Council believes that if the government is committed to facilitating their integration into our society, there should be regular platforms for the ethnic minorities to

dialogue with the policy makers on major areas concerning their most basic livelihood. Alternatively, the government can work with the community service operators and explore how regular dialogues can be organized so that the policy makers can always stay informed of the difficulties and concerns of the ethnic minorities.

- Before all the people of ethnic minorities are able to speak fluent everyday Cantonese and/or English, translation and interpretation service should be made available in all public service settings, particularly those ones as essential as education, career, medical service, welfare benefit, legal services etc..
- In terms of both education and career advancement, the life chance of ethnic minorities is being affected by the involvement of their families and parents. Due primarily to their own social and cultural limitations, parents are themselves not in an informed position to help their children to plan for their education and career. Support to parents is therefore of strategic importance for both the parents themselves and their next generation to fully participate in Hong Kong society.

6.20 ***Education and Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities:***

People with disabilities and their potentials have long been under-developed. The sheer missing of a precise enumeration or projection of the number of people with disabilities is itself indicative of such negligence. The entire policy and infrastructural environment has been unfavorable for them to pursue adequate education and training and to participate in social and economic production.

- 6.21 ***Education and Employment Support:*** We are aware of the continuous enhancement of supportive services and training for education and employment for people with disabilities. In spite of all those efforts, as the consultation paper points out, the unemployment rate of the people with disabilities is a few times higher than the general unemployment rate, not mentioning that the figure is itself an underestimation because many people with disabilities have dropped out of the labour force after repeated failures in finding jobs. This fact has concretely illustrated that to support people with disabilities for educational advancement and career development, something is missing. For a very long time, people with disabilities have been asking for supportive and affirmative policies such as supported employment programme or employment quota system. However, the government has been acting slowly in providing essential supports for the employment of people with disabilities. This unmistakably runs in contradiction to the proposed direction of the Steering Committee to unleash the labour force of the population, of which the people with disabilities are an inseparable part.

- 6.22 In fact, if given appropriate support, people with disabilities do have their enduring competence to go against all odds and develop themselves to participate and contribute to the society economically and socially.
- 6.23 ***Education for People with Disabilities:*** For many people with disabilities, access to education remains difficult in terms of educational system, curriculum, services and assistive technologies.
- 6.24 ***Employment for People with Disabilities:*** Full participation in labour market remains largely an unrealizable dream of many people with disabilities. Employers fail to realize how employment of people with disabilities brings social and economic values and how it will eventually benefit both the employees with disabilities and themselves. Changing their attitude and imprecise perception cannot rely solely on “chance” but proactive and innovative policy initiatives that can create new experiences for the employers, thereby changing their perception and attitude towards employing people with disabilities.
- 6.25 ***Measures for Employment of People with Disabilities:*** Our Council suggests that the government should seriously consider four complementary measures.
- On one hand, the government should incentivize employers by introducing tax allowance for employers employing people with disabilities.
 - On the other, a quota system should be considered. The government and publicly funded organizations should act as a role model and pledge a reasonable target of employing people with disabilities. Our Council thinks that a quota system should not be considered as a regime of compulsion but an educational measure through which the employers can have a first-hand and real experience of the potentials of the people with disabilities.
 - Many employers are not unwilling to employ people with disabilities. They just do not know what facilities or supportive measures are to be in place before they do so. Our Council believes that employers do need assistance. NGOs can be engaged to provide such support to help employers to employ people with disabilities.
 - Parents of the people with disabilities play a crucial role in the the latter’s employment. Many parents are very ambivalent. They would like their children to be able to fully participate in the society as they worry their children may be excluded, harmed or bullied if they are employed. We believe that parents’ education is needed for such parents to understand the competence of their children and render suitable support and encouragement to their employment if their competence is proven to be suitable for work in the normal employment setting.

- 6.26 Social inclusion requires more than education and employment. Social, community and ICT accessibilities for people with disabilities are important for them to experience a barrier free social and virtual world.
- 6.27 ***Ageing of People with Disabilities:*** When we talk about ageing population, we should not assume that all people age in the same way. The ageing of people with disabilities does deserve special attention.

