

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)417/08-09(03)

Ref : CB2/PS/1/08

Panel on Security

**Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Sex Workers
and Searches of Detainees**

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat

Police's handling of sex workers and searches of detainees

Purpose

This paper summarises past discussions of Members on issues relating to Police's handling of sex workers and searches of detainees.

Discussions held by the Panel on Security regarding Police's enforcement actions impacting on sex workers

2. Under the existing laws, the act of prostitution itself is not illegal. According to the Administration, the major objective of Police's enforcement action is to combat other activities that are connected with it, including harbouring or exercising control over a woman for the purposes of prostitution, keeping a vice establishment or permitting or tolerating premises or vessels that one owns or rents to be used for prostitution. Police's anti-vice operations are directed at persons controlling vice activities and operating vice establishments, rather than the sex workers unless the latter are involved in soliciting for an immoral purpose in public places. In taking enforcement actions against the above offences, it is necessary for the Police to demonstrate that sexual services are being offered, payment for those services has been made and the relevant person(s) are controlling the women for the purpose of prostitution, etc. According to the Administration, evidence collection is extremely difficult as vice operators resort to various means to avoid prosecution actions and persons receiving sexual services very seldom come forward to provide the necessary evidence. Hence, it is necessary for the Police to conduct covert operations to gather sufficient evidence for prosecution purpose.

Police's undercover operations against vice activities

3. At the meeting of the Panel on Security (the Panel) on 4 April 2006, members discussed with the Administration the Police's undercover operations against vice activities and received the views of deputations on the subject.

4. Members were concerned about allegations made by deputations attending the meeting about Police officers receiving service involving sexual intercourse or masturbation during undercover operations. Members queried the need for undercover Police officers to receive sexual services during the operation. Some members considered that the Police's internal guidelines governing anti-vice operations should be amended to prohibit Police officers undertaking undercover operations from receiving sexual services including masturbation.

5. The Administration responded that the aim of the Police's undercover operations was to gather sufficient evidence for prosecution purpose. As it was necessary for the Police to demonstrate that sexual services had been offered and payment for those services had been made in order to institute prosecution, a limited extent of body contact was inevitable in order to gather sufficient evidence for the purpose. However, it was clearly stated in the Police's internal guidelines governing anti-vice operations that sexual intercourse and oral sex were strictly prohibited. If it was essential for the Police officer concerned to receive some form of service in order to maintain his cover, the extent of service should be restricted to that as required by operational needs.

6. The Administration stressed that undercover Police officers performing anti-vice operations had to act in compliance with the law and the Police's internal guidelines. Police officers involved in such operations were carefully selected having regard to their psychological conditions and integrity. Before each operation, the selected officers would be briefed on the objectives of the operation and reminded not to treat sex workers impolitely.

7. At the Panel meeting on 27 October 2008, in the context of discussing the Fourth and Fifth Reports of the People's Republic of China under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment – Part Two: Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, members reiterated their deep concern about Police officers' abuse of power in the course of taking enforcement actions against sex workers.

8. Members expressed concern about allegations that some Police officers had received free sexual services during undercover operations. Members queried the necessity of allowing undercover Police officers to receive sexual services during the operation.

9. The Administration advised that the aim of undercover anti-vice operations was confined to evidence gathering. The Police had drawn up stringent guidelines for such operations (including the scope and extent of the evidence to be gathered, and the extent of body contact with sex workers). Officers taking enforcement actions were required to comply with the Police's internal guidelines governing anti-vice operations. The guidelines, revised and implemented in late 2007, reinforced the key principle that in the process of gathering evidence, Police officers undertaking undercover operations were not allowed to receive oral sex or sexual intercourse service offered by sex workers.

10. The Administration emphasised that the Police was very concerned about the conduct of Police officers. Any persons who felt aggrieved by any Police actions, including actions taken in anti-vice operations and body searches conducted on detainees, could make a formal complaint. All complaints against members of the Police Force were taken seriously. The relevant authorities would investigate into the complaints and take actions as appropriate. The Administration urged the parties concerned to provide detailed information on alleged misconduct and abuse of power by Police officers so that necessary investigations could be carried out.

