

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1946/09-10
(These minutes have been seen
by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PL/SE

Panel on Security

Minutes of meeting
held on Tuesday, 4 May 2010, at 2:00 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP (Chairman)
Hon James TO Kun-sun (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Dr Hon Margaret NG
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong, GBS
Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP
Hon Audrey EU Yuet-mee, SC, JP
Hon Andrew LEUNG Kwan-yuen, SBS, JP
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan
Hon CHAN Hak-kan
Hon WONG Kwok-kin, BBS
Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP
Hon Paul TSE Wai-chun
- Members attending** : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
- Members absent** : Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, GBS, JP
Hon CHIM Pui-chung
- Public Officers attending** : Item IV
Mr LAI Tung-kwok, SBS, IDSM, JP
Under Secretary for Security

Mr David LAU
Principal Assistant Secretary for Security (A)

Items V & VI

Mr LAI Tung-kwok, SBS, IDSM, JP
Under Secretary for Security

Mr Paul CHENG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Security (B)

Mr CHAN Chor-kam, FSDSM
Deputy Director of Fire Services

Mr WONG Sai-chuen, FSMSM
Chief Fire Officer (Headquarters)
Fire Services Department

**Attendance
by invitation**

: Item VI

Hong Kong Fire Services Department Staffs General Association

Mr CHIU Sin-chung
Chairman

Mr WONG Kwok-ying
Deputy Chairman

Hong Kong Fire Services Officers Association

Mr LAU Hon-wa
Chairman

Mr MAN Siu-fung
Vice-Chairman

**Clerk in
attendance**

: Mr Raymond LAM
Chief Council Secretary (2) 1

**Staff in
attendance**

: Ms Connie FUNG
Senior Assistant Legal Adviser 1

Mr Bonny LOO
Assistant Legal Adviser 3

Miss Josephine SO
Senior Council Secretary (2) 1

Ms Kiwi NG
Legislative Assistant (2) 1

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes of previous meeting
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1407/09-10)

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2010 were confirmed.

II. Information papers issued since the last meeting

2. Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last meeting.

III. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1409/09-10(01) and (02))

3. Members agreed that the following items would be discussed at the next regular meeting to be held on 1 June 2010 at 2:30 pm -

- (a) Enhancement of computer systems of the Immigration Department and the extension of e-Channel services;
- (b) Security matters under the "Framework Agreement on Guangdong/Hong Kong Co-operation"; and
- (c) Integrity management and behavioural guidelines of the Hong Kong Police Force.

IV. Adaptation of military-related references in the laws of Hong Kong
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1409/09-10(03) and (04))

4. Under Secretary for Security ("US for S") briefed Members on the principles to be adopted for adapting military-related references in the laws of Hong Kong and the work progress regarding the adaptation of such military-related references, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper.

5. Ms Audrey EU expressed concern about the Administration's slow progress in amending and adapting the military-related references in the laws of Hong Kong. She asked whether the Administration had encountered any particular difficulties in taking forward this adaptation of laws exercise.

Action

6. In response, US for S advised that there were a substantial number of military-related references in Hong Kong laws which required adaptation to bring them into conformity with the Basic Law and the status of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ("HKSAR"). As listed out in Annex B to the Administration's paper, a total of 86 Ordinances and items of subsidiary legislation, involving various policy bureaux and government departments, would be covered by this adaptation of laws exercise. For this reason, the Administration needed some time to conduct internal consultation before finalizing the proposed adaptations. US for S also advised that Article 10 of the Garrison Law provided that HKSAR should consult the Hong Kong Garrison when formulating any policy or drafting any legislative proposals which concerned the Hong Kong Garrison. While the Administration was consulting the Hong Kong Garrison on the detailed proposals for the adaptation of military-related references in Hong Kong laws, the drafting of the relevant legislation was conducted in parallel. The Administration would introduce the bill into the Legislative Council ("LegCo") as soon as possible.

