

LEGCO PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES

Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Family Violence

Supplementary Information on Improvement Measures of the Police

INTRODUCTION

Further to the paper setting out the improvement measures to be implemented by Police on the handling of domestic violence prepared for discussion for the Subcommittee meeting held on 28 March 2006 (LC Paper No. CB(2)1439/05-06(01)), the Chairman has, in the recent meeting of the Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Family Violence held on 23 May 2006, requested the Police to provide supplementary information relating specifically to four issues namely the Emergency Referral Questionnaire, Action Checklist, the training for police officers and the progress on the feasibility study into the establishment of designated units for the investigation of domestic violence reports. This Information Paper sets out the latest position in relation to the specific issues.

LATEST POSITION

Emergency Referral Questionnaire (ERQ)

2. The Questionnaire has adopted the concept of risk assessment that is universally employed in the policing of domestic violence. As protection of the victim and his/her children from further violence is of overriding concern, an ERQ has been devised as an assessment tool to guide officers to reveal and assess existing high risk factors within the victim family by going through a series of direct but

crucial threat assessment questions. The structured design with its focus on the heightened risk factors has made reference to the best practices adopted by overseas jurisdictions while placing an equal emphasis on local culture and policing experience in dealing with domestic violence reports.

3. While the formatting of the questions is going to be finalized, the underlying principle is to evolve on questions surrounding immediate high risk factors within the family, such as recent assault and dispute history, injuries inflicted, history of abuse on children within the family, tendency and position regarding divorce, and aggravating factors including suicidal tendency and parties' history of violent behavior and alcoholism. The answers to these questions as a whole would guide the handling officers in better appreciating the situation faced by the victim and his/her family and help the officers to make a more informed decision on whether any emergency referral is required by removing the victim and his/her children to a place of refuge or approaching the SWD outreaching teams for immediate crisis intervention.

4. The handling officer would document his/her decision on the ERQ, which would be electronically inputted into the Central Domestic Violence Database for future reference. To enhance on frontline supervision, apart from the requirement for an officer of Sergeant or above to be deployed to the scene to take charge of the investigation, which has taken effect on 7 May 2006, the supervisory officer is also required to review and endorse the assessment on the ERQ.

Action Checklist

5. To assist frontline officers to better document all actions at scene, in recognition of the complexity involved in domestic violence and the number of procedures to be followed, an Action Checklist has been designed to guide officers to take all the necessary and proper actions at the scene of a Domestic Incident Notice e.g. checking the parties against the Central Domestic Violence Database, checking of status of any Injunction Orders, serving of a Domestic Incident Notice and a Family

Support Services Information Card on both parties, completion of ERQ, interview victims separately, gathering evidence including medical for proper classification of the case and taking arrest actions based on prevailing evidence ... etc.

6. The Checklist is to be completed by the handling officer in every domestic violence incident and similarly countersigned by the supervisory officer at scene. An enhancement in the police electronic documentation system has been sought to upload the Checklist to the Database in the same manner as that which applies to the ERQ. The formatting of the ERQ and Checklist are being deliberated in conjunction with the Police Information Technology Branch to ensure compatibility with other Police Information Systems.

Designated Domestic Violence Investigation Unit

7. Police is conducting a feasibility study into the setting up of a designated domestic violence investigation capability and the viable options available. The study has made reference to relevant overseas experience and the concept of establishing Child Abuse Investigation Units in providing a designated investigative response to serious child abuse reports.

8. The study has included a Forcewide consultation exercise with all Major Formation Commanders (Regional Commanders) between April and May 2006. A wide range of comments and opinions have been received. The Force is now in the process of examining these comments and opinions in detail. Considerations include the efficient use of resources, how best to serve the interest of the victim family, the viable options available and how the various options would fit into the present investigation structure and cooperation with other departments and agencies.

Training

9. A new Training Package will be rolled out to all police officers during the training cycle between July and October 2006. The training aims at equipping officers with the knowledge and skills in conducting the Emergency Referral Questionnaire through scenario-based exercises, discussion and actual practices. It will also provide focus training on the attitude, skills and roles to be played by police officers during the process of conflict management. The need for awareness of family dynamics and victim's psychology and the importance of handling all victim family with sensitivity, including equal opportunity issues and an engaging attitude will be repeated in the new training package. The revised version would be incorporated into all basic and developmental training on the subject and will be subjected to continuous review.

10. In addition to the Forcewide training delivered during regular training days, as mentioned in para. 9 above, District Commanders, may also arrange refresher and special training to address local needs, especially in Districts where the occurrence of domestic violence is of high frequency.

11. Police will continue to seek continuous improvement in handling cases of domestic violence so as to provide the best services to victims and their children. The Commissioner of Police has included Domestic Violence in the Commissioner's Operational Targets for 2006. This highlights the Force commitment to provide a prompt and professional response to all reports of domestic incidents.