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Panel on Security

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 10 April 2008**

Problem of juvenile drug abuse

Purpose

This paper summarises past discussions by Members on the problem of juvenile drug abuse.

Current anti-drug policy

2. The Administration's anti-drug policy is embodied in a "five-pronged" approach - law enforcement and legislation, treatment and rehabilitation, preventive education and publicity, research and external cooperation. It has been drawn up on the advice of the Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN) and its two sub-committees, with members from various fields including youth, social work, medicine, academia and Legislative Council Members. The Fight Crime Committee (FCC) and the District Fight Crime Committees also discuss the juvenile drug abuse problem from time to time.

3. Following extensive consultation with the anti-drug sector, the Administration promulgated the Fourth Three-year Plan on Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Services in Hong Kong (2006-2008) in March 2006, which maps out the strategies of drug treatment and rehabilitation services to be taken from 2006 to 2008.

Latest situation on juvenile drug abuse and strategies

4. According to information provided by the Administration, the number of young drug abusers below the age of 21 fluctuated quite significantly during the past 10 years. The figures recorded in 2005 and 2006 reversed the declining trend during the period 2000 to 2004 and began to rise. The number in the first half of 2007 stood at 1 646, representing a 10.7% increase when compared to 1 487 in the same period of 2006. There has also been a shift from the use of heroin to psychotropic substances:

heroin abusers having decreased from 14 291 to 8 101 while psychotropic substance abusers have increased from 3 488 to 7 364. Results of the survey of drug use among students conducted by the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) in 2004 revealed that about 3.4% (i.e. 17 300) of the secondary students had abused drugs in their lifetime. In the light of the drug abuse trend among young abusers who are mainly psychotropic substance abusers, the Administration has taken the following measures to combat the problem of juvenile drug abuse -

- (a) stepping up preventive education and publicity measures to educate the public, in particular youngsters, about the harmful effects of psychotropic substance abuse at an early age;
- (b) intensifying early intervention initiatives to motivate abusers to seek treatment;
- (c) upgrading the skills of parents, teachers and social workers in identifying and handling young drug abusers; and
- (d) enhancing medical support to psychotropic substance abusers.

Discussions by Legislative Council Panels

Panel on Security

Meeting on 25 January 2007

5. At the Panel meeting on 25 January 2007, members expressed concern that the problem of drug abuse by young persons had worsened, and asked about the measures adopted by the Police to combat the sale of drugs.

6. The Administration advised that a Narcotics Bureau had been established within the Police's headquarters and special duty squads were deployed in each Police district and Police regions to combat the problem. The Police had stepped up its operations against retail outlets of drugs and strengthened the exchange of information with other law enforcement agencies. Publicity and education targeting young people were launched through the Junior Police Call and school liaison officers. In 2006, more than 50 activities, the majority of which was related to drug abuse, were organised for the youth.

Meeting on 6 February 2007

7. At the Panel meeting on 6 February 2007, members expressed concern over the age of young drug abusers getting lower and the increasing number of persons crossing the boundary to abuse drugs on the Mainland. Members were also concerned that those who abused drugs on the Mainland might not have a chance of receiving treatment and rehabilitation in Hong Kong. They enquired how the Administration would combat the

problem and whether the Administration had established any mechanism to provide treatment and rehabilitation service to Hong Kong residents arrested for drug abuse on the Mainland.

8. The Administration responded that according to statistics for the first three quarters of 2006, the average age of young drug abusers was 17 and the average age when a young person first abused drugs was 15. Such figures were comparable to the corresponding period in 2005. However, the number of young drug abusers had increased in the first three quarters of 2006 when compared with the statistics for the first three quarters of 2005. As such, the Administration had drawn up various measures to combat the problem, including the launching of the Sponsorship Scheme on Anti-Cross-boundary Drug Abuse Projects under which funding was provided to 18 projects on anti-drug education and publicity activities targeting young people, in schools, districts and at the boundary.

9. On the other hand, the Administration advised that the Police had been working closely with the Mainland authorities to combat the problem. Besides meetings at the top management level, communication was maintained at the operational level between the Narcotics Bureau of the Police and the relevant Mainland authorities. Meetings were held whenever necessary to discuss specific cases and exchange intelligence. A mechanism had also been established whereby the Police would liaise with social workers, if necessary and practicable, to provide service to Hong Kong residents arrested for drug abuse on the Mainland when the latter returned to Hong Kong.