7. Ms Audrey EU expressed dissatisfaction with the Administration's response. She said that the Administration failed to explain the reasons for taking such a long time to formulate the adaptation proposals. She sought clarification whether the slow progress of work was due to delay in consultation with the Hong Kong Garrison. Echoing Ms EU's view, Dr Margaret NG said that the discussion on amending and adapting the military-related references in Hong Kong laws had started since the Reunification in 1997. Expressing disappointment at the slow progress of this law amendment exercise, she queried whether the lack of coordination amongst government departments was a crucial factor causing the prolonged delay in finalizing the adaptation proposals.

8. In response, US for S advised that the Adaptation of Laws Programme was divided into phases. It should be noted that since the First LegCo, 56 adaptation of laws bills had already been introduced. Regarding the adaptation of military-related references, as the exercise involved a significant number of policy bureaux and government departments and required consultation with the Hong Kong Garrison, it needed time before the proposed adaptations could be introduced into LegCo. US for S said that the Administration did not see any particular problems in the working relationship amongst policy bureaux and government departments or in the consultation with the Hong Kong Garrison. He assured Members that the Administration would endeavour to expedite the introduction of a bill on the adaptation of military-related references in the laws of Hong Kong.

9. In response to Dr Margaret NG's enquiry about the legislative timetable for the introduction of the amendment bill, US for S advised that the Administration aimed to introduce the bill into LegCo before the end of 2010.

Action

V. Replacement of a crash fire tender in the Airport Fire Contingent
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1409/09-10(05) and (06))

10. US for S briefed Members on the Administration's proposal to procure a new Crash Fire Tender ("CFT") to replace the existing CFT R42 in the Airport Fire Contingent ("AFC") of the Fire Services Department ("FSD"), as detailed in the Administration's paper.

11. Dr Philip WONG and Ms Audrey EU noted with concern that the proposed replacement CFT would come into service in December 2011. They asked whether the Administration could further shorten the processing time, so as to expedite the procurement and commissioning of the new CFT.

12. In response, US for S and Deputy Director of Fire Services ("DDFS") advised that -

- (a) fire appliances were purpose-built specialized vehicles with unique specifications. As the manufacturer had already ceased the production of the model to which the existing CFT R42 belonged and hence there was no ready-made vehicles available for sale. Upon receipt of the procurement order, the supplier concerned would buy a vehicle chassis from a vehicle manufacturer, and then build the bodywork according to FSD's requirements and specifications. It was a current market practice that about 12 to 18 months would be allowed for the construction and delivery of the vehicle after the award of procurement contract. Some minor modification works, such as installation of communications equipment and stowage racks, painting of livery on the bodywork, would be carried out locally after the vehicle was delivered to Hong Kong; and
- (b) given the many processes involved in the procurement of the replacement CFT, which included the bidding of fund, drawing up of design and specifications, tendering and the manufacture and delivery of the vehicle, it would take some time for FSD and the relevant departments to complete the procurement. Nonetheless, with a view to expediting the procurement process, the Administration had adopted a proactive approach to shorten the lead time required for procurement. For the replacement of the existing CFT R42, the following new arrangements had been made -
 - (i) FSD had consulted frontline personnel and made an early start in drawing up the design and specifications for the new vehicle;

Action

- (ii) with a view to completing all tendering procedures and securing the approval of the tender board as early as possible, FSD and the relevant departments were now designing and preparing the tender specifications and planned to seek funding approval from the Finance Committee ("FC") in June 2010. Subject to FC's approval, FSD and the relevant departments could award the procurement contract in July 2010; and
- (iii) provision of training to enable frontline personnel to become familiar with the operation of the new CFT would be arranged at the earliest possible time upon the delivery of the new vehicle.

13. In reply to Dr Philip WONG's enquiry on whether the replaced CFT would be auctioned or kept as reserve, DDFS explained that as CFTs were expected to maintain a satisfactory availability rate of 90% or above, the existing CFT R42 would be retained as backup after the commissioning of the replacement CFT in December 2011.

