

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2681/06-07
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/SE/1

Panel on Security

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 3 July 2007, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP (Chairman)
Hon James TO Kun-sun (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Margaret NG
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, SBS, JP
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon CHOY So-yuk, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
- Member attending** : Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung
- Members absent** : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Dr Hon LUI Ming-wah, SBS, JP
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong, GBS
Hon Daniel LAM Wai-keung, SBS, JP
Hon CHIM Pui-chung
- Public Officers attending** : Item III
Mr Charles WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Security

Miss Sharon KO
Assistant Secretary for Security

Mr YAU Chi-chiu
Assistant Commissioner of Correctional Services
(Rehabilitation)

Ms Eva KWONG
Senior Clinical Psychologist
Correctional Services Department

Item IV

Mr Alan LO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Security

Mr David CHIU
Assistant Director of Immigration (Control)

Mr Corrado CHOW
Assistant Director of Immigration (Management & Support)

Item V

Ms CHEUNG Siu-hing
Deputy Secretary for Security

Ms Jane LEE
Assistant Secretary for Security

Mrs Michelle WONG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (School
Development)

Mr LEUNG Shiu-keung
Principal Education Officer (New Territories)

Mr Donald NG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing
(Transport)

Mr Johann WONG
District Officer (North)
Home Affairs Department

Mr Michael Rex DEMAID-GROVES
District Commander (Border)
Hong Kong Police Force

Ms Helen KWONG
Assistant District Commander (Administration)(Border)
Hong Kong Police Force

Miss Cindy LAW
Assistant Commissioner/New Territories
Transport Department

Mr David CHIU
Assistant Director (Control)
Immigration Department

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

Staff in attendance : Mr Raymond LAM
Senior Council Secretary (2) 5

Miss Helen DIN
Legislative Assistant (2) 1

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes of previous meeting
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2285/06-07)

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 May 2007 were confirmed.

II. Information papers issued since the last meeting
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2147/06-07(01) and CB(2)2249/06-07(01))

2. Members noted that the following papers had been issued since the last meeting -

- (a) Letter dated 8 June 2007 from the Administration regarding the first annual report of the Commissioner on Interception of Communications and Surveillance; and

Action

- (b) Letter dated 21 June 2007 from Hon James TO to the Secretary for Security regarding the first annual report of the Commissioner on Interception of Communications and Surveillance.

3. Members also noted a letter dated 3 July 2007 from Mr James TO, which was tabled at the meeting, regarding the holding of a special meeting to discuss the first annual report of the Commissioner on Interception of Communications and Surveillance.

(Post-meeting note : The letter tabled at the meeting was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2378/06-07 on 4 July 2007.)

4. Referring to his letter tabled at the meeting, the Deputy Chairman suggested that a special meeting should be held within July 2007 to discuss the first annual report of the Commissioner on Interception of Communications and Surveillance (the Commissioner) and the changes, if any, to the code of practice issued under the Interception of Communications and Surveillance Ordinance. If the first annual report of the Commissioner was not ready for discussion in July, the Administration should be invited to explain why it could not do so. His view was shared by Ms Emily LAU. The Chairman said that he would discuss the suggestion with the Administration.

III. Latest developments in the provision of rehabilitative services by the Correctional Services Department
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2284/06-07(01))

5. Principal Assistant Secretary for Security briefed Members on the latest developments in the provision of rehabilitative services by the Correctional Services Department (CSD).

6. Referring to paragraph 4 of the Administration's paper, the Deputy Chairman requested the Administration to provide members with a copy of the report of the consultancy study which formed the basis for the development of the Risks and Needs Assessment and Management Protocol for Offenders (the Protocol). Assistant Commissioner of Correctional Services (Rehabilitation) (ACCS) agreed to provide members with a copy of the report.

Admin

7. Senior Clinical Psychologist, Correctional Services Department (SCP/CSD) said that the Correctional Service of Canada and the Chinese University of Hong Kong had jointly conducted a study for CSD in 2002, after which CSD had -

- (a) developed the Protocol;

Action

- (b) improved and updated a set of prediction tables for the assessment of offenders' risk of re-offending;
- (c) developed a system for the systematic evaluation of offenders' rehabilitative needs, which formed the basis for rehabilitative programme matching for offenders; and
- (d) developed clinical risk assessment scales for assessment of the re-offending risks of offenders.

