

**The Legislative Council Public Accounts Committee public hearing
on the Director of Audit's Report No. 55
Chapter 10 – Residential Treatment and Rehabilitation Services
for Drug Abusers
7 December 2010**

Opening remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare

Chairman:

As just indicated by the Secretary for Security, we accept and agree with the views and recommendations on the future development of treatment centre services set out in the Director of Audit's Report. I would like to supplement mainly on two parts relating to the policy areas under the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB)'s purview.

Waiting Time of Probationers for Drug Treatment

2. The Audit Report has expressed concern over the uneven distribution of referrals by Probation Officers of the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and recommended that SWD should take measures to shorten the waiting time for drug treatment as far as possible. As mentioned by the Secretary for Security earlier, I would like to take the opportunity to reiterate that under the Probation of Offenders Ordinance, the court shall not send a probationer aged 14 or above to any particular drug treatment centre against his/her will.

3. SWD's Probation Officers will, in the best interest of probationers, continue to arrange their admission into drug treatment centres with a shorter waiting time as far as possible with reference to the latest occupancy situation of various drug treatment centres as shown on the intranet of SWD. If probationers only opt for drug treatment centres with a longer waiting time, Probation Officers will arrange community-based drug treatment programmes for them while they are waiting for the places with a view to assisting them to commence drug withdrawal treatment as soon as possible.

Monitoring the Operation Scale of Drug Treatment Centres at Government Sites/Premises

4. Separately, the Audit Report has also recommended that SWD should take proper measures to monitor the operation of non-subvented drug treatment centres, so as to ensure that all the centres comply with the conditions laid down by the Government in their respective land grants during their operation.

5. Non-subvented organisations have all along been playing a very important role in the delivery of welfare services. On the operation of drug treatment centres by non-subvented organisations at Government sites, they are run in an independent operation mode which is complementary to the overall anti-drug policy of the Government, with a view to providing appropriate services to drug abusers. In monitoring the effective use of land resources, the Government will strike a balance among various factors and consider the resources and capability of these organisations. SWD and the concerned government departments will examine the mechanism of granting Government sites to non-subvented organisations for operating drug treatment centres, and will properly monitor the operation and performance of the centres run on the sites allocated under Private Treaty Grants. Moreover, SWD has been keeping in close view the utilisation of non-subvented drug treatment centres. If the utilisation rates of the centres have remained low for a long time, we will discuss with them on how to utilise the resources in a more effective manner.

Conclusion

6. LWB and SWD will continue to work actively in alignment with the policy and work of the Security Bureau and refine the services of drug treatment centres in collaboration with relevant government departments and non-governmental organisations. SWD colleagues and I stand ready to answer questions to be raised by members. Thank you, Chairman.

-- END --