14. Noting that the proposed replacement CFT would be equipped with engines complying with Euro III emission standard, Ms Audrey EU enquired whether FSD had ever considered the use of Euro IV or V emission standard engines which were more environmental friendly than a Euro III engine.

15. DDFS said that the Government would specify in the tender documents that the replacement CFT should at least comply with the Euro III emission standard. Although the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department ("EMSD") had advised that Euro IV and V engines had not been commonly used in such heavy duty vehicles as CFT, FSD would welcome any suppliers to provide a tailor-made CFT equipped with Euro IV or V engines.

16. Mr WONG Kwok-kin referred to some cases recently brought to his attention in which some newly procured equipment and apparatus had experienced technical problems right after their commissioning. He expressed concern about the measures that the Government had adopted in the procurement of the replacement CFT to minimize technical problems and to avoid breakdown in future fire-fighting and rescue operations.

17. In response, DDFS advised that -

- (a) the procurement contract for the replacement CFT would be awarded through invitation of tender. The assessment of the tenders would be made in accordance with the Government's Stores and Procurement Regulations; and

Action

- (b) to ensure that the performance of the new CFT could meet the contractual requirements, FSD would closely monitor the production and liaise with the overseas supplier for carrying out factory acceptance tests thoroughly by FSD's technical staff before the new vehicle was delivered to Hong Kong.

18. Responding to Dr Philip WONG's enquiry on the frequency of turnouts of the existing CFT R42 proposed for replacement, DDFS said that CFT R42 had 286 and 86 emergency turnouts in the whole year of 2009 and in the first quarter of 2010 respectively. Its main function was to reach the scene of incident speedily and apply uninterrupted foam to protect the passengers. It could also be used for emergency rescue and fire fighting operations in the surrounding areas of HKIA which might not involve air crash, such as the fighting of fires involving oil tanks.

19. Mr IP Kwok-him recalled that FC had approved funding in 2008 for the replacement of another CFT which was commissioned in 1995 and deployed at the Main Airport Fire Station. He asked whether there was any difference in the functions of that CFT and the replacement CFT now under consideration.

20. DDFS replied that -

- (a) the main functions of the replacement CFT now under consideration were basically the same as those of the replacement CFT last approved by FC in May 2008;
- (b) the proposed replacement CFT would comply with the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization and offer superb performance in terms of speed, acceleration, carrying capacity and capability to perform on and off paved surfaces. For instance, it should reach a speed of 80 km per hour in 40 seconds with full load; and
- (c) the new vehicle would be equipped with a powerful roof mounted foam monitor with an effective throw range of over 90 metres, having the capability to handle fire-fighting duties involving large aircrafts including the new Airbus A380. It would also be fitted with a dedicated engine for operating the fire pump to apply uninterrupted foam even when the CFT was in motion at a speed up to 80 km per hour, enabling the vehicle to make speedier intervention and perform rescue function at the fire scene.

Action

**VI. Updating and replacement of fire services equipment and apparatus
(LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1409/09-10(07) to (10))**

Briefing by the Administration

21. US for S took Members through the Administration's paper which set out the existing procedures for procuring fire services equipment and apparatus, and the Administration's proposed measures for expediting the relevant processes.

Presentation of views by deputations

22. At the invitation of the Chairman, representatives from Hong Kong Fire Services Department Staffs General Association ("FSDSGA") and Hong Kong Fire Services Officers Association ("FSOA") presented their views on the subject.

*Hong Kong Fire Services Department Staffs General Association
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1409/09-10(09))*

23. Mr WONG Kwok-ying presented the views of FSDSGA as detailed in its submission.

*Hong Kong Fire Services Officers Association
(LC Paper No. CB(2)1409/09-10(10))*

24. Mr LAU Hon-wa took Members through the written submission which set out in detail the views and recommendations of FSOA on the procurement and management of fire services equipment and apparatus.