8. The Deputy Chairman asked about the results of the assessments conducted on 1 964 inmates and prisoners and whether any new measures had been adopted in view of the results. Referring to paragraph 7 of the Administration's paper, he asked why the risks and needs assessment of offenders would be enhanced, given that the assessments referred to in paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper had not yet been completed.

9. ACCS responded that the Protocol was being implemented in phases. SCP/CSD said that 1 964 local inmates and local prisoners with sentences of two years or above had undergone assessment of re-offending risks and rehabilitative needs. As a second step, rehabilitative programme matching was being arranged for those in need, starting with inmates.

10. The Deputy Chairman asked whether the Protocol had any resource implications.

11. ACCS responded that 24 staff would be recruited within the current financial year for implementation of the Protocol. SCP/CSD added that these 24 staff comprised three clinical psychologists, 13 correctional officers, seven assistant correctional officers and one assistant lecturer. ACCS added that all these correctional officers and assistant correctional officers would receive training in social work if they did not already have such training.

12. Dr Fernando CHEUNG asked about the percentage of local inmates and local prisoners with sentences of two years or above who had undergone assessment of re-offending risks and rehabilitative needs. He also asked whether there were case managers to follow up the cases and the average caseload of a case manager. ACCS agreed to provide a written response.

Admin

13. Dr Fernando CHEUNG expressed concern that according to paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper, only 1 146 group sessions had been organised for 898 participants.

14. SCP/CSD responded that inmates and prisoners identified to have rehabilitative needs would join a Responsivity Enhancement Programme to enhance their motivation to join more intensive intervention programmes as

Action

needed. She informed Members that after the introduction of the Protocol, the number of inmates and prisoners willing to take rehabilitative programmes had substantially increased. The number of inmates at the Hei Ling Chau Drug Addiction Treatment Centre who were willing to receive rehabilitative programmes had increased by six-fold over the previous year.

15. Ms Emily LAU asked whether there were countries where similar assessments and programmes had been introduced successfully.

16. SCP/CSD responded that re-offending risk assessment had been widely adopted in Europe and North America for over 10 years. It had been particularly successful in Australia, Canada, the United States and New Zealand. Experience indicated that such assessment and programme services, if properly delivered and with appropriate backup, such as resources, had effectively reduced the re-offending risk of inmates and prisoners by over 20%. The Mainland, Japan and Singapore had also indicated interest to introduce such assessment protocol.

17. Ms Emily LAU asked whether the results of assessment had any labelling effect on inmates and prisoners. SCP/CSD replied that there was so far no indication of such an effect.

18. In response to Ms Emily LAU's question about the intensive intervention programmes referred to in paragraph 5 of the Administration's paper, SCP/CSD said that the programmes mainly comprised intensive counselling for inmates and prisoners.

19. Ms Audrey EU asked whether inmates were allowed to choose among the courses referred to in paragraph 9 of the Administration's paper and whether there was any relationship between the vocational training courses referred to in paragraphs 9 and 11 of the Administration's paper. She also asked whether there was any requirement on the ratio between useful work and vocational training for adult prisoners.

20. ACCS responded that under the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, vocational training and study had to be provided to all young prisoners. Under the Prison Rules, all adult prisoners were required to engage in useful work and undergo vocational training unless excused on medical grounds. He said that all local adult offenders with remaining sentences of less than two years were eligible for receiving full-time vocational training at Lai Sun Correctional Institution (LSCI) on a voluntary basis. Part-time vocational training courses were provided by CSD for prisoners in other adult institutions for both male and female offenders.

21. Referring to paragraph 11 of the Administration's paper, Ms Audrey EU asked whether the passing rate of 91% for prisoner-trainees who had attempted

Action

public examinations and trade tests was better than expected. She also asked about the feedback of inmates and prisoners on training courses.

22. ACCS responded that CSD was satisfied so far with the results of prisoner-trainees at LSCI in public examinations and trade tests. The feedback from inmates and prisoners were generally positive.

23. Referring to paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper, the Deputy Chairman enquired how the re-offending risks and rehabilitative needs of the 1 964 inmates and prisoners were assessed. He asked whether the inmates and prisoners were required to answer a long list of questions, whether some of the questions covered very personal information and whether all the questions were compulsory. He also asked whether refusal to answer a question would result in solitary confinement. He considered that the assessors should respect an offender's right of not giving an answer to some of the questions.