Deliberations of the Panel on Security and the Subcommittee on Police's handling of searches of detainees

11. On 5 October 2007, the Police arrested a group of 15 protesters who attempted to stop the demolition work at Lee Tung Street in Wan Chai. It was reported that the Police had conducted searches on the protesters involving the complete removal of clothing unnecessarily and in an inappropriate manner when the latter were detained in the Police station, after the departure of their lawyers. Arising from the allegations made by those persons arrested in the Lee Tung Street case, the Panel and the Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Searches of Detainees (the Subcommittee) formed under the Panel held a number of meetings to discuss the Police's practices regarding the handling of searches of detainees.

Police's practices regarding the searches of detainees

12. At the Panel meeting on 30 October 2007, some members expressed concern about allegations that the Police had abused its power when conducting searches of detainees. Noting that persons in the Lee Tung Street case were arrested for causing obstruction to a public place and obstructing a Police officer in the execution of duty, these members queried the justifications for conducting strip searches on these persons, and whether such searches had been conducted in compliance with the Police's guidelines. They considered that the reasons for conducting such a search should be explained to the persons being searched and recorded.

13. The Administration responded that the Duty Officer of a Police station was responsible for handling matters in respect of persons detained in Police custody. The Duty Officer was under a duty to search an arrested person prior to detention in Police facilities and the extent to which the search was to be conducted was to be determined by the prevailing circumstances. The Duty Officer must be prepared to justify the extent of the search he had authorised. As a matter of principle, Police officers must inform the persons being searched of the purpose and reasons for such a search before it was conducted. Specific rules governing these had been laid down in the Police General Orders (PGO) and the Force Procedures Manual (FPM). Some members considered that the provisions in PGO and FPM relating to the handling of searches of detainees had not been drafted in such a way that struck an appropriate balance between law enforcement and the protection of human rights. They held the view that the Police should conduct a full review on the relevant provisions.

14. Members were also concerned about the keeping of records of searches involving the complete removal of clothing. They sought information on the number of such searches conducted by the Police in the past three years.

15. The Administration advised that a search of such a nature was recorded in either the Police's Communal Information System (CIS) or the police notebook of the Duty Officer who authorised the search. The technical design of CIS and large number of diverse entries contained in the system rendered it difficult for the Police to discern the relevant entries for compilation of the requested statistics. It was also not practical to conduct a manual search of all the police notebooks used by members of the Police Force in the past three years.

16. The Panel received the views of deputations on the Police's handling of searches of detainees at its meeting on 4 December 2007. Some members pointed out that the Basic Law (BL) prohibited arbitrary or unlawful search of the body of any resident. The Hong Kong Bill of Rights (BOR) also provided that no one should be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and all persons deprived of their liberty should be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. These members considered that what the Police had done in the Lee Tung Street case was in contravention of BL and BOR. They enquired whether the Police had issued guidelines setting out the constitutional obligations of Police officers under these articles.

17. The Administration responded that PGO had been drawn up having regard to the provisions in BL, BOR and international human rights treaties. When exercising their power, all Police officers had to comply with the legal requirements which included the constitutional freedom and rights guaranteed for every individual. During their training, all Police officers had been reminded that the power of Police officers to search detainees had to be exercised with due regard to proportionality and necessity. Police officers who

did not comply with the Police's guidelines when exercising such power were liable to disciplinary action and criminal sanction.

Review of the Police's practices regarding the searches of detainees

18. On 14 December 2007, the Panel was informed that the Police would conduct a two-stage review of its existing practices regarding the handling of searches of detainees, having regard to the views and concerns raised by members at the Panel meetings on 30 October and 4 December 2007. In the first stage, the Police would review what immediate improvement measures they could implement in the interim without jeopardising the court proceedings in the Lee Tung Street case. In the second stage, the Police would consider, upon the conclusion of legal proceedings on the court case, whether additional measures were warranted to further improve the handling of searches of detainees.

Outcome of the first stage review on the Police's practices regarding the searches of detainees and proposed improvement measures

19. At its meeting on 4 March 2008, the Panel was briefed on the outcome of the first stage review conducted by the Police and the proposed measures to improve the procedures for searching detainees.

20. Some members expressed concern that the revised PGO and the proposed internal guidelines might allow the Police to abuse its power and the dignity of detainees could still not be protected. They suggested that PGO should contain a specific section on strip search. Such a section should cover the circumstances under which strip searches would be conducted, how such searches were to be carried out and how the human rights, privacy and dignity of detainees could be protected during such searches. In addition, strip search should only be authorised by the most senior ranking officer in a Police station instead of the Duty Officer of the Police station. They also suggested that the specific circumstances under which strip searches would be conducted should be included in the Police's internal guidelines. It should be stipulated in the guidelines that a strip search should be considered only when there were no other alternatives. Any officer who contravened the guidelines should be subject to disciplinary action.