Discussion

25. Mr CHAN Hak-kan referred to the No. 4 Alarm fire at Lai Cheong Factory Building in Cheung Sha Wan on 8 March 2010 in which a senior fireman lost his life in the course of the fire-fighting operation. Mr CHAN said that the incident had aroused widespread concern in the community over the work safety of firemen and attracted criticism that although FSD had been allocated funds a long time ago for the procurement of various fire services equipment, including new breathing apparatus, new digital radio communication system and fire tunics and overtrousers for replacement, the provision of such equipment to frontline staff for use was delayed by years because the procurement procedures were cumbersome and time-consuming. He asked whether FSD would consider adopting a more flexible arrangement for the introduction of new equipment in future and accord priority to those firemen stationed in high-risk areas for receiving training and using the new

Action

equipment, instead of waiting for all staff to have been trained before using the new equipment.

26. In response, US for S made the following points -

- (a) the Administration attached great importance to ensuring the safety of frontline fire-fighting personnel and providing firemen with safe and reliable equipment and facilities. Besides taking measures to ensure that fire services equipment were under proper maintenance and in effective operation, the Administration regularly replaced and procured more advanced equipment taking into account FSD's suggestion, so as to further enhance the protection for frontline personnel. Generally, the existing equipment of FSD compared favourably with those used by fire brigades overseas;
- (b) large-scale replacement or procurement of fire services equipment normally involved a number of steps, which included bidding of fund, drafting specifications, tendering, manufacture, delivery, installation, testing and training. The time required for the entire process depended on factors such as the complexity of the equipment, its specifications, price and the quantity procured. For the procurement of equipment with relatively simple specifications and readily available stock, such as fire fighting hose and protective gloves, the entire procurement process would normally be completed in around six months. As regards fire services equipment which were purchased for the first time, replacement of existing equipment that required substantial upgrading or changes to the specifications or replacement of equipment with no readily available stock and where time was needed for manufacturing, the time required to complete the procurement process would be relatively longer. According to the traditional practice, the Administration would start preparing the specifications and tendering after funding was approved;
- (c) in order to expedite the procurement process, FSD and relevant departments had reached a consensus to make an early start on the initial procurement procedures, including the drafting of specifications and tendering. This would enable FSD and relevant departments to award contract as soon as possible upon securing funding approval, which would in turn allow the suppliers to commence the manufacturing or delivery procedures immediately. With the adoption of the new measures as set out in paragraph 10 of the Administration's paper, the entire process for procuring fire equipment or appliances could be shortened by about a year; and

Action

- (d) wherever possible, FSD would adopt a phased delivery approach for large-scale procurement of equipment to enable early commencement of training.

27. Responding to Mr CHAN Hak-kan's concern about the long lead time taken for the purchase of the new breathing apparatus after their being identified as suitable for use by FSD, DDFS explained that in order to keep in line with the latest European standards published in 2006, FSD had adopted a forward-looking procurement strategy by conducting a research to look for new breathing apparatus. It was however found that new breathing apparatus conforming to the latest European standards had not yet been made available in the market until late 2007. Prototype samples from five different manufacturers were then obtained for initial trial and evaluation. With approval given in 2007 to purchase the new breathing apparatus, funding was earmarked in 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 for FSD to procure 1 500 sets of new breathing apparatus to replace all existing breathing apparatus and their accessories. During the tender preparation, about 100 frontline personnel were invited to evaluate different products. According to FSD's original schedule, the new breathing apparatus should be ready for full operational use in December 2009. In March 2009, training for FSD trainers commenced upon receipt of the first shipment of the new breathing apparatus. While the training programme was almost completed towards the end of 2009, some software problems were detected with the new apparatus during the testing process. FSD had immediately notified the manufacturer of the problems, and such problems were rectified subsequently by the manufacturer. It should be noted that all the 1 500 sets of new breathing apparatus had been in full operational use since early April 2010. Prior to their commissioning, the original breathing apparatus were still in effective operation. Hence, the postponement in the use of the new apparatus did not affect the safety of frontline fire-fighting personnel.