24. SCP/CSD responded that the risk assessment process comprised mainly two parts. The first part involved the use of a prediction table, which was developed with the assistance of the Correctional Service of Canada, and the offender concerned was not required to answer any question. The second part involved the gathering of information on the rehabilitative needs of the offender. The information gathered would only be used for formulation of a rehabilitative programme. An offender would not be subject to solitary confinement for refusal to answer a question.

Admin

25. The Deputy Chairman asked whether the results of an assessment would affect an offender's right or mode of confinement. He requested CSD to provide members with a copy of the questionnaire used in such assessment.

26. ACCS stressed that participation in such assessment was voluntary. Offenders could choose not to answer a question. Information was gathered solely for the purpose of assessing a person's rehabilitative needs. Such assessment was conducted by CSD staff who had received training in social work.

27. The Deputy Chairman asked whether an offender was informed at the beginning of an assessment that he had the right of not answering any of the questions. He said that to his knowledge, some offenders had not been informed of such a right until the end of the assessment.

Admin

28. SCP/CSD said that it was a standard procedure for a clinical psychologist to inform an offender, at the beginning of an assessment, of his right in the assessment process. ACCS said that all CSD staff who conducted such assessments were required to inform the offenders being assessed of such a right at the beginning of the assessment. He undertook to look into the case referred to by the Deputy Chairman.

Action

29. Ms Emily LAU asked whether inmates and prisoners were aware of the Protocol. SCP/CSD replied in the affirmative.

30. Ms Margaret NG expressed support for allocating more resources for rehabilitative services. She said that many inmates and prisoners had complained of inadequate facilities in penal institutions and difficulty in enrolling in vocational training courses, especially computer courses. She asked whether there was information on the number of inmates and prisoners who could not enrol in such courses.

Admin

31. ACCS responded that CSD was concerned about the adequacy of computer training for offenders. There were currently 230 computers for youth offenders and 340 computers for adult offenders in various penal institutions. Multi-media centres had been constructed in five penal institutions for adult offenders. In the first five months of 2007, CSD had organised 34 computer courses for 360 adult offenders. CSD would also organise with non-government organisations (NGOs) a computer application contest among all penal institutions. The Deputy Chairman requested the Administration to provide information, in terms of person-hours, on inmates and prisoners who had used computers and those who had received computer training in penal institutions.

32. Ms Margaret NG asked whether prisoners were required to engage in simple and repetitive work, such as envelope-making. She also asked whether the Administration had any plans to amend existing legislation to provide more flexibility in rehabilitation programmes that involved participation of the community.

33. ACCS responded that the gainful employment of offenders had not only helped maintaining a stable custodial environment, but had also facilitated their rehabilitation through developing a good work habit and a sense of responsibility. He stressed that CSD was assisting offenders to rehabilitate through a combination of gainful employment, psychological services and vocational training.

34. Ms Margaret NG said that to her knowledge, the computers in penal institutions were donated by NGOs and the instructors of computer courses were only volunteers from NGOs. She asked whether there were sufficient instructors for computer courses. She queried how prisoners could develop a good work habit and a sense of responsibility merely through engagement in simple and repetitive work.

35. ACCS responded that the computers in penal institutions were gradually replaced by new ones. The instructors of interest courses, including computer courses, were volunteers from the CSD Rehabilitation Volunteer Group, which had a membership of more than 200 professionals, teachers and students. Ms Margaret NG requested the Administration to provide information on the

Action

number of volunteers who had served as instructors of computer courses in penal institutions and the number of offenders who had applied for computer courses but were not offered a place. She also asked the Administration to provide information on its plans to update the facilities for providing rehabilitative services in old penal institutions.

Admin

36. ACCS agreed to provide the information requested by Ms Margaret NG. He said that the Administration had, in response to members' request at the Panel meeting on 3 April 2007, provided information on the facilities for providing rehabilitative services in penal institutions converted from buildings previously used for other purposes. In this connection, he informed Members that tenders were being invited for the construction of a multi-media language centre in Cape Collinson Correctional Institution, where multi-media equipment had been installed in the group counselling room. An additional interview room was being built inside the Tai Lam Correctional Institution. Resources were being redeployed for the construction of additional counselling and multi-function rooms at the Hei Ling Chau Addiction Treatment Centre.

37. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung asked about the Administration's funding for services jointly provided by CSD and NGOs. He requested the Administration to provide a comparison of the percentage of inmates and prisoners who had been provided vocational training between Hong Kong and other places.

Admin

38. ACCS responded that CSD would spend \$460.8 million in 2007-08 on programmes and activities assisting inmates and prisoners to reintegrate into the society. He agreed to collect the information requested by Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung.

39. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that the services provided by the Government for the reintegration of offenders into the society were far from adequate. Many inmates and prisoners encountered financial and accommodation problems immediately after release. He considered that adequate supportive services should be provided to inmates and prisoners immediately after release. His view was shared by the Deputy Chairman.

40. ACCS responded that the successful reintegration of offenders into the society required, in addition to the rehabilitation and reintegration services provided by CSD, the support of the community and the determination of the offenders.

41. The Deputy Chairman said that Members were generally in support of the work of CSD. Some Members had even jointly written to the Secretary for Security conveying their concerns about the adequacy of manpower and resources of CSD.

Action

42. The Chairman said that the subject would be discussed again in one year's time.

IV. Manpower deployment of the Immigration Department

(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2284/06-07(02), CB(2)1736/06-07(06) and CB(2)2284/06-07(03))

43. Mr Howard YOUNG asked whether the Administration had any further plans for immigration clearance of passengers by electronic means to relieve work pressure on frontline immigration staff.

44. Assistant Director of Immigration (Control) (AD of Imm) responded that the Immigration Department (ImmD) was considering extending the e-Channels to frequent visitors on a trial basis by the end of 2007.

45. Mr Howard YOUNG asked whether immigration counter staff could be arranged to sit at different directions on a rotation basis to minimise strain disorders of their arms and shoulders.

46. AD of Imm responded that consideration could be given to arranging the immigration staff inside the kiosks at the Shenzhen Bay Control Point to swap their seats regularly to minimise strain disorders of their arms and shoulders.

47. The Deputy Chairman asked whether the Immigration Department would, as suggested in the joint submission dated 21 May 2007 from four staff unions of ImmD, use projected passenger volume in its future estimation of manpower requirement.

48. AD of Imm responded that the Administration was expected to consider enhancing its efficiency first before resorting to manpower increase to order to cope with the natural increase in workload. He said that the Administration was aware of the increase in passenger volume and was seeking to relieve the pressure at control points through the opening of new control points.

49. The Deputy Chairman asked whether the problem of inadequate air-conditioning at control points had been resolved.

50. AD of Imm responded that according to his own experience, the air-conditioning at control points might be stretched to its limits during the bunching hours when the passenger volume was extremely high. When necessary, ImmD would request the party concerned, such as the Kowloon-Canton Railway Corporation (KCRC), to adjust the air-conditioning at the control point to cater for the sudden surge in passenger volume.

Action

51. Referring to paragraph 6 of the Administration's paper, Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung asked when the improvement works to the air-conditioning system at control points would be completed. Ms Emily LAU said that the problem of inadequate air-conditioning at control points should be resolved as soon as possible.

52. AD of Imm responded that arrangements were being made for the replacement of the air-conditioning system at the Lo Wu Control Point. As the control point was being used daily, the replacement work would be carried out by phases after the summer.

53. The Deputy Chairman asked whether transport was provided by ImmD for its staff to travel to and from various control points.

54. AD of Imm responded that departmental transport for immigration staff was provided by ImmD between various control points and designated pick-up points in Hung Hom, Mong Kok, Shatin, Sheung Shui and Yuen Long. The longest travelling time from the staff quarters in Shatin and Sheung Shui and the eastern part of Hong Kong to the Shenzhen Bay Control Point were 1 hour 15 minutes and 1 hour 45 minutes respectively.

55. Ms Emily LAU asked how the leave accumulation situation of immigration staff referred to in the Annex to the Administration's paper compared to those of the staff of other disciplined forces. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung asked when ImmD would resolve the problems relating to the leave accumulation of immigration staff.

56. AD of Imm responded that although ImmD had the highest number of staff with accumulated leave reaching 90% to 99% of their respective limits, there would be more opportunities for immigration staff to reduce their accumulated leave after the addition of some 500 staff in 2007-2008.