21. There was a suggestion that the Police should explore the possibility of acquisition of equipment to assist it in the conduct of searches, with a view to minimising the need for strip searches and providing better protection for the privacy, human rights and dignity of detainees.

22. Having considered the views and suggestions of members, the Administration advised the Panel that the Police would actively explore the following -

- (a) the acquisition of equipment to assist the Police in conducting searches of detainees with a view to minimising the need for the complete removal of clothing during body searches;
- (b) further enhancement of PGO and the proposed internal guidelines to address members' concerns regarding searches involving the complete removal of clothing;
- (c) inclusion of examples in the proposed internal guidelines to provide clear guidance to officers in determining the scope of searches on detainees based on the prevailing circumstances and on a case-by-case basis;
- (d) fine-tuning the wording of the relevant forms and the proposed internal guidelines to reflect the detainees' rights more accurately; and
- (e) refinement of the proposed internal guidelines to stipulate that searches of detainees involving the complete removal of clothing should be considered as a last resort to discharge the Police's statutory functions and fulfil their duty of care to all persons detained in their custody, and that any officer contravening the guidelines might be subject to disciplinary action.

23. Regarding the ranking of authorising officers, members were informed that the Police considered it appropriate for the Duty Officer of a Police station to authorise a search on a detainee involving the complete removal of clothing. The Duty Officer was normally at the Station Sergeant rank and had many years of police experience.

24. In June 2008, the Administration informed the Panel that the Police was consulting its legal advisors, with a view to finalising its new guidelines and improved procedures for searches of detainees for implementation in July 2008.

Police's new arrangements for the searches of detainees

25. On 27 June 2008, the Administration provided the Panel with the finalised documents relating to the Police's new arrangements for the handling of searches of detainees to be implemented from 1 July 2008. These documents, comprising revised provisions in PGO and FPM, a Custody Search Form and the Guidelines on the Searching of Detained Persons (the Guidelines), were discussed at the Panel meeting on 8 July 2008.

26. Some members expressed concern that the revisions made to PGO and FPM and the Guidelines had provided the Police with wider powers of search which were open to abuse. They maintained the view that searches involving

the removal of underwear should only be authorised by the most senior ranking officer in a Police station. Some members suggested that an independent monitoring mechanism should be put in place to monitor the Police's searches of detainees involving removal of underwear. They considered that with the advancement of technology, the Administration should explore the feasibility of deploying devices that would enable the Police to detect any article kept by a person to be detained without complete removal of clothing.

27. The Administration responded that the new guidelines and improved procedures for searches of detainees had provided appropriate safeguards to prevent arbitrary searches. It was made explicit and clear that a search involving the removal of underwear should not be conducted as a matter of routine but only in circumstances with strong justification. The new guidelines also stated that a search involving the removal of clothing should be conducted with proper regard to the privacy and dignity of the detained person and in accordance with Hong Kong's human rights obligations. Revisions were made to PGO to require that accurate records be kept in CIS to record the search conducted on a particular detainee and the scope of the search. The officer conducting the search would be required to explain to the detainee the reasons for and the scope of the search before the search was conducted, and the Duty Officer should ensure that the purposefully designed Custody Search Form would be served on the detainee, with the contents explained to the detainee. The form set out clearly the reasons for and the scope of the search in question, the searching procedures, and the rights and entitlements of the person to be searched. The detainee would be asked to acknowledge and sign on the form after such explanation and prior to the search. The Administration informed the Panel that the Police had procured some 120 hand-held metal detectors to facilitate the conduct of searches of persons to be detained.

28. Notwithstanding the explanations provided by the Administration, the Panel decided that the Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Searches of Detainees, which was previously appointed by the Panel and put on the waiting list for activation pursuant to the House Committee's decision on 14 December 2007, should be activated to continue discussions with the Administration to seek further improvements to the new arrangements.

29. At the Panel meeting on 27 October 2008, in the context of discussing the Fourth and Fifth Reports of the People's Republic of China under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment – Part Two: Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, members reiterated their deep concern about Police officers' abuse of power in handling of searches on detainees.

