

EXTRACT

立法會
Legislative Council

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the Administration)

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LegCo Panel on Security

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 6 February 2001 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon LAU Kong-wah (Chairman)
Hon James TO Kun-sun (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, JP
Hon Margaret NG
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon Ambrose LAU Hon-chuen, JP
Hon IP Kwok-him, JP
- Members attending** : Hon NG Leung-sing
Hon SIN Chung-kai
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
- Members absent** : Hon Mrs Selina CHOW LIANG Shuk-yee, JP
Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi
- Public Officers attending** : Item III
Mr David WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Security B

Mr MAK Kwai-pui, JP
Chief Ambulance Officer
Fire Services Department

Item IV

Mr Timothy TONG, JP
Deputy Secretary for Security 3

Mr Alan CHU
Principal Assistant Secretary for Security D

Miss May CHAN
Assistant Secretary for Security D

Mr T P WONG
Deputy Director of Immigration (Special Assignment)

Ms Helen CHAN
Assistant Principal Immigration Officer
Immigration Department

Ms Joyce TAM
Principal Assistant Secretary for Information Technology
and Broadcasting

Mr Alex MA
Assistant Director of Information Technology Services

Clerk in attendance : Mrs Sharon TONG
Chief Assistant Secretary (2)1

Staff in attendance : Mr Jimmy MA, JP
Legal Adviser

Ms Eva LIU
Head (Research and Library Services)

Mr Raymond LAM
Senior Assistant Secretary (2)5

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III. Review of paramedic ambulance service

(LC Paper No. CB(2) 388/00-01(04))

12. At the invitation of the Chairman, Principal Assistant Secretary for Security B (PAS(S)B) briefed Members on the progress of the review on the further development of paramedic ambulance service in Hong Kong.

13. In response to Mr James TO's question about the cost for equipping all ambulances with paramedic equipment, PAS(S)B said that the cost would be about \$2 million.

14. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that he had come across a complaint case in which the medical treatment of a child who fainted in his school was delayed due to traffic congestion and a lack of provision of paramedic care on the ambulance. As a result, the child had become having a mental age of three. He further said that after the upgrading of all ambulances, the key issue would be the adequacy of trained ambulance personnel at Emergency Medical Assistant (EMA) II level. He asked whether the major obstacle for the provision of paramedic care in all ambulances was a lack of adequate training capacity or a lack of ambulance personnel interested in undergoing EMA II training.

15. Chief Ambulance Officer (CAO) said that if 550 additional ambulance personnel were trained as EMA II in the coming four years, paramedic ambulance service could then be provided on all ambulances. He added that the paramedic training of ambulance personnel would inevitably take some time.

16. Referring to paragraph 4.2.2 of the Report on the Review of Paramedic Ambulance Service (the Report), Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong asked whether there would be sufficient number of ambulance personnel eligible for undergoing EMA II training. CAO responded that about half of the 532 non-EMA ambulance supervisors were aged over 50 or possessed academic qualifications of Form 2 level or below and therefore they were either not suitable or incapable for training. However, about 700 serving ambulancemen had achieved Form 5 or above standard and possessed over 10 years' experience. These ambulancemen were capable to receive EMA II training. He was therefore confident that the paramedic training of a sufficient number of ambulance personnel could be completed within four years.

17. Mr IP Kwok-him asked about the cost involved in the EMA II training of the 550 ambulance personnel. CAO responded that if the training was to be completed within four years, 136 persons would have to be trained in each year. This would require additional resources for providing four additional EMA II training courses in each year. A rough estimation indicated that additional financial commitments of about \$8 million, \$10 million, \$13 million and \$15 million would be required in the

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first, second, third and fourth years respectively. PAS(S)B said that financial resources would be required for areas such as training, recertification and the employment of trainers. Additional expenditure would be incurred in paying special allowance to more ambulance personnel performing paramedic duties.

18. Mr IP Kwok-him asked whether EMA II level was the targeted skills level of ambulance personnel who provided paramedic ambulance service. He asked whether there were skills levels above EMA II. CAO responded that EMA II level was equivalent to an intermediate level in advanced countries. A higher skills level was the EMA III level. Some training instructors had already undergone training at EMA III level in Canada. In the longer term, the Administration would consider upgrading EMA II ambulance personnel to EMA III level. This would be one of the areas to be examined by the independent consultant to be appointed to look into the findings of the review.

19. Miss Margaret NG pointed out that there was a pressing need to improve the situation, especially when the situation would worsen in the coming years. She said that the Administration was too slow in addressing the problem of inadequate paramedic ambulance service, which was important to the rescue of lives. The upgrading of equipment in ambulances and the training of ambulance personnel should be expedited. She stressed that it was not necessary to wait for the consultant's report before such upgrading of equipment and training were conducted.

