

**For discussion
on 5 May 2008**

Legislative Council Panel on Security

Policy and Measures for Enhancing the Safety of Sex Workers

Purpose

This paper outlines the policy and measures adopted by the Police to enhance the safety of sex workers and related matters.

Enhancing the Safety of Sex Workers

2. The Police are committed to protecting the safety of all members of the public (including sex workers) and have taken various measures to ensure the safety of sex workers working in “one sex worker apartments” :

- (a) setting up telephone hotlines or appointing liaison officers in individual districts so that sex workers can ask for Police assistance through these channels when necessary;
- (b) visits by staff of the Regional/District Crime Prevention Offices to “one sex worker apartments” in individual districts following the occurrence of a crime to offer advice on crime prevention and to distribute anti-crime information leaflets to enhance awareness of crime prevention. Sex workers are reminded to seek the assistance of the Police through dialling 999 in case of emergency or when their safety is under threat; and
- (c) visits by Police officers to “one sex worker apartments” in individual districts from time to time to enhance communication with sex workers and deter offenders against sex workers.

3. In addition to the above measures, in view of the concerns of sex workers regarding their safety following recent murder cases targeting at sex workers, the Police have taken the initiative to enhance communication with sex worker groups. Officers of the Crime Prevention Bureau of the Police met with sex workers and representatives of concern groups on 18 March 2008 to further explore the feasibility of various measures such as :

- (a) establishment of a mechanism to disseminate timely crime information to sex workers so as to enhance their vigilance and safeguard their personal safety;

- (b) setting up of contact points at district level so that district police officers could contact sex workers in the same district directly; and
- (c) provision of advice on protecting the personal safety of sex workers.

The Police will continue to explore the feasibility of the above measures and maintain communication with sex worker groups.

Existing Legislation Relating to Vice Establishments and Sex Workers

4. Under the existing law, the act of prostitution itself is not illegal. However, there are various vice-related offences to prevent the exploitation of women and girls for the purposes of prostitution, to combat organized prostitution activities, and to lessen the nuisance to members of the public that vice activities may cause. These offences include “solicitation for an immoral purpose”, “living on earnings of prostitution of others”, “controlling over persons for purpose of unlawful sexual intercourse or prostitution”, “keeping a vice establishment¹”, and “letting premises for use as a vice establishment”. The maximum penalty of the above offences ranges from a fine of \$10,000 and imprisonment for 6 months, to imprisonment for 14 years. The Police take enforcement actions against the above-mentioned offences, targeting in particular persons controlling prostitutes and operating vice establishments.

5. The law as it currently stands strikes a reasonable balance, taking account of the human rights and privacy of sex workers, the well being of other members of the community as well as the prevailing moral values of the community. Any proposal to amend the existing prostitution-related laws, for example, amending the definition of “vice-establishment”, repealing prostitution-related offences, etc. should be carefully considered from various policy perspectives, and not solely from the angle of law and order. The views from different sectors of the community must be considered thoroughly before changes, if any, are to be made to the existing legislative regime.

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¹ Under the existing legislation, “vice-establishment” refers to premises which are used wholly or mainly for organizing or arranging of prostitution, or used wholly or mainly for the purpose of prostitution by two or more persons.