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Panel on Security

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 8 July 2008**

**Development in the provision of rehabilitation services
by the Correctional Services Department**

Purpose

This paper summarises past discussions by the Panel on Security on the rehabilitation services for offenders under the custody of the Correctional Services Department (CSD).

Background

2. It has been the mission of CSD to provide a safe and humane environment for the detention of prisoners and persons on remand. CSD is also committed to assisting prisoners in their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of comprehensive rehabilitative services.

3. In response to the growing importance of the reformation of offenders, CSD established in January 1998 a new Rehabilitation Division for better coordination of rehabilitative policies and programme development. The Division has since then strived to strengthen CSD's rehabilitative services and programmes, and to cultivate community involvement in the provision of such services. The rehabilitative services provided by CSD include pre-sentence assessment services, prisoners' welfare and counselling services, psychological services, education programmes, work and vocational training as well as supervision services.

Discussions by the Panel on Security

Meeting on 6 January 2000

4. At the Panel meeting on 6 January 2000, Hon Selina CHOW expressed concern that some young offenders might not be interested in mainstream

education. She suggested that consideration be given to developing their skills in areas such as performing arts.

5. The Administration responded that the training for young offenders mainly focused on the development of skills which would enable them to make a living in the future. Besides receiving training in mainstream education, interest groups in areas such as performing arts and music were organised for young offenders. Young offenders identified to have talents in particular areas would be encouraged to further their study or training in that area.

6. Responding to members' enquiry whether young offenders had the opportunity to receive training in information technology and to communicate with the external world through the Internet, the Administration advised that there were computer rooms and multi-media centres inside each young offender institution and information technology training was provided to young offenders. However, for security reason, young offenders were not allowed to communicate with the external world by electronic means.

Meeting on 8 July 2003

7. At its meeting on 8 July 2003, the Panel received views from deputations and discussed with the Administration the rehabilitation programmes conducted by CSD for persons under its custody and the supportive services provided to them by the Social Welfare Department, the Labour Department and the non-governmental organisations after their discharge.

8. The rehabilitated offenders attending the meeting expressed concern that ex-offenders were being discriminated when seeking employment and those who had served long-term prison sentence found it particularly difficult to find a job. They urged the Government to spend more on developing useful courses for rehabilitated offenders, so as to facilitate their reintegration into the society. Members concurred with the rehabilitated offenders that inmates who were imprisoned for a long period of time would be institutionalised and would lose their identity and self-confidence, thereby affecting their reintegration into the society. Members called on the Administration to improve the prison environment and to enhance the counselling and training services provided for inmates/prisoners. Some members held the view that among the measures to help inmates/prisoners reintegrate into the society, none was more effective than the Government and employers taking the lead to employ rehabilitated offenders. These members suggested that the Administration should consider taking affirmative action such as allocating certain portion of jobs in the civil service to be filled by rehabilitated offenders.

9. Elaborating on the work and vocational training provided to prisoners, the Administration advised that CSD had worked closely with the Construction Industry Training Authority to develop courses to help inmates obtain skills accreditation. The Administration also explained that given the overcrowding situation in prison, the effect of institutionalisation on inmates was inevitable.

However, seeing the need to help inmates/prisoners to adapt to their new life after release, aftercare officers of CSD strived for fostering a trustful relationship with inmates/prisoners during the inmates/prisoners' period of detention. They also provided inmates/prisoners with appropriate support and guidance to adapt to the institutional programme, to become aware of their inadequacy and the difficulties ahead. Regarding possible discrimination faced by discharged prisoners, the Administration assured members that as an equal opportunity employer, the Government did not discriminate against ex-offenders when recruiting staff. The Administration would continue with its sustained public education efforts to promote acceptance of rehabilitated offenders by the community at large as well as employers both in the public and private sectors.

Meeting on 3 July 2007

10. At its meeting on 3 July 2007, when the Panel was briefed on the latest developments in the provision of rehabilitative services by CSD, members were informed that with the assistance of the Correctional Service of Canada and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, CSD had developed a Risks and Needs Assessment and Management Protocol for Offenders (the Protocol) for systematic evaluation of offenders' custodial and re-offending risks and their rehabilitative needs. According to the Administration, the Protocol had substantially enhanced CSD's work in prison management and provision of matching rehabilitative programmes.

