

## **Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services**

### **Integrated Community-based Services for Offenders**

#### **Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the implementation of the integrated community-based services for offenders by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) since 3 July 2012.

#### **Background**

2. SWD provides community-based rehabilitation services for offenders through social work service intervention with the overall objective to assist them to re-integrate into the community as law-abiding citizens. Community-based rehabilitation services for offenders include probation service, the Community Service Orders (CSO) Scheme and the Community Support Service Scheme (CSSS) run by SWD.

#### ***Probation Service***

3. Probation service is a community-based rehabilitation programme for offenders whereby offenders are placed under statutory supervision of a Probation Officer (PO) for a period of one to three years in accordance with the Probation of Offenders Ordinance, Chapter 298. Upon the request of the court, a PO compiles a social enquiry report and makes recommendation to the court on the suitability of an offender to be put on probation supervision. A PO also supervises probationers who are put under probation supervision by the courts. The ultimate goal of probation service is to assist offenders to re-integrate into the community as law-abiding citizens. Since the 1950s, probation service has been operating in close link with the courts. Before July 2012, there were 11 probation offices and one High Court and District Court Probation Office (HC&DCPO) serving the seven Magistrates' Courts and the High Court and District Court respectively.

## ***CSO Scheme***

4. The CSO Scheme is a community-based sentence option pursuant to the Community Service Orders Ordinance, Chapter 378. The court may make an order requiring a person of or over 14 years of age and is convicted of an offence punishable with imprisonment to perform unpaid work for such number of hours, but not exceeding 240 hours within a period of 12 months, under the supervision of a PO who shall also provide rehabilitative counselling and guidance to the offender. Under the order, the offender is required to spend his leisure time to perform community service as reparation to the harm he has done to the community. Through such work and guidance of the PO, the offender is helped to reform himself. First started in the late 1980s as a pilot project in three Magistrates' Courts and later extended to other courts, the CSO Scheme had been operated by one CSO Office serving the whole territory before July 2012.

## ***CSSS***

5. First started in the mid-1990s, CSSS serves as a supporting unit to probation service and the CSO Scheme, providing group counselling and structured activities (i.e. group work service) to help young offenders stay law-abiding and develop socially acceptable behaviour. Before July 2012, there were two CSSS Centres run by SWD serving the whole territory.

## **Review on Community-based Services for Offenders**

6. For the past two decades, the above community-based services for offenders had been operating under different operation modes. With the increase in CSO cases over the years, the difference in operation modes had brought about undue referral/ transfer of cases among the service units, and overlapping of services. For example, probationers placed under CSO by the court had to be transferred to the CSO Office (for professional case work service) from Probation Office, and the probationers have to develop relationship with another PO, and/ or to approach different offices for individual supervision and group work service. In addition, various social changes over the past years had complicated the social problems in relation to crime, and also brought along new models and approaches in working with offenders.

7. To better meet the changing needs of society and enhance service efficiency, SWD set up a Steering Group for Review of Community-based Services for Offenders (the Steering Group) in April 2010, and embarked on a comprehensive review of the service delivery modes of probation service, the CSO Scheme and CSSS.

### **The Proposed Integrated Model**

8. After an intensive review and study, the Steering Group recommended in November 2011 an integrated model to provide a more comprehensive and convenient one-stop professional service for service users. To this end, the 11 probation offices, the CSO Office and the two CSSS Centres would be integrated to form seven Probation and Community Service Orders Offices (PCSOs) to serve their respective Magistrates' Courts over the territory. At the same time, a Co-ordinating Office of Community Service Orders (COCSO) would be set up to provide support to the seven PCSOs on the provision of the CSO Scheme, such as co-ordination of work projects and management of site supervisors<sup>1</sup>.

9. Under this integrated model, the seven PCSOs would be responsible for all the statutory duties of probation service, the CSO Scheme, as well as programmes and group work for probationers/offenders placed under the CSO and their family members, while COCSO would take up all the work-project-related duties of the CSO Scheme. The integrated model aims to create synergy in service delivery with a one-stop service for offenders on whom both PO reports and CSO suitability reports are called at the same time, minimise referral/ transfer of cases between POs, enable POs to focus their effort in discharging statutory duties and professional services, and enhance the development of expertise in community-based services for offenders, including both probation service and the CSO Scheme.

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<sup>1</sup> Although HC&DCPO also provides probation service, it was not included in the review to integrate with other offices as the POs of HC&DCPO are senior officers who have to handle more complicated and serious cases of the High Court and District Court. Nevertheless, the office has started to provide one-stop service for probationers and offenders placed under the CSO by the High Court and District Court since July 2012.

## **Preparatory Work**

10. To ensure smooth operation and implementation of the integrated model, the concerned Branches/ Sections of SWD Headquarters have worked closely with the district management and concerned offices to work out the logistics arrangement, in consultation with staff associations and frontline staff, throughout the preparatory period from December 2011 to June 2012. The major preparation work undertaken by SWD included –

- (a) a series of consultation meetings, briefing sessions and training courses were conducted with concerned parties including the district management, staff associations, unit heads and frontline staff;
- (b) the Judiciary was consulted on the integrated model and kept informed of the implementation;
- (c) a staff deployment plan was worked out and the staff concerned were prepared for their transfer to ensure smooth case transfer;
- (d) the job duties of various posts and ranks as well as the workflow of PCSO were reviewed and updated to facilitate the work of POs;
- (e) the computer system, including the Client Information System and its CSO sub-system, was enhanced to meet the new operational needs and workflow;
- (f) the plans to acquire the premises for each of the PCSOs were worked out with the district management to ensure that suitable office premises would be available to accommodate all the officers both in the short term and in the long run;
- (g) handover-meetings were arranged among the concerned offices to prepare for the removal of office equipment, furniture, files and documents; and
- (h) affected service users were kept fully in the picture at an early stage on the transfer of offices to ensure any likely disruption of services rendered to them was kept to the minimum.

## **Implementation**

11. The integrated model for the community-based services for offenders was implemented on 3 July 2012. The seven PCSOs started to provide services for offenders who are ordered by the court to be placed under probation or CSO supervision, while COCSO was set up to support the seven PCSOs in arranging unpaid community work for persons who are placed under CSO by the court.

12. The integrated model has been implemented for about nine months so far. The initial feedback collected from the courts, the district management and concerned offices shows that the integrated model has worked smoothly. With the synergy generated and work procedures streamlined under the new model, service users and their family members can now receive professional casework and group work service in the same office and the service efficiency is enhanced. Greater flexibility in manpower deployment is also achieved to better meet the changing needs of offenders.

## **Way Forward**

13. SWD will continue to monitor the implementation of the integrated model. A review on the integrated model with the involvement of district management, unit heads and frontline staff will be conducted one year after the implementation in around July 2013.

## **Advice Sought**

14. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Social Welfare Department  
March 2013