30. Members noted that the Police had conducted a total of 1 674 custody searches involving removal of underwear (Level III searches) between July and September 2008. Some members considered the number unacceptably high,

and queried the necessity of conducting Level III searches on all detainees in these 1 674 cases. They requested the Administration to consider appointing a senior ranking Police officer at Assistant Commissioner of Police level to conduct random checking of the search records filed in the Police's CIS to ensure that all the searches were conducted with strong justifications.

31. The Administration responded that Police officers were prudent and cautious in carrying out searches involving removal of underwear. Level III searches were those involving the removal/partial removal/looking into/search and request for removal of items of clothing usually worn to cover a person's private parts. Not all of the 1 674 searches that were classified as Level III involved the actual removal of underwear.

32. Some members considered the inclusion of searches involving partial removal of/looking into clothing as Level III searches inappropriate. They queried whether the figure of 1 674 Level III searches could accurately reflect the actual situation of Police's conducting of strip searches. They requested the Administration to provide information enumerating the different forms of searches under Level III, with a breakdown of the nature of the offences involved in those 1 674 searches and complaints received against the three levels of searches. Some members took the view that the Administration should review and make improvement to the three-level classification system, say, by having an additional level of searches to differentiate strip searches which involved the complete removal of underwear from all other forms of searches under Level III.

Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Searches of Detainees

33. Following the decision at the Panel meeting on 8 July 2008, the Subcommittee held three meetings with the Administration between 14 and 17 July 2008, including one meeting with 13 organisations. In the course of deliberations, the Subcommittee expressed concern on the following issues -

- (a) the requirement to search all detainees;
- (b) rank of officers who might authorise a search involving removal of underwear;
- (c) independent mechanism for monitoring search of detainees involving complete removal of clothing;
- (d) procedures for conducting a search of a detainee;
- (e) use of equipment to assist Police officers in the conduct of searches;

- (f) search of detainees with special needs;
- (g) whether a detainee could be required to adopt certain postures or to perform certain acts during a search;
- (h) consequences of violation of the requirements under PGO, FPM or the Guidelines;
- (i) need for search of a detainee after his return to a temporary holding area or detention cell; and
- (j) further revisions to PGO, FPM, the Guidelines and the Custody Search Form.

34. When concluding its work, the Subcommittee expressed the view that the new arrangements for the search of detainees had not struck a proper balance between ensuring the safety of detainees and preventing possible abuse of power by Police officers. The Subcommittee urged the Administration to further improve the arrangements to enhance the protection of the rights of detainees and safeguard them from possible abuse of power, especially unreasonable and unnecessary searches involving complete removal of clothing. It also recommended that the issues as referred to in paragraph 33 above should be followed up by the Panel. Details of the Subcommittee's deliberations were set out in its report to the Panel, a copy of which is in **Appendix I**.

Relevant papers

35. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix II**.

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Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)2692/07-08

Ref : CB2/PS/2/07

Paper for the Panel on Security

Report of the Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Searches of Detainees

Purpose

This paper reports on the deliberations of the Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Searches of Detainees (the Subcommittee).

The Subcommittee

2. On 5 October 2007, the Police arrested a group of 15 protesters who attempted to stop the demolition work at Lee Tung Street in Wan Chai. It was subsequently reported that the Police had conducted searches on the protesters involving the complete removal of clothing when the latter were detained in the police station, after the departure of their lawyers. Arising from the allegations made by those persons arrested in the Lee Tung Street case, the Panel on Security (the Panel) held a number of meetings to discuss the Police's practices regarding the handling of searches of detainees.

3. At its meeting on 4 December 2007, the Panel decided to appoint a subcommittee to study issues relating to the Police's practices in handling searches of detainees. The Subcommittee was put on the waiting list for activation pursuant to the House Committee's decision on 14 December 2007. In the interim, the Panel discussed the outcome of the Police's stage one review on the handling of searches of detainees at its meeting on 4 March 2008. On 27 June 2008, the Administration provided the Panel with the finalized documents relating to the Police's new arrangements for the handling of searches of detainees to be implemented from 1 July 2008. These documents comprised revised provisions in the Police General Orders (PGO) and the Force Procedures Manual (FPM), a Custody Search Form and the Guidelines on the Searching of Detained Persons (the Guidelines). The Panel further discussed the subject at its meeting on 8 July 2008 and decided that the Subcommittee should be activated.