57. AD of Imm said that immigration staff with leave accumulation close to their limits were notified of such a fact by electronic mails. Applications for vacation leave, apart from those made with a very short notice, were all granted to immigration staff. He added that a few staff members might have chosen to forfeit some of their accumulated leave in order to maintain their eligibility for acting allowance.

58. Referring to paragraph 9 of the Administration's paper, Ms Emily LAU asked whether there was adequate legal basis for immigration staff to take actions against persons who might have created public disorder or verbally abused public officers at control points.

59. AD of Imm responded that the appropriate ways to tackle such circumstances would depend very much on the actual situation on the ground.

Action

He said that ImmD would, together with the Police, step up its enforcement against passengers of unruly behavior.

60. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that ImmD should discuss with its staff unions the projection of future workload and future manpower requirement.

61. Principal Assistant Secretary for Security (PAS(S)) responded that close communication was maintained between ImmD and the staff unions. The number of uniformed immigration staff had increased by over 10% between 2002 and 2006. In 2007-2008, ImmD would recruit about 500 uniformed staff, representing an increase of about 10% over 2006-2007. He added that ImmD had introduced e-Channels and other measures which helped relieve the pressure on immigration staff. The Administration would continue to properly process ImmD's bids for resources.

62. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung asked when all the immigration counters of older design would be replaced.

63. AD of Imm responded that the replacement of immigration counters of older design was an ongoing exercise. ImmD planned to complete replacement or modification of all such counters within two years.

Admin

64. The Chairman suggested that the Secretary for Security should provide an update on the subject at his next briefing on the Chief Executive's Policy Address. He added that the four staff unions of ImmD should also be invited to submit their views, if any, on the latest position before the briefing. Members agreed.

V. Immigration and complementary arrangements for cross-boundary students
(LC Paper No. CB(2)2284/06-07(04))

65. Members noted a letter dated 3 July 2007 from Mr LI Kwok-ying, which was tabled at the meeting, regarding immigration and complementary arrangements for cross-boundary students.

(Post-meeting note : The letter tabled at the meeting was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2378/06-07 on 4 July 2007.)

66. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong said that there were some 4 000 students who were Hong Kong residents living in Shenzhen. Among these, about 3 000 were students studying in primary schools or kindergartens in Hong Kong. However, only about 2 530 of these students had been issued Closed Area Permits (CAPs) for taking school coaches at Lo Wu Station Road outside the Lo Wu Control Point. Students had to cross the boundary in the same way as

Action

other ordinary passengers. Some of these students had even got lost in their journeys. He expressed concern about the safety of these cross-boundary students. He considered that students should be allowed to go to school at staggered hours. Arrangements should be made for primary students to cross the boundary between 7:00 am and 8:15 am and kindergarten students to cross the boundary between 8:15 am and 9:00 am. CAPs should be issued at least to all cross-boundary students of primary schools and kindergartens using the Lo Wu Station Road in the coming school year. The traffic at Lo Wu Station Road should be better managed.

67. Deputy Secretary for Security (DS for S) responded that the Administration was concerned about the safety of cross-boundary students. She explained that as Lo Wu Station Road was a country road with a limited design capacity, safety risks would arise from overuse of the road. There was thus a limit to the number of CAPs that could be issued for using the road. The Administration had issued CAPs to cross-boundary students within the capacity of Lo Wu Station Road, notwithstanding that normally CAPs would not be issued to those whose destination was outside the Frontier Closed Area.

68. District Officer (North) (DO(N)) said that the maximum number of CAPs that could be issued was limited by the capacity of Lo Wu Station Road. He informed Members that arrangements had been made with a number of kindergartens to allow cross-boundary students to arrive school at about 9:30 am from the next school year onwards. Arrangements were also being made with certain primary schools to allow cross-boundary students to go to school at a different time. He added that KCRC had agreed to deploy more station assistants as well as make available additional ticket turnstiles during the peak hours to assist cross-boundary students taking trains.

69. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong expressed concern that school coaches were not allowed to access the Lok Ma Chau (LMC) Control Point, although some green minibuses were allowed to take passengers to LMC Control Point in the evenings. He considered that school coaches should be given access to the LMC Control Point. His view was shared by Dr Fernando CHEUNG.

70. Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing (Transport) (PAS(T)) responded that green minibuses were allowed to take passengers to LMC Control Point during the overnight period only. Owing to the busy traffic at the LMC Control Point during daytime, school coaches could not be allowed to take students to the LMC Control Point. However, the Lok Ma Chau - Huanggang Shuttle Buses (Yellow Buses) operator had arranged some buses for carrying cross-boundary students to the San Tin Public Transport Interchange (PTI), and permission was given to some school coaches to pick up and set down cross-boundary students inside the PTI. The Administration was also exploring the feasibility of providing more laybys at the San Tin PTI so

Action

that more school coaches could be allowed to enter the PTI to set down and pick up cross-boundary students.

71. Referring to the letter dated 3 July 2007 from Mr LI Kwok-ying, Miss CHOY So-yuk said that CAPs should be issued to all cross-boundary students, regardless of whether the school was located in the North District. She said that if some Yellow Buses could be designated for carrying cross-boundary students, there was no reason why school coaches could not be allowed to access the LMC Control Point. She added that school coaches should also be allowed to use the PTI at the LMC Terminus of the Sheung Shui - Lok Ma Chau Spur Line (the Spur Line). She considered that these measures should be introduced in the next school year.

Admin

72. PAS(T) responded that as the PTI at the LMC Terminus of the Spur Line was of limited size and located within a conservation area, there was tight control on the number of vehicles allowed to enter the area. Only limited number of public transport vehicles were thus allowed to provide services at the PTI. The Chairman requested the Administration to reconsider allowing school coaches to pick up and set down cross-boundary students at the PTI at the LMC Terminus of the Spur Line.

73. Referring to the letter dated 3 July 2007 from Mr LI Kwok-ying, Mr WONG Yung-kan asked about the total number of cross-boundary students whose schools were located outside the North District and whether CAPs would be issued to these students.

74. DS for S responded that among some 4 000 cross-boundary students in Hong Kong, over 2 000 were studying in schools located in the North District. She said that while the Administration would look into the issues raised in the letter from Mr LI Kwok-ying, it should be noted that the Lo Wu Station Road had a limited capacity. Nevertheless, the Administration would consider the issue of CAPs in the coming school year, having regard to the arrangements being worked out for students to go to school at staggered hours and the capacity of the Lo Wu Station Road.

75. Mr WONG Yung-kan asked whether the Administration would, in the longer term, consider arranging different cross-boundary students to cross the boundary at different control points.

76. PAS(T) responded that cross-boundary coach operators could use their cross-boundary coach quotas to provide services to carry cross-boundary students between Shenzhen and their schools in Hong Kong, and DO(N) had been liaising with schools and the cross-boundary coach operators to facilitate discussion on this proposal. DO(N) added that according to information provided by interested schools, there were operators which could provide such a service and the major issue was the level of charge for the service.

Action

77. Dr Fernando CHEUNG said that with one-third of marriages registered in Hong Kong being cross-boundary marriages, the Administration should have anticipated the rapid increase in the number of cross-boundary students. He considered that the Administration should facilitate the early introduction of cross-boundary school coach service. Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung said that the Secretary for Home Affairs should take the lead to liaise with the Mainland authorities with a view to introducing such a service as soon as possible. The Chairman asked whether such a service could be introduced in September 2007 and whether travelling allowance could be provided to cross-boundary students using such a service.

78. Principal Assistant Secretary for Education (School Development) responded that travelling subsidies for needy students were currently provided to students travelling within the territory of Hong Kong. Consideration might be given to the introduction of complementary measures if cross-boundary school coach service was available. It should be noted that the introduction of cross-boundary school coach service might take some time, as it involved operation both in the territory of the Mainland and Hong Kong. She stressed that the relevant bureaux and government departments were exploring various options with a view to facilitating cross-boundary students to attend schools in Hong Kong, such as arranging for students to go to school at staggered hours.

79. Mr CHUENG Man-kwong pointed out that concessionary fares were currently offered to Lo Wu residents but not cross-boundary students travelling by train to or from Lo Wu Station. He considered that either the concessionary fares for Lo Wu residents should be offered to cross-boundary students or subsidy should be provided to cross-boundary students using train service.

80. Members agreed that the Panel should write to the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) to convey its concerns and views in connection with the transport and complementary arrangements for cross-boundary students. Members also agreed that CS should be requested to provide a response by the end of July 2007 and that a further meeting might be held, if necessary, to discuss the issue.

81. The meeting ended at 5:10 pm.