Meeting on 17 October 2007

10. At the Panel meeting on 17 October 2007, issues relating to drug abuse among young people were raised during the briefing by the Secretary for Security on the Chief Executive(CE)'s 2007-2008 Policy Address.

11. Members considered that the Administration should combat the juvenile drug abuse problem in collaboration with the relevant Mainland authorities. Members suggested that arrival checking could be conducted at boundary control points to identify Hong Kong residents who had abused drugs on the Mainland. The Administration should obtain from the Mainland authorities the list of Hong Kong residents arrested for drug abuse on the Mainland, so that the cases concerned could be followed up by schools. Hair analyses should be conducted, with the consent of parents, on students to identify those who abused drugs.

12. The Administration responded that it was combating the problem through launching intelligence-led operations and maintaining close communications with the Mainland authorities. For Hong Kong residents arrested for drug abuse on the Mainland, a mechanism had been established for the provision of services to those who were willing to receive such a service when they returned to Hong Kong. For privacy reasons, the Administration was not in a position to disclose any list of Hong Kong residents arrested for drug abuse on the Mainland. The Administration further advised that, as announced by CE during his Policy Address on 10 October 2007, an

inter-departmental Task Force to be led by the Secretary for Justice (SJ) would be established to tackle the juvenile drug abuse problem. The Task Force would, building on the existing anti-crime and anti-drug networks, review the current measures, spearhead cross bureaux and inter-departmental efforts, and enhance collaboration among non-government organisations, stakeholders and the community, with a view to identifying areas of focus and enhancement. The issue of conducting medical examination to identify students who abused drugs would be one of the issues that would be studied by the Task Force.

13. Members also expressed concern whether there would be duplication in the role and work between the Task Force and ACAN. The Administration advised that the Task Force was not a standing committee and was not intended for replacing ACAN. It was a senior level committee established for tackling the juvenile drug abuse problem.

Meeting on 30 October 2007

14. At the Panel meeting on 30 October 2007, members noted with concern that survey of drug use among students was conducted by CRDA once every four years. Some members suggested that it should be conducted at shorter intervals (say once every two years) with a smaller scale survey to be conducted annually, and that the surveys should be intended to identify, among others, the reasons for youth drug abuse.

15. The Administration responded that as the scope of the survey was broad, much time and resources were required for conducting the survey. Whether the survey could be conducted at shorter intervals would have to be considered by the Task Force. The Administration stressed that the survey was only one of the means by which the youth drug abuse situation was assessed. Besides the survey, ad hoc research studies, admission statistics from treatment and rehabilitation service agencies and drug-related arrest and seizure figures provided reference to the latest situation. As regards the reasons for youth drug abuse, the Administration had studied and found that the major reasons included curiosity and influence by peers. It also found that young drug abusers generally had worse relations with family members than non-drug abusers.

16. Members expressed concern whether the increased supply and low retail price of Ketamine had led to the increase in drug abuse among the youth. They were also concerned that more young people crossed the boundary to abuse drug on the Mainland. They enquired about measures taken by the Administration to combat the problem.

17. The Administration responded that the retail price for a small pack of Ketamine of about 0.2 to 0.5 grams in weight was about \$55 to \$60. Following the seizure of a huge quantity of Ketamine in an operation conducted in 2006, Ketamine was trafficked in smaller quantities. As some countries had not classified Ketamine as a dangerous drug, there were difficulties in combating Ketamine at the international level. Nevertheless, the Administration would continue to combat the drug trafficking problem at source. The Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) had stepped up enforcement against drug trafficking at all control points. The Police and C&ED also worked closely, and maintained a close partnership with the relevant law enforcement

agencies of other jurisdictions in the exchange of intelligence and joint enforcement actions.

18. The Administration further advised that the Mainland authorities had done a lot to combat drug abuse, including enforcing the law strictly and launching publicity and education programmes. A person convicted of drug abuse on the Mainland for the first time would be subject to administrative detention for 15 days, while persons convicted for the second time would be subject to compulsory drug treatment. The Administration would consider stepping up publicity on the consequences of cross-boundary drug abuse. A new drug education kit had already been launched for teachers and school social workers to disseminate anti-drug messages in schools.

19. Some members were concerned about the inadequacy of resources targeted young drug abusers, and asked about the financial resources allocated for education and publicity against drug abuse.