4. The terms of reference and the membership of the Subcommittee are in **Appendices I and II** respectively.

5. Under the chairmanship of Hon James TO, the Subcommittee has held three meetings with the Administration between 14 and 17 July 2008, including one meeting with 13 organizations. In addition, the Subcommittee has considered a submission from one other organization. A list of organizations which have given views to the Subcommittee is in **Appendix III**.

Deliberations of the Subcommittee

The requirement to search all detainees

6. The new arrangements for searches of detainees confirm that a search will be conducted on all persons to be detained in police custody. Members are concerned that this would widen the Police's power to conduct searches on detainees. To better protect the privacy, human rights and dignity of detainees, members are of the view that whether a search should be conducted on a detainee should be determined on a case-by-case basis having regard to the prevailing circumstances. The scope of search should be no more than what is rational and proportionate.

7. The Administration has advised that at common law, the Police has a duty to take all reasonable measures to ensure that detainees do not escape or assist others to do so, do not injure themselves or others, do not destroy or dispose of evidence, and do not commit further crime. The Administration has also advised that its legal advice has confirmed that it is lawful for the Police to take such reasonable measures as are necessary to carry out these duties, and that the search of a detainee, if properly conducted, with the scope of the search on each occasion to be determined having regard to the prevailing circumstances and on a case-by-case basis, would not be an unlawful or considered arbitrary interference with the detainee's privacy or personal integrity as the purpose of the search is legitimate.

8. The Administration has explained that under the new arrangements, a search of a detainee may involve non-removal of clothing, removal of clothing or removal of underwear. The scope of each search is case specific and should be no more than what is rational and proportionate to achieve the purpose referred to in paragraph 7 above under the prevailing circumstances. Under the new arrangements for the searches of detainees, a search involving removal of underwear should not be conducted routinely, but only in circumstances with strong justification.

9. Members have asked the Administration to explain the legal grounds on which the decision to conduct searches on all detainees is based, and whether the "reasonable suspicion" test has to be applied in deciding whether to conduct a search.

10. The Administration has replied that the "reasonable suspicion" test is not a factor when determining whether a detainee should be searched prior to detention. At common law, the Police has a duty of care towards detainees and has to ensure that detainees do not escape or assist others to do so, do not injure themselves or others, do not destroy or dispose of evidence and do not commit further crime. This is confirmed by the judgment in *Lindley v Rutter* [1981] QB 128. The Administration is of the view that a search of each and every person prior to his being detained in a Temporary Holding Area (THA) or detention cell is a reasonable measure for the above-mentioned purposes. The scope of each search would, however, be case specific and should be no more than what is rational and proportionate to achieve the purpose under the prevailing circumstances. Members has noted that the court pointed out in *Lindley v Rutter* that "What can be never justified is the adoption of any particular measures without regard to all the circumstances of the particular case".

Rank of officers who may authorize a search involving removal of underwear

11. The new arrangements retain the previous practice for a Duty Officer of a police station (DO) to determine the scope of search on a detainee. Members are concerned that in view of the heavy workload of a DO and the requirement for the scope of search to be determined having regard to a number of factors referred to in FPM as well as the fact that the officer-in-charge of a case may be of a higher rank than a DO, a higher-ranking officer, such as the most senior ranking officer in a police station, should be responsible for authorizing any search involving complete removal of clothing.

12. The Administration has advised that a DO is the most appropriate officer to authorize a search of a detainee and determine the scope of search. A DO is normally of Station Sergeant rank and has substantial knowledge of police work as well as ample field experience. He is the officer-in-charge of any person taken into the custody of the Police and is accountable for his decision on the scope of search on a detainee. The decision of a DO in respect of the search of a detainee for the fulfilment of the Police's duty of care to detainees and to ensure the safety of others who may come into contact with them is independent and should not be influenced by any other police officers.

13. The Administration has also pointed out that the work of DOs is not unsupervised. Operation Support Sub-unit Commanders are required to review all cases entered into the Police's Communal Information System (CIS) by the DOs of their respective units to ensure that relevant orders and procedures are adhered to.