28. DDFS stressed that FSD attached great importance to providing frontline fire-fighting personnel with safe and reliable equipment and facilities. It had always strived to provide frontline personnel with the best equipment so as to ensure their safety and efficiency while carrying out their duties. In order to further expedite the procurement and replacement process, FSD would request suppliers to deliver the new equipment by batches wherever practicable. FSD would conduct testing on the new equipment that arrived in early shipments and, depending on operational need and the actual situation, distribute them for use by firemen who had already been trained to do so. In deciding whether the new equipment could be introduced in batches, FSD would consider a number of factors, including the need to maintain uniformity in overall operation; whether the parallel use of old and new equipment could be accommodated in actual operation and whether such arrangement would

Action

seriously affect the operational procedures; as well as its impact on training, maintenance, logistics support and use of resources.

29. The Deputy Chairman expressed grave concern that according to FSOA's submission, there was a serious shortage of manpower and expertise responsible for the procurement of fire-fighting equipment and apparatus in FSD, and its existing stores procurement and stock management systems were far from efficient and effective. He sought clarification from the representatives of FSOA and FSDSGA on the number of staff members in FSD designated to undertake procurement-related duties, and whether inventory management of fire services equipment, such as fire tunics and overtrousers provided for all fireman, was supported by a dedicated computer system.

30. In response, Mr LAU Hon-wa made the following points -

- (a) the Workshops Division under the Planning Group was responsible for all engineering matters relating to fire appliances, fire-fighting and rescue equipment. These included design, development, procurement, inspection and maintenance, fitting out, modification, testing and commissioning;
- (b) generally speaking, fire services equipment could be categorized into fire appliances, protective equipment, fire-fighting equipment, rescue equipment and communication systems. At present, only the procurement of fire-fighting and rescue equipment was handled by two staff specifically and exclusively for such duties. The procurement of all other equipment was part of the duties of some staff holding regular office in different divisions or units while taking up the procurement-related work as extra responsibilities;
- (c) there were cases where user acceptance tests on new products and equipment were neither conducted by professionals nor technically qualified personnel; and
- (d) the existing computer system in FSD only captured raw data and failed to consolidate the data submitted by different divisions or Fire Commands to give a full and coherent picture of the flows and availability of various fire services equipment, as in the notable case of fire tunics and overtrousers for all firemen. The Government was advised to establish an integrated computer system to centralize the information on the usage, stocking and distribution of various equipment, which would in the end allow information exchange and data analysis.

Action

31. Mr CHIU Sin-chung added that the root of the problems lay in serious shortage of manpower. FSD should address the workload problem of its staff.

32. Responding to the concern about the workload of firemen, US for S informed Members that FSD had been reviewing its manpower requirements over the years. Due to the growing workload in the past few years, FSD had made requests for additional manpower in accordance with the established resource bidding procedures. Between 2006 and 2010, the Administration had approved the creation of 117 permanent posts in FSD so as to enhance its overall capacity and operational efficiency. US for S further said that where necessary, the Administration would consider seeking additional resources for FSD. In examining requests for additional resources, the Administration would take into account a basket of factors, including the current level of financial resources, the level of work presently handled by FSD and its performance statistics.