20. CAO responded that when some ambulance personnel were deployed as training instructors and EMA II trainees, other ambulance personnel would be required to work on their rest days on overtime pay to fill their absence if the same level of service was to be maintained. Expediting training would require the deployment of more training instructors and EMA trainees, which might affect daily operations and the service provided. Nevertheless, the consultant would be requested to examine whether training could be expedited. He informed Members that the consultancy study was expected to complete in three months' time. He added that funding request for measures recommended in the consultant's interim report would be submitted as soon as possible.

21. Dr LUI Ming-wah shared the view that should be addressed expeditiously. He said that the fact that the problem had remained unresolved for so many years reflected weaknesses in the management of ambulance service. He considered that there seemed to be no need to appoint a consultant to look into the findings of the review, as it was merely necessary for the Administration to identify the equipment as well as training needs and submit a funding request accordingly.

22. CAO disagreed with the view that there were weaknesses in the management of ambulance service. He explained that requests to upgrade the equipment of ambulances and strengthen paramedic ambulance service had been made since 20 years ago. Such requests had been turned down by the then Medical and Health Department, which considered it more important to ensure the earliest delivery of patients to hospitals. It was not until the Hospital Authority was formed when

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paramedic ambulance service was given more importance. He further explained that as the management and staff side held different views on a number of issues, it was necessary to appoint a consultant with the relevant expertise to assess objectively the full implications and resource requirements for providing paramedic care on all ambulances and develop a detailed implementation plan. He cited as an example that the management supported the granting of a special allowance to EMA II ambulance supervisors, while the staff side considered that EMA II skills should be reflected in the ranking or the salary of the ambulance personnel concerned. The consultant would also be expected to make recommendation on how to recognize the ambulance supervisors performing EMA duties.

23. PAS(S)B said that efforts had been concentrated on addressing more pressing issues in the past. There had been continuous improvement in ambulance service, such as the transfer of non-emergency ambulance service to the Hospital Authority in 1994. The number of ambulances, ambulance stations and staff had been increased in the past few years to cope with the demand for ambulance service, which had increased from about 347 600 emergency calls in 1996 to more than 459 600 emergency calls in 2000. There had also been improvement in the response time of emergency ambulance service.

24. Dr LUI Ming-wah commented that although there had been improvement in ambulance service in the past, such improvement could not meet the needs of the society. He said that the timetable for the EMA II training of ambulance personnel was unacceptable and should be expedited. PAS(S)B responded that the estimated training time of four years was a conservative one. He undertook to consider Members' views.

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25. Mr James TO considered that to complete EMA II training for ambulance personnel within a period of four years was a reasonable timeframe. Referring to paragraph 4.2.6 of the Report, he questioned whether a consultant was in a better position to conduct a study on the human resource requirement for the future development of paramedic ambulance service. He asked whether persons with EMA II qualifications could be recruited from outside the existing ambulancemen establishment. CAO responded that according to his experience, persons with EMA II qualifications could not be recruited from outside. Knowledge and previous experience in ambulance service was required before training in paramedic ambulance service could be provided.

26. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that with a response time of within 12 minutes, it might take a total of 20 to 30 minutes for a patient to arrive at a hospital. The provision of paramedic ambulance service was therefore very important. Such service would be substantially hindered if ambulance personnel were reluctant to undergo paramedic training. The Administration should seek to resolve the differences between the management and staff side as soon as possible. He further said that if funding in the region of hundreds of millions could be sought for the development of a computerized mobilizing system for ambulances, there was no reason why additional funds could not be sought to resolve the difference between the management and staff

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side. He added that the problem had remained unresolved for more than five years. There might already have been a sufficient number of paramedic ambulance personnel, if the problem had been resolved early. Mr James TO considered that the key issue was not a reluctance of ambulance personnel to undergo paramedic training.

27. CAO said that although the performance pledge was to respond to 92.5% of emergency calls within the 12-minute response time, about 50% of ambulances arrived at the scene within 7.5 minutes. The issue of response time would be one of the areas to be studied by the consultant. He added that as some trained personnel might fail in the re-certification tests conducted at three year intervals, it was more appropriate to grant special allowance to ambulance personnel performing EMA duties.

28. Miss Margaret NG considered that it was unacceptable for improvement in ambulance service to be delayed by the dispute between the management and the staff side. She said that the Security Bureau should work with all the relevant policy bureaux and government departments for an early solution to the problem. If necessary, the Panel could write to the relevant bureaux to convey its concerns. PAS(S)B said that the Security Bureau / Fire Services Department would proceed to appoint a consultant and seek funding from the Finance Bureau as soon as possible.

29. Miss Margaret NG and Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that the Administration should revert to the Panel on the progress of providing paramedic service on all ambulances in about one month's time. Mr James TO considered that it was more appropriate for the Administration to provide a progress report in three months' time. Mr IP Kwok-him shared the same view. He said that more time should be allowed for the Administration to address the problems and provide a progress report. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that the Administration should provide a progress report regarding the implementation of providing paramedic service on all ambulances in March 2001.

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Legislative Council Secretariat
7 March 2001