14. Members find the Administration's argument not convincing. They consider that a police officer at the rank of Chief Inspector of Police or above should also possess many years of police experience. Members remain of the view that a higher-ranking officer, such as the most senior ranking officer in a police station, should be responsible for authorizing any search involving complete removal of clothing so as to enhance public confidence in the mechanism and accountability. They also suggest that the Administration should clearly set out in PGO and FPM the criteria for conducting searches involving complete removal of clothing, and the requirement that a search involving complete removal of clothing should be conducted only when it is inevitable and strictly necessary.

15. Members also suggest that forums or exchange sessions between DOs and Legislative Council Members should be arranged to enhance DOs' awareness of human rights concerns.

Independent mechanism for monitoring search of detainees involving complete removal of clothing

16. Under the new arrangements, at least two police officers of the same gender as the detainee will be present during a search. Members are of the view that there should be an independent mechanism for monitoring searches involving complete removal of clothing so as to prevent abuse of power by police officers. Such a type of search should be allowed to be conducted in the presence of a third party, such as a lawyer, Justice of the Peace, clergyman, family member of the detainee or the most senior ranking officer in a police station, if the detainee so prefers. Members also suggest that the process of search should be video-recorded, if the person being searched so requests, to better protect a detainee from abuse of power by police officers in the process of search.

17. The Administration has responded that if a legal representative is at the police station when a detainee is to be searched, and if the detainee so requests, the DO may allow the legal representative to be present during the search as long as there is no undue hindrance to the detention process.

18. The Administration has also pointed out that multiple safeguards have been built into the new arrangements to prevent any possible abuse during a search. Before a search is carried out, the detainee is informed that he may raise any concerns about the search to the DO, who will in turn document the concerns in CIS and reconsider the scope of search. The DO's decision, together with his reasoning and any other actions taken, will be conveyed to the detainee and recorded in CIS. Any detainee aggrieved by the search could lodge a complaint with the Complaints Against Police Office. In view of members' concern, the Administration will consider allowing the process of search to be video-recorded, if the detainee so requests.

19. Members are concerned that some detainees could not afford the service of lawyers. They remain of the view that a Justice of the Peace, family member of the detainee, clergyman or the most senior ranking officer in a police station should be allowed to be present during the conduct of searches involving complete removal of clothing.

Procedures for conducting a search of a detainee

20. To facilitate members' understanding of the procedures for search of a detainee, members have requested the Administration to provide a copy of the Police's training materials on the procedures for conducting a search on a detainee. Noting that the Division of Criminal Justice of the State of New Jersey in the United States of America has uploaded the Strip Search and Body Cavity Search Requirements and Procedures for Police Officers onto its website, members have suggested that more information on the procedures for the search of a detainee should be uploaded onto the Police's website for access by members of the public.

21. The Administration has replied that training is provided to police officers on the conduct of searches of persons to familiarize them with the relevant principles and procedures. Officers are instructed on the classification of different types of searches, the procedural steps for conducting a search and other specific operational issues that should be taken into account in conducting searches. Classroom teaching is supplemented by practical instruction. However, given that all searches are conducted in the same manner, the Police consider that the disclosure of training materials, which contain details of how searches are to be conducted, would reveal the Police's operational tactics and hence undermine its prevention and detection of crime. The Administration will consider the suggestion of providing more information on the procedures of the search of detainees to the public.

Use of equipment to assist police officers in the conduct of searches

22. Members are of the view that the complete removal of clothing during a search should be minimized. They suggest that the Police should explore the possibility of acquisition of equipment to assist police officers in the conduct of searches, with a view to minimizing the need for searches involving complete removal of clothing and providing better protection for the privacy, human rights and dignity of detainees. Members noted that the police of the United Kingdom are reported to deploy infrared devices to assist police officers in the conduct of searches.

23. The Administration has advised that 120 metal detectors have recently been procured by the Police for assisting police officers in conducting searches on

detainees. The Police will explore the use of infra-red equipment in the conduct of search of detainees.

Search of detainees with special needs

24. Under the new arrangements, a uniformed serviceman is allowed to retain such items of uniform and equipment as may be necessary to enable him to appear properly dressed before the court. Members have asked whether similar considerations could be given to detainees who have special requests concerning dress code, such as the wearing of head-dress, as required by their religion. Members consider that additional procedures or measures should be adopted when conducting searches on detainees who require special care or attention, such as minors, the mentally disabled or transsexuals.