11. Members asked whether there were countries where similar assessments and programmes had been introduced successfully. As CSD had started conducting assessment of re-offending risks and rehabilitative needs for 1 964 local inmates/prisoners with sentences of two years or above, members enquired about the results of the assessments and whether any new measures had been adopted in view of the results.

12. The Administration 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 had effectively reduced the re-offending risk of inmates and prisoners by over 20%. The Mainland, Japan and Singapore had also indicated interest in introducing such assessment protocol. As the Protocol was a new initiative, there was room for refinement. CSD would take a step-by-step approach in implementing the Protocol, and would further enhance the risks and needs assessment of offenders, delivery of recidivism prevention programmes and social reintegration programmes through regular reviews. With 1 964 local inmates and local prisoners having undergone assessment of re-offending risks and rehabilitative needs, rehabilitative programme matching would be arranged for those in need.

13. On the issue of work and vocational training for offenders, members asked whether there was any requirement on the ratio between useful work and vocational training for adult prisoners. They also expressed concern about the

feedback of inmates/prisoners on these training courses.

14. The Administration responded that all adult prisoners were required to engage in useful work and undergo vocational training under the Prison Rules unless excused on medical grounds. On the other hand, under the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, vocational training and study had to be provided to all young prisoners. To enhance the employability of adult offenders, CSD provided, as a trial scheme, full-time vocational training to eligible adult prisoners at Lai Sun Correctional Institution (LSCI) in 2004 and 2005 on a voluntary basis. Based on the experience gained in the trial scheme, CSD had established and operated a pre-release vocational training centre at LSCI since July 2006 to provide full-time accredited and market-oriented training. Apart from the vocational training provided at LSCI, CSD also provided part-time vocational training courses for prisoners in other adult institutions for both male and female offenders. Upon completion of the courses, prisoners would be arranged to sit for related public examinations for assessing their level of learning and attaining recognised professional qualifications. The feedback from inmates and prisoners on the training provided were generally positive.

15. In response to members' concern as to whether computer training and facilities for offenders were adequate, and whether there were sufficient instructors for computer courses, the Administration advised that there were currently 230 computers for youth offenders and 340 computers for adult offenders in various penal institutions. In the first five months of 2007, CSD had organised 34 computer courses for 360 adult offenders. The instructors of computer courses were volunteers from the CSD Rehabilitation Volunteer Group, which had a membership of more than 200 professionals, teachers and students.

16. Members were generally in support of the work of CSD. Some members however remained of the view that the services provided by the Government for the reintegration of offenders into the society were far from adequate. These members considered that more resources should be allocated for CSD to enhance its rehabilitative services, and adequate supportive services should be provided to inmates/prisoners immediately after release.

17. The Administration advised that CSD would spend \$460.8 million in 2007-2008 on programmes and activities assisting inmates and prisoners to reintegrate into the society. The Administration stressed 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.

Relevant papers

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

Minutes

- (a) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Security on 6 January 2000 [LC Paper No. CB(2)1202/99-00];
- (b) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Security on 8 July 2003 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2996/02-03];
- (c) minutes of meeting of the Panel on Security on 3 July 2007 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2681/06-07];

Papers

- (d) Administration's paper entitled "Development in Rehabilitation Services for Offenders" for the meeting of the Panel on Security on 6 January 2000 [LC Paper No. CB(2)748/99-00(03)];
- (e) Administration's paper entitled "Employment Service Support and Financial Assistance Provided to Adult Rehabilitated Offenders" for the meeting of the Panel on Security on 8 July 2003 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2677/02-03(06)]; and
- (f) Administration's paper entitled "Latest Developments in the Provision of Rehabilitative Services by the Correctional Services Department" for the meeting of the Panel on Security on 3 July 2007 [LC Paper No. CB(2)2284/06-07(01)].

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

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