33. In response to Members' concern about the way how FSD assigned the duties of testing and commissioning of new equipment to different units, DDFS explained that the procurement-related duties were mainly distributed amongst a number of administrative and support units under the Headquarters Command, and the personnel assigned to undertake the checking and testing had been trained in the relevant fields with technical knowledge and practical experience to carry out the acceptance tests of specific equipment. This was the main reason why officers of the breathing apparatus section were asked to conduct the testing and commissioning of the breathing apparatus and equipment driven by compressed air. DDFS said that FSD would review its procurement strategies and procedures. Where necessary, it would consider applying for provision of additional resources in accordance with the established procedures so as to increase the manpower support for handling procurement-related duties. FSD was also reviewing its existing procurement management system to see whether the system could cope with the prevailing needs of the department. If justified, FSD would propose to replace the existing system with a new procurement system with enhanced functionalities which would enable FSD to better monitor and control the stock of equipment and improve its capability in data retrieval, so as to facilitate management decision-making and strategic planning.

34. Dr Margaret NG and Mr IP Kwok-him questioned the effectiveness of the improvement measures as set out in paragraph 10 of the Administration's paper in addressing the many concerns and problems highlighted by the two deputations, in particular the lengthy time and process for the procurement and updating of fire services equipment and the shortage of manpower for undertaking the testing, commissioning and training of frontline personnel in the use of new equipment upon their delivery. Expressing serious concern as to whether the problems were due to mismanagement on the part of FSD, Dr NG proposed that the Efficiency Unit of the Government should be suggested to

Action

Clerk

conduct a management study on the procurement and updating of fire service equipment and related management or administration issues for FSD. Members agreed.

35. DDFS informed Members that in the light of the recommendations made by the Public Accounts Committee and with a view to strengthening FSD's internal information and resource management functions, FSD had enlisted the assistance of the Efficiency Unit to conduct a study and identify areas of improvement to the processes and procedures relating to the procurement of ambulances. The study, which commenced in September 2009, had been completed. As explained earlier, the Administration had taken on board the advice of the Efficiency Unit and FSD would adjust the procurement procedures in order to shorten the lead time required for procuring ambulances. Similar arrangements would also apply to the procurement of fire services equipment. Taking the procurement of fire tunics and overtrousers as an example, the drawing up of tender specifications had been done well in advance, such that the procurement contract could be awarded right after funding approval. As regards Members' concern about the adequacy of the manpower support in FSD, DDFS reiterated that FSD was fully aware of the pressure and heavy workload faced by frontline personnel, which had been brought about by rising public expectation for better services. In this regard, FSD would continue to monitor closely its manpower requirement and service needs and explore ways to optimize the deployment of resources to meet future challenges. In the process, FSD would enhance communication with the staff side.

36. Ms Audrey EU expressed serious doubt whether the Administration was aware of the many concerns and problems as raised by the two staff unions. She expressed disappointment that although the staff unions had highlighted the need to address the fundamental problem of manpower shortage, the Administration's initial response was far from satisfactory since it failed to provide any concrete measures that would help solve this specific problem and also the following problems arising from manpower shortage -

- (a) the lengthy time and process for the procurement and updating of fire services equipment and apparatus;
- (b) the shortage of manpower for undertaking the testing, commissioning and the training of frontline personnel in the use of new equipment upon their delivery;
- (c) the lengthy time between the delivery of new apparatus/appliances and putting them into operational use; and
- (d) the slow progress in the preparation of the Chinese translation of the operational/training manuals on various fire fighting and

Action

rescue equipment for use by frontline personnel.

Admin

Ms EU considered that the Administration should look into the above issues and revert to the Panel at a meeting in July 2010. She requested the Administration to provide in writing a detailed response to the issues raised in the submissions from FSDSGA and FSOA.

37. In response to the concern raised by Ms Audrey EU on the Chinese translation of operational manuals, DDFS said that FSD had acknowledged requests of the two staff associations and requested suppliers to provide both Chinese and English versions of operational manuals along with the new equipment. He reiterated that, with a view to assessing the suitability of new equipment for operational use, frontline personnel had not only been consulted at different stages of the procurement process through the Standard Stowage Review Committee but also been invited to visit overseas exhibitions.