25. The Administration has advised that the Guidelines allow a detainee to retain his head-dress, if the wearing of such a head-dress is required by his faith or custom, except during the period when the detainee is not under close supervision. Any request from a detainee for the retention of a certain item of clothing or article is to be considered by DO on a case-by-case basis. Under no circumstances should a detainee be allowed to carry any hard or sharp object in the cell for safety reason. At the request of members, the Administration has agreed to consider spelling out this point explicitly in FPM and consider introducing additional procedures or measures for searches of detainees who require special care or attention, such as minors, the mentally disabled and transsexuals.

Whether a detainee can be required to adopt certain postures or to perform certain acts during a search

26. Members have expressed concern about whether a detainee could be required to adopt certain insulting or degrading postures or perform unnecessary acts during a search, and whether police officers who require a detainee to do so would be in contravention of the new arrangements.

27. The Administration has responded that each search should be conducted with proper regard to the privacy and dignity of the detainee. DOs will make every practicable effort to minimize embarrassment to the detainee in the search process. The DO who authorizes a search needs to justify the manner in which the search is carried out, including why the detainee is requested to adopt a certain posture during a search. In particular, the DO must justify his decision if he requires a detainee to perform a specific act during the search. The DO's decision and the acts required will be recorded in CIS.

28. Members request the Administration to consider spelling out explicitly in PGO and FPM that any request for a detainee to adopt a certain posture during a search should be subject to the necessity and proportionality tests.

Consequences of violation of the requirements under the Police General Orders, Force Procedures Manual or the Guidelines on the Searching of Detainees

29. Members are concerned that PGO, FPM and the Guidelines may not be legally binding on police officers. They have asked whether there is any punishment for police officers who violate the requirements under the new arrangements.

30. The Administration has pointed out that "contravention of police regulations, or any police orders, whether written or verbal" is one of the disciplinary offences under the Police (Discipline) Regulations (Cap. 232A). PGO are considered as written orders with which police officers must comply, while FPM and the Guidelines seek to explain the internal police procedures in a more detailed way. The recurrent or blatant disregard of PGO or FPM would render an officer liable to disciplinary actions.

Need for search of a detainee after his return to a temporary holding area or detention cell

31. The new arrangements retain the existing requirement that if a detainee is removed from a THA or detention cell for any reason, he will be searched on his return prior to being detained again in a THA or detention cell. Members are concerned that this may mean subsequent searches are conducted arbitrarily without regard to the circumstances of the particular case.

32. The Administration has advised that notwithstanding that a detainee will likely be closely supervised by a police officer for the full period when the detainee is taken outside a THA or detention cell, it will be difficult for the police officer to be totally certain that the detainee does not get hold of any items during the period with which the detainee could harm himself or others. To fulfil the Police's duty of care to the detainee and to ensure the safety of others who may come into contact with the detainee, it is necessary for the Police to search the detainee again before his return to a THA or detention cell. However, the scope of search will be decided upon the prevailing circumstances and available information.

33. The Administration has also advised that police officers are required to record the reasons for the temporary removal of a detainee from a THA or detention cell under the detainee's movement record in CIS. This provides a strong safeguard against possible abuse of the movement procedure by, say, moving a detainee in and out of THA or cell purely to increase the number of searches to be conducted, thereby using such searches as a punitive measure against the person.

Other revisions to the Police General Orders, Force Procedures Manual, the Guidelines on the Searching of Detainees and the Custody Search Form

34. To better protect the rights of detainees in the process of search and prevent possible abuse of power, members have suggested and the Administration has agreed to consider the following revisions to PGO, FPM, the Guidelines and the Custody Search Form -

- (a) to give a clearer indication that searches involving complete removal of clothing should only be conducted in very restrictive circumstances;
- (b) to include references to the relevant provisions of the Basic Law and international conventions regarding the protection of human rights in respect of detainees in PGO and FPM;
- (c) to better reflect a detainee's right in raising objection to the scope of search when being so informed by DOs;
- (d) to make it clear that it is not mandatory for a detainee to sign on the Custody Search Form;
- (e) to require the authorizing officer to record in the Custody Search Form more detailed justifications for conducting a search involving removal of underwear;
- (f) to allow a male detainee to retain his underwear, as is the case for a female detainee;
- (g) to include typical search procedures in the guidelines;
- (h) to clarify the meaning of "persons to be detained in police custody";
- (i) to spell out clearly that only persons whose presence is necessary for conducting a search are allowed to be present during a search; and
- (j) to spell out explicitly the requirement for police officers to keep accurate record of all searches.

