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Panel on Security

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 2 February 2010

Employment service support for rehabilitated offenders

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the employment service support for rehabilitated offenders and summarizes discussions of the Panel on Security (the Panel) on the subject.

Background

2. One of the prime missions of the Correctional Services Department (CSD) is to provide the best possible opportunity for all inmates to make a new start in life, by offering timely, apt and comprehensive rehabilitation programmes. According to the Administration, CSD has developed, delivered and managed a series of rehabilitation programmes to assist offenders in equipping themselves for leading a lawful life after discharge. CSD has also adopted a comprehensive recidivism rate (i.e. the rate of re-admission within three years after discharge of all local convicts released from CSD's custody) since 2000 to facilitate studies on re-offending behaviour and provide timely feedback for programme monitoring and evaluation.

Deliberations of the Panel on Security

3. The Panel discussed the employment service support for rehabilitated offenders at its meeting on 8 July 2003. It also discussed the provision of vocational training for adult offenders at its meetings on 6 January 2000, 3 July 2007, 8 July 2008 and 5 May 2009. The deliberations are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Supportive services for discharged prisoners provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), Labour Department (LD) and non-government organizations (NGOs)

4. According to the Administration, SWD provided support to vulnerable members of the community through its extensive network of service units. Discharged prisoners who needed support could approach these service units as appropriate. In addition, under SWD's programme on services for offenders, annual subventions of about \$45 million were provided to the Society of Rehabilitation And Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP) to provide counselling, group activities, residential services and employment opportunities for ex-offenders with the objective of helping them re-integrate into the community and lead a law-abiding life. Social workers of SRACP's Pre-release Preparation Service paid regular visits to the penal institutions of CSD to promote its services to prisoners. They helped prisoners formulate discharge plans through individual interviews, talks, video presentation and distribution of information leaflets.

5. The Administration also joined hands with NGOs to help rehabilitated offenders seek jobs. LD provided free employment services to help job seekers, who could visit Job Centres for job referrals or the Internet Employment Service website to browse vacancy and labour market information. The Hong Kong Council of Social Service also provided specialized employment assistance to the socially handicapped, including discharged prisoners. The services included counseling, job matching, post-placement follow-up, and provision of an employment resources centre. To provide better support services for rehabilitated persons after their discharge from penal institutions, CSD had, since October 2006, engaged SRACP to provide follow-up employment services for rehabilitated offenders who had completed pre-release vocational training provided by CSD. Statistics provided by SRACP showed that from October 2006 to March 2009, 722 (i.e. 77.9%) of those 927 rehabilitated persons who had completed pre-release vocational training courses before leaving the penal institutions accepted follow-up employment service provided by SRACP, and 82.7% of these people were able to find a job within three months after release.

Adequacy and quality of the vocational training provided for offenders

6. Some members expressed concern about the adequacy and quality of vocational training provided for adult offenders. They considered that the Administration should make its best endeavour to ensure that the training courses/programmes provided by CSD could help improve offenders' vocational skills and enhance their chance of securing gainful employment after release. They enquired about the feedback of rehabilitated offenders on training courses currently available in penal institutions.

7. The Administration advised that -

- (a) pre-release vocational training courses provided by CSD were targeted at adult local prisoners who were due to be released in

three to 24 months, with the aim of improving their vocational skills so as to help them find jobs and reintegrate into the society as soon as possible after their release from penal institutions;

- (b) as at May 2009, there were a total of 4 900 adult local prisoners serving their sentences at various penal institutions. 2 600 to 2 700 of them had a remaining sentence of three to 24 months. In 2009, about 630 part-time and 200 full-time vocational training places would be provided for eligible adult prisoners. This represented a 14% increase in the number of training places as compared with that of 2008;
- (c) based on past enrolment experience, CSD expected most of the adult prisoners who applied for such training courses and fulfilled the relevant criteria would be given an offer. Taking note of the shortfall of about 100 vocational training places in 2008, CSD would keep up its efforts in reviewing the adequacy of the vocational training provided for offenders in the coming years; and
- (d) all participating inmates were requested to complete an evaluation form upon completion of vocational training. The evaluation results showed that more than 95% of the participants considered the training programmes useful in facilitating their rehabilitation, as the courses were graded either as "very satisfactory" or "satisfactory". The Administration reviewed from time to time the usefulness and quality of vocational training provided for offenders in order to enhance their employability after discharge. In providing accredited and market-oriented vocational training for offenders, CSD regularly reviewed the content of the training programmes having regard to the manpower projection in Hong Kong and the employment statistics of discharged offenders.

