

For discussion on
1 November 2005

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON SECURITY

PRISON DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Purpose

This paper updates Members on progress in prison development plans subsequent to the shelving of the Hei Ling Chau (HLC) prison development proposal in October 2004.

Background

2. At its meeting on 16 May 2003, the Finance Committee (FC) approved funding for carrying out a two-stage feasibility study for the HLC prison development proposal, including public consultations in the first stage. During the public consultations, we received public objection from sectors of the community and call for the Administration to explore alternative development plans to address the problems of prison overcrowding and outdated penal facilities. As a result, we decided to shelve the HLC prison development proposal and to explore alternative prison development possibilities.

The Problem

3. The problem that we are seeking to solve is –
- (a) Current overcrowding in maximum security prisons, remand facilities and female institutions;
 - (b) Projected shortfall between current capacity and future penal population; and
 - (c) Aging penal facilities.

Current Overcrowding

4. The current number of penal places is 11 460, and as at 21 October 2005, the total penal population was 12 150. The overall occupancy rate is therefore 106%.

5. In the case of male institutions, while the overall occupancy rate is 96%, there is a shortfall of 569 places in remand facilities and maximum security prisons^{Note}. In the case of female institutions, there is shortfall at both the aggregate level, and in remand facilities and maximum security prisons. The shortfall at the aggregate level is 1 073 places (population of 2 644 minus design capacity of 1 571 places). Of this 1 073 places, 488 is the shortfall in remand facilities and maximum security prisons^{Note}.

Projected Shortfall

6. Looking ahead, the penal population is projected to grow to 13 330 by 2010, and to 14 250 by 2015. If we do not increase the number of our penal places (currently 11 460), at the aggregate level there will be a shortfall of 1 870 places in 2010, and 2 790 in 2015. Overcrowding would be even more serious in maximum security prisons, remand facilities and female institutions.

Outdated Penal Facilities

7. Of the 24 existing penal institutions, half will be over 40 years old by 2015 and eight were converted from buildings previously used for other purposes. If we cannot replace these institutions in time, their environment and facilities would be such as making it more difficult for us to maintain our standards in prison management, security, and most importantly, rehabilitation work.

^{Note} As some remand institutions are also maximum security facilities and vice versa, we are presenting the combined shortfall of these two types of institutions. Presenting separate shortfalls for the two types of institutions will result in double counting.

Prison Development Plans

8. The HLC proposal was intended to go some way to solving the problem. In working on alternative prison development options we similarly aim to tackle each aspect of the problem, and the following summarizes the latest position and our way forward.

Ongoing Projects

9. Since the shelving of the HLC prison development proposal, the Correctional Services Department (CSD) has launched a series of smaller-scale projects which can be done relatively quickly and go some way to meeting the immediate demand for penal places.

10. To relieve overcrowding in female institutions, we will –

- (a) add 48 penal places when we complete the conversion works at the Chi Sun Correctional Institution at Chi Ma Wan around end 2005 (the whole project involves 96 places, of which 48 are already in place); and
- (b) add 212 places when we complete the construction of the new Lai Chi Kok Correctional Institution, which will commence operation in the first quarter of 2006 (the Institution will provide 650 places, of which 438 places are for re-provisioning the Victoria Prison).

All together these projects will add 260 female places and reduce the shortfall from 1 073 to 813.

11. As for remand facilities, 144 additional places will be provided by an extension project at the Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre to be completed by end 2006.

12. The improvements that can be brought about by short-term, small scale projects are limited. We have therefore been looking at other larger-scale projects.

Proposed Redevelopment of Lo Wu Correctional Institution (LWCI)

13. For larger-scale projects, after an internal study we have now confirmed the technical feasibility of redeveloping the LWCI into three institutions. The proposed redevelopment will cover the existing site of the LWCI and a smaller adjacent site, and will provide two medium security institutions each with 400 places and a minimum security one with 600 places. The total capacity is therefore 1 400 places (182 replacement places plus 1 218 additional places).

14. This additional 1 218 places will enable us to meet demand in 2010. When the LWCI redevelopment is completed around end 2009, the total number of penal places will be increased to 13 264 while the penal population is projected to grow to about 13 330 in 2010. At that time, therefore, at the aggregate level the number of penal places will be sufficient for the penal population. In finalizing the details of the project, we will work out how to split the 1 400 places between male and female prisoners, so that these female places will be sufficient for demand at that time. The two planned medium security institutions at Lo Wu will also be able to receive prisoners of suitable security category from the existing maximum security prisons, hence releasing these maximum security places to meet demand. Similarly, when the new Lo Wu institutions take over prisoners from the existing prisons, the latter will have greater capacity for remand places.

15. The redevelopment of LWCI into three penal institutions will enable some economy of scale. Also, as the three proposed penal institutions will be purpose-built, we will adopt the most suitable design and utilize the latest technology to reduce staffing requirement, ensure security and facilitate rehabilitation. The whole redevelopment will be subject to a height restriction of 13 meters to reduce visual impact on the surrounding areas. Studies to assess the impacts of the proposed project on the environment, traffic and drainage system will also be conducted.

16. We have started consulting the local community on the proposal, and will consult the North District Council on 8 December 2005. We will revert to the Panel with the results of the public consultations and

details of the works project before seeking funding approval from the FC towards the end of the 2005/06 legislative session. Subject to funding approval, we expect that the redevelopment project will be completed by end 2009.

Other Projects

17. While the proposed Lo Wu project could solve our problem in 2010, we must plan beyond 2010. By 2015 the projected penal population will be 14 250, and if there are no further increases in penal places from 2010 the shortfall will be 986. And as discussed above we will also need to update some of the current facilities. We are therefore in parallel considering options for further development projects. Initially, we have identified redevelopment potential for the existing institutions at Chi Ma Wan and will conduct further studies. We will consult the Panel on the specific plans as and when they are drawn up.

Way Forward

18. We will continue to –
- (a) identify and work on small scale projects so as to bring early improvement;
 - (b) work on the LWCI redevelopment project with a view to submitting a funding proposal to the FC; and
 - (c) identify options for further development/redevelopment projects with a view to addressing the projected increase in penal population and the aging of our facilities by 2015.

Security Bureau
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