38. Echoing Ms Audrey EU's view, Mr WONG Kwok-hing said that the Administration should show its determination to solve the problems. He called on the Administration to take into account the views and suggestions of the two staff unions, notably the provision of additional manpower and the setting up of a dedicated team for handling procurement-related work, as well as the development of a new computerized procurement and supply system with enhanced functionalities which could help improve FSD's efficiency and effectiveness in inventory management.

39. In response, DDFS advised that the FSD management was reviewing issues relating to the replacement and procurement of fire services equipment, including manpower resources and information technology systems required for the job. During the review process, it would consider the merits and the viability of setting up a dedicated team in FSD to cope with the workload arising from procurement and replacement of fire services equipment. The FSD management hoped to come up with some further updates in July 2010.

40. Mr CHIU Sin-chung and Mr LAU Hon-wa expressed reservations as to whether the Administration could really solve the long-standing manpower shortage problem in FSD in the next two months.

41. The Chairman suggested that the Administration should continue its discussion with the staff unions, so as to formulate an improvement proposal that was acceptable to the staff side. He also suggested that the two staff unions should put forward their views and suggestions on various matters in relation to service performance and safety, as well as other issues of concern to the FSD management for its consideration.

42. Responding to Ms Audrey EU's enquiry about the reason for the slow progress in the preparation of the Chinese translation of the operational/training

Action

manuals on various fire fighting and rescue equipment, Mr CHIU Sin-chung, Mr MAN Siu-fung and Mr LAU Hon-wa said that the two staff unions had for years been urging the management to provide the manuals in both Chinese and English so as to help frontline personnel to familiarize themselves, in the shortest possible time, with the principles and detailed operation of the equipment and apparatus. However, the FSD management had ignored their request and regarded it as a "low-priority" item. Mr MAN further said that FSD had only engaged four staff members to carry out translation work on a full-time basis.

43. Ms Audrey EU, Mr IP Kwok-him and Ms Cyd HO considered that the Administration should explore the option of outsourcing, in order to speed up the preparation of the Chinese translation of the operational/training manuals on various fire fighting and rescue equipment.

44. In relation to FSD's use of different makes/models of the same equipment, Ms Audrey EU, Ms Cyd HO and the Chairman were very concerned about the interoperability among different models of the same equipment/apparatus produced by different manufacturers. They sought clarification on whether there were any issues of incompatibility between different makes/models of the same equipment/apparatus currently in use.

45. In response, DDFS reiterated that FSD attached great importance to the protective equipment and facilities provided to firemen. FSD kept on reviewing and identifying more advanced tools and equipment to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of fire fighting and rescue operations and to enhance the safety of frontline personnel. In this respect, the Standard Stowage Review Committee was re-organized in 2008 to evaluate and review all equipment relating to rescue and fire fighting operations on a regular basis. It should be noted that in the procurement of new fire services equipment to replace existing equipment, it was necessary to observe the established procedures for procurement in order to ensure fairness and impartiality. While procurement had to be carried out through a worldwide tendering to comply with the Government's Stores and Procurement Regulations, there was a possibility that the same type of equipment acquired at different times might be supplied by different manufacturers. However, there should not be any incompatibility in the functions of the equipment.

46. Ms Cyd HO considered it unacceptably long for the Administration to have taken more than three years to put the new breathing apparatus into full operational use since the time the apparatus were identified as suitable for use by FSD. It was equally unacceptable and inexcusable if any particular kind or type of personal protective equipment for frontline personnel, including protective clothing, boots and other ancillary equipment, were unavailable or out of stock. She expressed strong dissatisfaction with the absence of concrete proposals from the Administration to resolve the long-standing problems that

Action

had been recognized by the staff unions as "high-priority" issues which needed to be addressed. Ms HO echoed with Dr Margaret NG that FSD should enlist the assistance of the Efficiency Unit to conduct a study on the procurement and related management/administration issues for FSD.