The Family

- 6.28 Forming and raising a family is a complicated decision. By asking how possibly a couple gets married (or committed in a long-term relationship of any kind) and why they should decide to give birth to and/or raise children, we should have a better idea of how to make Hong Kong a place where local residents and new comers would choose to form and raise their families here.
- 6.29 Our Council welcomes the Steering Committee's effort in making a separate chapter to talk about building a favorable environment for people to consider forming and raising families. However, our Council asks the government to consider it with a more comprehensive approach than focusing disproportionately on fertility.
- 6.30 ***Removing Barriers to Formation of Families:*** We think that the key response strategies in creating incentives and removing barriers to forming families and raising children should include (1) micro measures to improve the accessibility, affordability and quality of child and community care support to families and (2) macro measures to reduce social stresses or anxiety of young adults in forming families and raising children.
- Financial Barrier: From a purely financial perspective, youth's educational and career advancement difficulties and their decreasing reward from employment simply prevent young adults from forming families earlier even if they will to. Thus, formation of families is inextricably linked with the education and career development of the younger generation mentioned above.
 - That said, based on the survey findings quoted in the consultation document (para 5.6), women of higher income level and higher education attainment tended not to give birth to children. This indeed shows that money alone does not incentivize fertility and that even financially favorable young adults may not consider forming families and raising children in nowadays Hong Kong.
 - Non-Financial Considerations: Our Council rejects the idea of direct money handout to incentivize child birth. On the other hand, our Council

asks the government to pay more attention to the non-financial aspect of factors that discourage people to form and raise families.

- On one hand, it has to do with the way the society and the people think about family in relation to wedding, marriage, and parenting and how they associate these with stress and anxiety.
- On the other, it is also about the expected experience and outcome of marriage in an era when family caring responsibilities are often in conflict with work duties, when divorce rate keeps increasing and when couple relationship, parent-child relationship are having different kinds of troubles such as child abuse and domestic violence.

6.31 ***Facing Social Division and Exclusion:*** Meanwhile, some families are now being raised in a less desirable form, namely the cross-border families of various kinds. Likewise, families with new immigrants from the Mainland are experiencing various kinds of difficulties which require policy support.

6.32 The latest ruling of the Court of Final Appeal that the restriction on the New Arrivals to apply for CSSA since 2004 is unconstitutional. Lifting the restriction has sparked off a big controversy in the society. Individual persons think that these new immigrants should not deserve such resources because they have not contributed to Hong Kong as much. Our Council is deeply worried about this social sentiment and its escalation, as much as we are deeply concerned with that there are a substantial number of citizens who are enduring the hard reality in Hong Kong but have never been given a chance to feel and truly identify with Hong Kong as their preferred place of residence.

6.33 In a macro sense, social division and exclusion may be one of the important factors that people may be worried about the future of Hong Kong, as giving birth to children and raising a family depends very much on people's expectation/projection on the social, economic and political outlook of Hong Kong. Certainly, economic opportunities are one of the major concerns of the potential parents. However, the environmental, social, cultural as well as political conditions are becoming more and more important factors in their consideration. How we should facilitate social inclusion among the old Hong Kong, the potential migrants, the newly migrated as well as other racial and ethnic groups in Hong Kong is a major question that the entire community of Hong Kong should carefully deliberate.

6.34 The question to ask is not just what kind of support we should render to the cross-border families and those with new migrants but also what kind of livelihood that we can make available to those who have been here for long, such that all families can be raised without jeopardizing the resources and opportunities of the other. This inevitably calls for efforts on long-term social

planning for Hong Kong.