Conclusion

35. The Subcommittee concludes that the new arrangements for the search of detainees have not struck a proper balance between ensuring the safety of detainees and preventing possible abuse of power. It urges the Administration to

further improve the arrangements to enhance the protection of the rights of detainees and safeguard them from possible abuse of power, especially unreasonable and unnecessary searches involving complete removal of clothing.

Recommendation

36. The Subcommittee recommends that the issues raised by the Subcommittee should be followed up by the Panel in the next term.

Advice Sought

37. Members are invited to note the deliberations of the Subcommittee.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
25 July 2008

Appendix I

Panel on Security

Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Searches of Detainees

Terms of Reference

To study issues relating to the Police's practices in handling searches of detainees, and to make recommendations to the Panel where necessary.

Panel on Security

Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Searches of Detainees

Membership list

Chairman	Hon James TO Kun-sun
Members	Hon Margaret NG Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung
	(Total : 5 Members)
Clerk	Mr Raymond LAM
Legal Adviser	Mr LEE Yu-sung
Date	14 July 2008

Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Searches of Detainees

A. Organizations which have given oral representation to the Subcommittee

1. Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor
2. Justice and Peace Commission of the Hong Kong Catholic Diocese
3. Civil Human Rights Front
4. Migrant Support Network
5. JJJ Association
6. Zi Teng
7. Hong Kong Christian Institute
8. The Association for the Advancement of Feminism
9. Action for REACH OUT
10. A Group of Citizens Who Concern About the Democratize of Town Planning, But Unjustifiably Detained, Molted and Suppressed by the Police
11. Midnight Blue
12. Civil Right Action Group
13. Hong Kong Domestic Workers General Union

B. Organization which has provided written submission only

Society for Community Organization

**List of relevant documents on
Police's handling of sex workers and searches of detainees**

Date of meeting	Meeting	Document / Paper No.
17 December 2003	Legislative Council	Question raised by Hon Emily LAU on complaints about abuse of power by police officers towards sex workers (Question 12)
14 January 2004	Legislative Council	Question raised by Hon Audrey EU on body contact between police officers and prostitutes in the course of anti-vice operations (Question 2)
4 April 2006	Panel on Security	Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)79/06-07)
		Administration's paper entitled "Police's undercover operations against vice activities" (LC Paper No. CB(2)1565/05-06(05))
		Supplementary information provided by the Administration on Police's undercover operations against vice activities (LC Paper No. CB(2)3021/05-06(01))
30 October 2007	Panel on Security	Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)452/07-08)
		Administration's paper entitled "Police's Practices Regarding Handling of Searches of Detainees" (LC Paper No. CB(2)167/07-08(03))
4 December 2007	Panel on Security	Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)1031/07-08)
		Administration's paper entitled "Police's Practices Regarding Handling of Searches of Detainees and Related Matters" (LC Paper No. CB(2)451/07-08(03))
		Administration's letter dated 18 February 2008 on "Searching of detainees by the Police" (LC Paper No. CB(2)1124/07-08(01))

Date of meeting	Meeting	Document / Paper No.
4 March 2008	Panel on Security	Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)2087/07-08)
		Administration's paper entitled "Report on Stage One of the Review on the Police's Practices regarding the Searches of Detainees" (LC Paper No. CB(2)1209/07-08(03))
		Administration's letter dated 9 April 2008 on "Police's review of the existing practices regarding handling of searches of detainees" (LC Paper No. CB(2)1546/07-08(01))
8 July 2008	Panel on Security	Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)2822/07-08)
		Administration's letter dated 12 June 2008 on "Review of the Handling of Searches of Detainees" (LC Paper No. CB(2)2241/07-08(01))
		Administration's letter dated 27 June 2008 on "Police's review of the existing practices regarding handling of searches of detainees" (LC Paper No. CB(2)2439/07-08(01))
14, 16 & 17 July 2008	Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Searches of Detainees	Report of the Subcommittee on Police's Handling of Searches of Detainees (LC Paper No. CB(2)2692/07-08)
27 October 2008	Panel on Security	Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)348/08-09)
		Administration's paper entitled "Fourth and Fifth Reports of the People's Republic of China under the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment – Part Two: Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" (LC Paper No. CB(2)129/08-09(03))