47. DDFS advised that in 2010-2011, the Administration had earmarked about \$170 million for the procurement of various fire services equipment, including fire appliances and rescue equipment. The replacement of 13 000 sets of fire tunics and overtrousers for all fire personnel was one of the items included in the earmarked funding, and the number of fire tunics and overtrousers provided for each fireman would be increased from one to two sets. It should be noted that before the delivery of the new fire tunics and overtrousers by March 2011, there was a need to replace/replenish the old fire tunics and overtrousers in the interim between now and 2011. During the process, FSD had to exercise prudence to ensure that public money was not wasted due to over-stocking of obsolete items.

48. Given the various issues raised and concerns expressed by the two staff unions, Ms Cyd HO invited the representatives of FSDSGA and FSOA to provide the Panel with more detailed information on the problems faced by frontline personnel, in particular the shortage of personal protective equipment and the incompatibility in fire-fighting and rescue equipment, so that members could examine whether or not the matter should be pursued further.

49. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan held the view that the FSD management was very unprofessional in handling the replacement and procurement of fire services equipment. Noting that the crux of various problems lay in serious shortage of manpower, he enquired whether the Administration had any plan to address the issues of long working hours and huge work pressure faced by frontline personnel.

50. In reply, DDFS reiterated that FSD was reviewing its procurement strategies and procedures, and it hoped to come up with some further updates in July 2010. FSD would continue to maintain close dialogue with frontline staff to understand and address their concerns about long working hours and heavy workload. Where necessary, it would apply for additional resources in accordance with the established procedures for the creation of additional posts in FSD.

51. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan said that he had also heard of complaints about the performance of FSD's radio communications system. Noting that FC had approved in May 2009 a non-recurrent commitment of \$178 million for FSD to replace its existing analogue radio communications system with a new digital system, he enquired whether the new system would improve communication between the Fire Services Communications Centre and the fire appliances and ambulances.

Action

52. In response, DDFS advised that -

- (a) the radio communications system of FSD played an important role in supporting the Department's territory-wide voice communication between the Fire Services Communications Centre at FSD Headquarters and vehicles, as well as the direct voice communication among the frontline staff at the scene of incidents. A reliable radio communications system was therefore essential for the efficient and effective operation of FSD;
- (b) with the existing radio communications system having been in use since 1997 and reaching the end of its serviceable life, FSD, with the assistance of EMSD, had proposed the replacement of the existing analogue system by a new digital system. The new system, which was expected to be commissioned in July 2011, could bring about a number of benefits, including the following -
 - (i) the proposed system would be equipped with some 200 portable repeaters, which could be flexibly deployed inside buildings at the scene of incidents. The deployment of these repeaters would enhance both the reliability and coverage of indoor communication;
 - (ii) the proposed system, which featured error correction, digital encoding, as well as random allocation of voice channels, would offer improved voice quality and better protection against interference and interception by its new features;
 - (iii) the proposed system would make more efficient use of the radio spectrum and had the capacity to provide more voice channels and increase the usable or effective airtime by about 100%; and
- (c) to secure a reliable communication environment, FSD would study, jointly with EMSD, the feasibility of providing the fire fighting teams with more voice channels at the scene of incidents. In addition, FSD had set up a working team to look into the operational viability of providing a hand-held set to each crew member, having regard to the fact that heavy voice traffic would be generated from the use of large number of portable transceivers on the same channel.

53. The Deputy Chairman and Dr Margaret NG commented that the inefficiency and confusion in the procurement of fire services equipment was

Action

only a manifestation or symptom of a broader and more fundamental problem in FSD with its management and administration. In addition to the study to be conducted by the Efficiency Unit into a number of procurement and management issues for FSD, they held the view that the Administration should consider commissioning an independent consultant to conduct a comprehensive review on FSD's governance and management structure.

54. The Chairman said that the Panel would discuss the subject again at its meeting in July 2010.

55. The meeting ended at 4:30 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
2 July 2010