

\$12m boost in aid for social work

Harry King Standard

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THE government will pay about \$12 million more to support eight welfare services in the next financial year, according to estimates worked out by the Social Welfare Department.

The department has assessed the new allocations on a standard cost basis which takes into account price rises and salary adjustments.

The services covered include outreaching social work, school social work, family life education, small group homes, foster care and neighbourhood level community development.

Work on determining the standard costs for two remaining services - family counselling and pool bus service - is being finalised and proposals will be ready very shortly, a spokesman for the department said yesterday.

He noted that in the current financial year, government expenditure on subventing these services was about \$50 million.

"In the new financial year, if the new standard costs are used, allocations to voluntary agencies in these fields will go up to some \$62 million," he said.

The spokesman described the proposals as "a further step forward in implementing the new subvention system announced last year."

"This is a clear indication of the government's increasing commitment to improving the quality of services in these fields," he said.

"Our intention is to provide a reasonable level of support for social welfare services," the spokesman said.

"Subvented agencies should rest assured that standard costs will be adequate. Furthermore, they will be fully consulted before final decisions are taken."

The department has written to all the subvented agencies concerned to seek their views on the proposals before putting its recommendations to the Social Welfare Advisory Committee.

"The department will be happy to discuss the proposals with agencies if they feel that a meeting will be useful," the spokesman said.

He explained that the standard costs proposed were derived from existing standards as set out in the Social Welfare Development Five-year Plan, which is "a document representing cooperative planning efforts between the government and the voluntary sector."

He said that standard costs for services were carefully worked out following a review of the services provided in government and voluntary agencies and should be regarded as starting points

for further review and improvement.

"Indeed, under the five-year plan, there is the necessary mechanism enabling services to be reviewed regularly and improved upon in a coordinated and systematic way to meet changing needs and changing circumstances," he said.

COSTS

Standard costs are assessed on the basis of the numbers and levels of staff required to provide a particular service and other charges such as utilities, administration and programme expenses. They will be reviewed regularly to take account of recognised price rises and salary adjustments in the civil service.

Staff costs are derived from existing standards under the five-year plan and also take account of the extension of the welfare class review to the voluntary sector.

Separate provision will be made for Provident Fund contributions as well as rents and rates.