20. The Administration advised that it attached great importance to anti-drug work and had invested significant resources in helping high-risk youth. On the education front, over \$20 million was provided each year for publicity against drug abuse. Furthermore, funding in the region of millions of dollars was provided each year through the Beat Drugs Fund for anti-drug publicity programmes launched by non-government organisations. As young drug abusers in Hong Kong generally did not seek treatment until a late stage after having abused drugs for three to four year, a new pilot collaboration scheme seeking to strengthen the cooperation between social workers and private medical practitioners for provision of body check service and motivational interviews to young substance abusers would be launched in early 2007-2008. In addition, a total of about 320 social workers were delivering outreaching service to high-risk youths, and more outreaching social workers were being deployed in districts, such as Sha Tin, Yuen Long, Tsuen Wan/Kwai Ching and Tai Po/North, where the various youth at-risk factors including the problem of youth drug abuse were more serious. Besides the service provided by outreaching social workers, counselling service was also provided at five Counselling Centres for Psychotropic Substance Abusers.

Panel on Welfare Services

21. At the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services on 13 October 2006, at which the former Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food gave a briefing on the CE's 2006-2007 Policy Address, members expressed concern about the problem of drug abuse by teenagers, and asked whether additional resources would be allocated for rehabilitation and support services for juvenile drug abusers.

22. The Administration responded that in addition to the enforcement actions against drug trafficking, the Administration would continue to combat drug abuse through inter-departmental efforts, including the promotion of a positive attitude towards life among teenagers and enhancement of their awareness of the harmful effects of drug abuse.

23. At its meeting on 3 July 2007, the Panel on Welfare Services discussed the support services provided for young drug abusers. Members considered that the existing support services for young drug abusers were far from adequate to address the increasing severity of the problem. They urged the Administration to enhance inter-departmental efforts to improve the rehabilitation and support services for young drug abusers.

24. The Administration responded that it attached great importance to anti-drug work, and had invested significant resources in helping high-risk youth. Apart from the Beat Drugs Fund, about \$590 million was allocated for anti-drug efforts in 2007. A two-year pilot collaboration scheme seeking to provide early intervention to young drug abusers would be launched in 2007-2008 to enhance co-operation between social workers and private medical practitioners. Under the scheme, youngsters and occasional abusers would be given medical treatment and advice, or be referred to counselling or other services at an early stage. Over \$2 million was proposed to be allocated for the implementation of this pilot collaboration scheme.

25. Members queried whether the existing reporting mechanism administered by CRDA could reflect accurately the magnitude of the drug abuse problem. They suggested that the Administration should improve the existing reporting mechanism with a view to providing information on the accurate number of young drug abusers for the formulation of anti-drug measures and support services. In addition, the Administration should also enhance the collaboration among the relevant bureaux and government departments in combating the problem of juvenile drug abuse. More resources and support should be provided for schools to facilitate early identification of drug abuse among students.

26. The Administration explained that CRDA collated statistical information regarding drug abuse and tracked the changing trend. CRDA figures did not represent the total number of abusers. They reflected the general trend of drug abuse which was useful in guiding policy-making. The Administration further advised that the current anti-drug policy was drawn up upon the advice of ACAN and its sub-committees, which comprised members from various fields. In partnership with ACAN, the Administration had launched different anti-drug initiatives through cross-sectoral efforts, including the pilot co-operation scheme which was a good example of collaboration between the medical and social welfare sector spearheaded by ACAN.

27. Pointing out the increasing trend of cross-boundary drug abuse involving young people and given that more boundary control points were expected to be opened in the coming years, members considered that the problem should be addressed without further delay. In view of the severity of the problem, the Panel on Welfare Services passed a motion at its meeting on 3 July 2007 urging the Government to immediately conduct a comprehensive review on the outdated and inadequate anti-drug policy, reaffirm the policy and direction of identifying drug abusers at an early stage and helping them to rehabilitate, and allocate more resources to improve the existing reporting mechanism and the extremely insufficient services.

Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services

28. At the meeting of the Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services on 22 October 2007, at which SJ gave a briefing on the policy initiatives of the Department of Justice for 2007-2008, members expressed concern whether there would be duplication in the role and work of the Task Force and other narcotics-related bodies, such as ACAN and the Narcotics Bureau. Some members considered it inappropriate for SJ, who acted as the Government's principal legal adviser, to have a leading role in combating crime. These members were of the view that given his special constitutional status, SJ should avoid taking up a position that would tarnish his independent image and undermine public's confidence in the rule of law.