- 6.35 ***Quality of Life for New and Old Members of the Society:*** Our Council thinks that we should strive to build up the New Arrivals' identification with Hong Kong and make sure that their potentials can be developed by providing essential means and equal opportunities to them. Proactive immigration policy and developmental social policies to actively engage the Type I and Type II babies and their families, as well as the New Arrivals and help them become effectively integrated into Hong Kong society is crucial. Indeed, the projected labour shortage can be filled by these babies if they are effectively integrated into Hong Kong society. More supports should be rendered to them and their families. At the same time, we also express our full understanding towards those who have expressed their negative sentiment, for over the past two decades they have been consistently shown that their quality of life seems to be going down. The government should not assume that they do not require any support to maintain and improve their quality of life.
- 6.36 ***Setting up Social Development Commission for Long-term Social Planning:*** Our Council suggests that, in addition to the Economic Development Commission, the government should consider forming a Social Development Commission to conduct a long-term social planning and consider how to better employ different social policy tools to secure and improve the quality of life of the existing population while also make sure that the newly arrived population, be they from the mainland or other places, have equal opportunities to develop their potentials and contribute to the society .
- 6.37 The Social Development Commission should also examine how the raising number of transient population may create tremendous impact on various areas of social development. Our Council is aware of the public discourse, during the consultation period, on setting a maximum capacity of the city in terms of number of population. However, we think that the discussion may be very dangerous if it is not handled well. Setting a maximum number of population may not help as some organizations have advocated. Rather than laying the blame on the New Arrivals or accusing the tourists from the mainland, our Council deems it more constructive to think about our capacity in terms of various economic and social infrastructures, such as space, transportation, market capacity and so on, in relation to the everyday life of the local people in Hong Kong. The proposed Social Development Commission should be charged to take up this capacity assessment and provide policy suggestions on how to develop our city in an economically and socially sustainable way.
- 6.38 ***Strengthening Legislation on Discriminations Against Minorities and Proactive Programme to Promote Social Inclusion:*** Also, to protect those new

comers (as well as different social groups) and to protect the existing population from expressing their sentiment in an extreme form of exclusive behaviors, the government should strengthen legislation on discriminations against specific population and make sure that the fundamental rights of all socially disadvantaged groups in Hong Kong are adequately protected. While protective measures are required, preventive measures are also needed to proactively engage different social groups at the community level, facilitate their exchange and interaction as well as mutual help, and thereby promote social inclusion in the community. As our community becomes more and more socially and culturally diverse, our Council suggests that we should set up more community-based service and support centres at different localities to take up the important work of promoting social inclusion among different social groups.

- 6.39 In many ways, individual families have a role and their own share of responsibilities in planning their life. However, urbanized lifestyle, particularly the kind in Hong Kong, does exert tremendous amount of stress on individuals and their families. Our society should think about how not to create further challenges or stresses on families and what kind of support that these families should obtain when they are in trouble. We should think about how investment in families could enhance Hong Kong's capacity of economic and social development.

The Elderly

- 6.40 How livable a city is sometimes revealed by how the elderly in that place are being treated. From this angle, providing for good quality of life for the elderly enhances our city's capacity. We shall then truly see the potentials and productivity of the old people.
- 6.41 ***Reforming Retirement Protection System for Maintaining Elderly's Consumption Capacity:*** Far from being a financial burden, retirement protection is the foundation for not just elderly quality of life, but also economic growth in a consumer society. In 30 years time, older people account for 1/3 of the population. Establishing and preserving their consumption power is of utmost importance to both individual elders and the society at large. Although the consultation document does not expect to touch on retirement protection, talking about silver hair market and its sustainability is doubtless about, partly, discussion of the consumption capacity of the elderly. This in turn depends on how we make decision now about the retirement protection system that we are to put in place. Our Council is supportive of establishing a universal pension system which can come into effect immediately once it is kicked off and can offer a minimum income protection

for all the elderly.