8. Some members expressed concern that only a small number of adult prisoners were provided with a chance to receive full-time or part-time market-oriented vocational training in penal institutions. They considered that CSD should strengthen its provision of pre-release vocational training for rehabilitated offenders, so as to enhance their employability after discharge and facilitate their reintegration into the society. They suggested that the Administration should make it a compulsory requirement for prisoners to attend vocational training courses.

9. The Administration responded that attending vocational training courses could not be made a compulsory requirement for adult prisoners. Besides the workshops in the correctional institutions for adult prisoners to engage in work, pre-release vocational training was also provided for adult local prisoners with remaining sentences from three to 24 months for enrollment on a voluntary basis. CSD had plans to introduce new or enhanced market-oriented vocational training courses in such trades as food and beverage services, print production, desktop

publishing and fashion and clothing design for adult offenders. The purpose of vocational training was to prepare them to meet market needs at the time of release. It was noteworthy that CSD had secured the support of a number of NGOs and agencies in providing part-time vocational training for adult prisoners, and rehabilitated persons could continue to seek assistance from SRACP and other NGOs after release, if necessary. The Administration hoped that these services could enhance offenders' employability after discharge and facilitate their smooth reintegration into the society.

Computer training for offenders

10. Regarding the question of whether computer training and facilities for offenders were adequate, the Administration advised that CSD strived to promote computer literacy of prisoners and inmates through the provision of computer facilities and computer training courses. There were currently 267 computers for young offenders and 370 computers for adult offenders at various penal institutions. Young offenders, i.e. those under the age of 21, received half-day compulsory education which included computer study as a core subject. Depending on whether they had enrolled in public examination on computer-related subjects, young offenders used computer and received computer training for around four to six hours per week on average. For adult prisoners, they were required to engage in useful work in accordance with the Prison Rules (Cap. 234A) unless excused on medical grounds. Computer training for adult prisoners was mainly offered in the form of hobby classes with volunteers serving as instructors and prisoners joining on a voluntary basis after work. In 2009, in addition to those 830 part-time and full-time vocational training places which could be taken up by adult local prisoners with remaining sentences of three to 24 months on a voluntary basis, and 160 computer training places offered by Employees Retraining Board for local adult offenders, more than 900 training places on computer courses would be provided for all adult offenders at various institutions. Compared with the number of adult prisoners who had received computer training in 2006 (i.e. 675), the number of computer training places had substantially increased over the years.

Relevant papers

11. Members may wish to refer to the following minutes and papers for further details -

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

- (d) minutes of the meeting of the Panel on Security on 8 July 2008 (LC Paper No. CB(2)2822/07-08);
- (e) minutes of the meeting of the Panel on Security on 5 May 2009 (LC Paper No. CB(2)2055/08-09);
- (f) Administration's paper entitled "Development in Rehabilitation Services for Offenders" (LC Paper No. CB(2)748/99-00(03));
- (g) Administration's paper entitled "Employment Service Support and Financial Assistance Provided to Adult Rehabilitated Offenders" (LC Paper No. CB(2)2677/02-03(06));
- (h) Administration's paper entitled "Latest Developments in the Provision of Rehabilitative Services by the Correctional Services Department" (LC Paper No. CB(2)2284/06-07(01));
- (i) Administration's paper entitled "Latest Developments in the Provision of Rehabilitative Services by the Correctional Services Department" (LC Paper No. CB(2)2481/07-08(02)); and
- (j) Administration's paper entitled "Latest Developments in the Provision of Rehabilitative Services by the Correctional Services Department" (LC Paper No. CB(2)1207/08-09(06)).

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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