29. The Administration responded that it was deeply concerned about the problem of juvenile drug abuse which was getting acute in recent years. As the problem cut across many policy areas, the Administration decided to set up a high level inter-departmental Task Force to tackle the problem. The Administration was appreciative of the work of ACAN and the Narcotics Bureau against drug abuse. The Task Force would make use of the existing anti-crime and anti-drug networks to consolidate strategies to combat the problem from a holistic perspective. It would establish close liaison with ACAN and the Narcotics Bureau and step up cross-bureaux and interdepartmental efforts. Hence, there was no question of the Task Force replacing the functions of ACAN and the Narcotics Bureau. The Administration pointed out that the Chief Secretary for Administration and SJ currently served as the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of FCC respectively. FCC comprised representatives from different government departments and discussed various crime issues including juvenile drug abuse. As SJ was familiar with the subject of juvenile drug abuse and combating the problem inevitably involved legal issues, it was appropriate for him to head the Task Force.

Related information

30. A number of questions relating to the issue of juvenile drug abuse were raised by Members at the Council meetings on 18 October 2006, 22 November 2006, 24 January 2007, 7 March 2007, 25 April 2007, 13 June 2007 and 11 July 2007. A list of these questions is in the **Appendix**.

Relevant papers

31. Members may wish to refer to the following minutes of meetings and papers for further details of the discussions -

Minutes

- (a) Minutes of the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services held on 13 October 2006 (LC Paper No. CB(2)262/06-07);

- (b) Minutes of the meeting of the Panel on Security held on 25 January 2007 (LC Paper No. CB(2)1177/06-07);
- (c) Minutes of the meeting of the Panel on Security held on 6 February 2007 (LC Paper No. CB(2)1450/06-07);
- (d) Minutes of the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services held on 3 July 2007 (LC Paper No. CB(2)2773/06-07);
- (e) Minutes of the meeting of the Panel on Security held on 17 October 2007 (LC Paper No. CB(2)694/07-08);
- (f) Minutes of the meeting of the Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services held on 22 October 2007 (LC Paper No. CB(2)402/07-08);
- (g) Minutes of the meeting of the Panel on Security held on 30 October 2007 (LC Paper No. CB(2)452/07-08);

Papers

- (h) Administration's paper for the meeting of the Panel on Security on 6 February 2007 (LC Paper No. CB(2)989/06-07(05));
- (i) Administration's paper for the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services on 3 July 2007 (LC Paper No. CB(2)2300/06-07(03));
- (j) Administration's paper for the meeting of the Panel on Security on 17 October 2007 entitled "Policy Initiatives of Security Bureau" (LC Paper No. CB(2)41/07-08(01)); and
- (k) Administration's paper for the meeting of the Panel on Security on 30 October 2007 (LC Paper No. CB(2)167/07-08(01)).

32. The above minutes and papers are also available on the website of the Legislative Council (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>).

Information provided by the Administration in response to issues raised by Members at Council Meetings

Council meeting on 18 October 2006

At the Council meeting on 18 October 2006, Hon Bernard CHAN asked a question on drug abuse by young people and measures taken by the Administration to tackle the problem.

Council meeting on 22 November 2006

2. At the Council meeting on 22 November 2006, Dr Hon Joseph LEE Kok-long asked a question on drug abuse by adolescents and policies on prevention of such problem.

Council meeting on 24 January 2007

3. At the Council meeting on 24 January 2007, Hon LAU Kong-wah asked a question on the existing drug rehabilitation services for young people and other support measures to help youngsters rehabilitate from drug addiction.

Council meeting on 7 March 2007

4. At the Council meeting on 7 March 2007, Hon James TO asked a question on the problem of Hong Kong children and youth taking or trafficking drugs on the Mainland and the support services targeted at children and youth taking drugs in places of entertainment on the Mainland.

Council meeting on 25 April 2007

5. At the Council meeting on 25 April 2007, Hon LAU Kong-wah asked a question on the problems of cross-boundary drug trafficking and Hong Kong residents, including youngsters, abusing drugs on the Mainland.

Council meeting on 13 June 2007

6. At the Council meeting on 13 June 2007, Hon TSANG Yok-sing asked a question on services provided to young people abusing psychoactive drugs.

Council meeting on 11 July 2007

7. At the Council meeting on 11 July 2007, Hon James TIEN asked a question on drug abuse by youngsters and measures taken by the Administration to combat the problem of cross-boundary drug trafficking and drug abuse.

8. The above questions and replies are available at the website of the Legislative Council (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>).