- 6.42 To ensure a better support to elderly post-retirement livelihood, our Council thinks that we should seek to improve the existing Mandatory Provident Fund Scheme to complement a universal pension system.
- 6.43 ***Building an Age-Friendly Community:*** Preserving their consumption and productive capacity depends not just on money but also on environmental infrastructure as well as health capacity in physiological, social and mental senses. Universal low and affordable cost access to public transportation is one of the most prominent examples of facilitating infrastructure, which is widely appreciated by many older citizens since its inception. What more can be done to build an age-friendly community? What kinds of community design are conducive to the participation of the elderly? Our Council has devoted tremendous efforts in the past few years working with various stakeholders and different District Councils in promoting age-friendly community. We hope the Steering Committee to make reference to our latest publication “起動全城：香港長者友善社區” for detailed suggestions and indicators on how to build an age-friendly community.
- 6.44 Other than hardware, the prevailing goods and services consumption market is far from elderly friendly. Many goods and services do not meet the needs of elderly or exclude the elderly as a targeted group (e.g. Insurance). A lot more have to be done to educate the elderly and empower them so that they do not fall into dishonest sales trap.
- 6.45 ***Age-friendly Silver Hair Market:*** The consultation paper talks about silver hair market as a way to reinvent the opportunities or potentials of an ageing society, rather than seeing it merely as a threat or challenge. Our Council thinks the direction is correct. However, the development of a silver hair market has to be person oriented rather than business-centred. The latter takes consumption merely as an exchange of goods and services, while the former seeks to accomplish other social goods as well via exchange of goods and services. In addition to the tangible needs, a silver hair market has to take care of the intangible needs of the elderly as well. Many elderly wants to be socially connected and engaged as much as they want those services and products. They also want to have those engagement opportunities accessible within a familiar environment. A silver hair market, therefore, is better if it can be community-based, and can be facilitating cross-generation interaction and social engagement in their neighborhood, so as to enable the elderly to enjoy a more active aging life.
- 6.46 ***Policy Support for Innovation for Silver Hair Market:*** Our Council believes

that a community-based silver hair market has to be adequately supported by government policies and public initiatives given the economic and business environment of Hong Kong. Many NGOs and social enterprises are interested in taking part in building the silver hair market. Through partnership with Trade and Industry Department, for example, our Council has been working on a So-Biz project which seeks to engage the mainstream goods and services providers to promote accessible consumption for the elderly. Projects or programme like this organized by NGOs and SEs or even the district elderly groups should be given more support.

- 6.47 ***Enhancing Social Engagement of the Elderly:*** Expansion of the volume of elderly population may not be a problem as the consultation paper portrays if all of them are socially engaged in one way or another. However, as the number of aged people increases, we see more and more singleton and aged couple. Many of them are socially isolated or disengaged. Social disengagement is usually associated with poor mental health that pure financial support cannot compensate. Socially isolated, caused by poor mental and physical health, financial security deserves high attention.
- 6.48 ***Encouraging Employers to Set Up Flexible Retirement Policy:*** The consultation paper mentions about “promoting a longer working life.” (para. 2.6) Other than considering the prospects of younger generations, there are a lot more to be considered. Our Council is aware of that some retirees are in favor of having the retirement age postponed. While we are aware of the improved health conditions of many elderly at their early retirement age and that can support a longer working life, some also doubt whether our people, living in one of the most economically advanced region in the world, should work as long as they can physically afford rather than enjoy their retirement life when they are still relatively healthy. We have heard that many retirees find it hard to adapt to a life without work and they have therefore advocated a longer working life. Our Council respects people’s choice not to retire. On the other hand, the entire community of Hong Kong should also think about what other rewarding experiences are being/can be developed during their working life so that the retired can freely choose what kind of engagement they desire. Hong Kong labour forces are well known of their being diligent and the average working hours of our working population is known to be among the longest in the world. They never have time to develop other interests or lifestyle. In this sense, a healthy and productive ageing may depend on our lifestyle before retirement. Our Council thinks that promoting work-life balance, encouraging people to participate in different arts and culture or sports and recreational activities is of great importance to active ageing of the coming cohorts of elderly.

- 6.49 Our Council supports the idea that people should be given a choice as to when they would like to retire, so long as its policy objective is to promote elderly continuous engagement or transition from economic to other forms of engagement. All willful labour force participation of the elderly should be supported provided that the set of reward and fringe benefits of the aged labour are not being attenuated because of their age. Hence, a full set of rights to remain in the labour force should be respected. Flexible retirement entails a lot administrative, legal, and labour protection arrangement. We suggest that the government should take the lead and set a good role model for other employers to follow.
- 6.50 For those grassroots working labours in occupations of the elementary level, they can hardly make end meet. Developing other forms of social engagement is luxury for them. While minimum wage policy has been implemented, our Council thinks it is still inadequate to meet the basic livelihood of many grassroots household. On top of minimum wage, our Council asks the government to consider legislation for standard working hours to make sure that grassroots labours do not need to work overly long hours, and develop other interests while maintain better physical conditions when they are yet aged.
- 6.51 ***Innovation for Managing the Retirees:*** For those of the professional and managerial levels, even they are not economically engaged formally, their knowledge, skills and experiences are the most precious assets of the aging society. We must identify effective ways to develop and manage the retiree or to-be-retired “knowledge workers” and leverage their knowledge and experiences for social and economic development.
- 6.52 ***Long-term Care System for the Elderly:*** In addition to active aging, some elderly require different levels of social and medical care. A long-term care system is urgently needed to provide various levels of support to older people with different need profiles. Majority of our elders favor ageing in family and community as long as their health and physical capacity can manage. Yet many queue up for, and end up staying in, institution care, indicating that our community care system has yet been sufficiently developed to fully address the health and security need of the elderly.
- 6.53 Our Council thinks that the response strategies to address the long term care needs of the elders should include (i) setting population-based and locality-based planning parameters to address the inadequate community support services to allow the elders to age in the community and at home and to resolve the long waiting list of nursing homes for the frail elders through increasing provision of public services and incentivizing private services; (ii) providing integrated health and social care service systems, long term care office and

case management support to help the elders and their families to identify their needed services and to monitor the quality of service; (iii) resolving the financing of long term care through various options like social insurance, co-payment and means-testing for service.

6.54 *Incentivizing and Planning of Formal and Informal Care Labour Supply:*

Ageing in family is never easy in our urbanized Hong Kong society as men and women are more and more equally participating full time in the labour market. Yet, even for institutional care, it is not easy to recruit care workers to support the caring duties. The entire society will have to think about how to incentivize formal and informal care support so that our elderly are adequately taken care of.

- For informal care, it is time when the society should consider how to recognize the contribution that informal carers in families have made, because caring their aged members is no longer purely a private or domestic but also social responsibility in the context of population ageing. Carer's allowance for the families to support the elderly is one such option to consider. The level of allowance and the payment method (ie. Publicly financed, co-payment etc.) can be further deliberated.
- For formal care, attracting local people to enter the industry of care may not be easy. Increasing monetary reward and providing better promotion opportunities and working environment are important measures. Yet, monetary reward alone is unlikely to be effective an incentive without other measures. Establishing a qualification framework for persons who are already in the caring industry or are interested in it will help retain manpower for the provision of care. The manpower establishment of residential service should also be enhanced. The government should engage the service providers to think of other innovative methods to incentivize both the young people and adults to join the caring workforce.

6.55 *Retirement in Guangdong:* The consultation paper mentions Guangdong Scheme and Portable CSSA as an option for the elderly to retire on the Mainland. The Council agrees that it can be an option to be explored. However, this option is unlikely to be a real one without the government's commitment to support the elderly when they are in need. Reliable medical service, for example, has long been known to be one of the most crucial factors for the elderly to consider retiring on the Mainland. What this in fact tells us is that the elderly places overwhelming emphasis on security need and they count on a reliable public authority to be their fall back when they are in need. The government has to explore how it can be their fall back in meeting their financial, medical or social needs before it can be a real option. Local NGOs have been running care institutions in Guangdong and their experiences shall

inform how retirement in Guangdong Province, either in institutional setting or in community can be made possible.

- 6.56 On the other hand, elderly expects to stay connected with their family members in Hong Kong. The Guangdong Scheme and Portable CSSA is hardly sufficient unless we can think of ways to ensure that the elderly can meet with their family members regularly. While it may not be possible that they meet on a daily basis in person, we can leverage IT facilities to foster their communication. For elderly who choose to retire in the mainland, it is important to help them build a community in the place where they stay