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Panel on Welfare Services

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 11 March 2013**

Services for offenders

Purpose

This paper provides background information and gives a brief account of the discussions at meetings of the Council and its committees on services for offenders.

Background

2. The Social Welfare Department ("SWD") provides treatment for offenders through a social work approach, including the community-based services for offenders (which include probation service, the Community Service Orders ("CSO") Scheme and the Community Support Service ("CSS") Scheme), residential training and aftercare service provided in the Tuen Mun Children and Juvenile Home. According to the Administration, the overall objective of the services for offenders is to help offenders reintegrate into the community as law-abiding citizens. This is achieved through both community-based and residential services, adopting social work approaches. It is hoped that through proper supervision, counselling, academic, prevocational and social skills training, the offenders can be equipped with the necessary skills to deal with life demands.

3. Probation service is a community-based programme whereby, in accordance with the Probation of Offenders Ordinance (Cap. 298), an offender is placed under statutory supervision of a probation officer for a period of one to three years. The CSO Scheme provides the courts with the option to order offenders aged 14 and above, who are convicted of an offence punishable by imprisonment, to perform unpaid work of benefit to the community in place of, or in addition to, any other sentence. The CSS Scheme provides training and structural activities as supportive service to probationers and young offenders under residential training for their rehabilitation.

Members' deliberations

4. During its discussions on social welfare planning at the meetings on 11 July 2011 and 19 February 2013, the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") was briefed on services for offenders. Relevant issues were also raised at the Panel meetings on 12 April 2012 and 21 January 2013.

Enhancement of CSS Scheme

5. Members noted that five CSS Scheme teams, which were operated by non-governmental organizations and attached to integrated children and youth services centres, assisted young people who were under the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme. Through the provision of guidance and counselling, treatment groups, skills training/education groups, recreational activities and community services, CSS Scheme teams helped the target at-risk youths reintegrate into mainstream education or work force, and reduced their likelihood of re-offending. The manpower of these teams was first enhanced in 2005-2006 with provision of a total of 25 additional social workers. To cater for anticipated increase in the number of cautioned juveniles as a result of enhanced law enforcement efforts to combat youth drug abuse, SWD allocated additional resources to provide each of the CSS Scheme team with one additional social worker in October 2008.

Pilot Project on Enhanced Probation Service

6. Regarding probation service, the Administration advised that, apart from the existing probation services for young persons convicted of drug offences, SWD had launched, since 1 October 2009, a two-year Pilot Project on Enhanced Probation Service ("the Project") at the two Probation Offices serving the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts and Kwun Tong Magistrates' Courts respectively. The Project arose from Security Bureau's policy initiative of tackling the youth drug abuse problem, as well as a recommendation of the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse. The Project aimed to provide more focused, structured and intensive treatment programmes for young offenders aged below 21 who were convicted of drug-related offences and put on probation supervision pursuant to the Probation of Offenders Ordinance. Its major services included conducting more frequent interview sessions and urine tests to ascertain probationers' drug status, arranging regular home visits and curfew checks to monitor the behaviour of the probationers as well as monitoring school/employment performance of the probationers in helping them lead a meaningful life. The Project also aimed to gain more involvement of the court in the rehabilitation process of the probationers, including the court seeking more progress reports on probationers' performance and giving directions as appropriate.

7. Members noted that SWD would extend the Project for one year and conduct evaluation on the Project with a view to deciding the way forward. A written question was raised, at the special Finance Committee meetings in March 2012 which examined the Estimates of Expenditure 2012-2013, on the effectiveness of the Project each year, its contents, the estimated number of cases served and the expenditure involved in the future. In reply, the Administration said that up to 31 January 2012, a total of 429 social enquiry cases of drug-related offences were referred by the two Magistrates' Courts, among which 218 were put on probation supervision under the Project. Of the 218 cases, 90 were still active and 106 had completed the probation supervision satisfactorily. In 2012-2013, the estimated caseload was 240 and estimated expenditure was around \$1.8 million. The Administration would conduct a comprehensive final evaluation of the Project in 2012-2013 to shed light on its way forward, including the future capacity and expenditure.

Latest development

8. Upon completion of a review on the community-based services for offenders, SWD has implemented an integrated model on community-based services for offenders since July 2012 with a view to generating more synergy and providing a one-stop service to better meet rehabilitation needs of offenders. Under the integrated model, the former 11 probation offices are integrated with the CSO Office and CCS Centres and re-organized into seven Probation and Community Service Orders Offices ("PCSOs"). The seven PCSOs are responsible for all statutory duties and each of them serves its respective Magistrates' Courts. A co-ordinating office of CSO has also been set up specifically to support the seven PCSOs in arranging unpaid community work for persons who are placed under CSO by the court.

9. The Administration will brief the Panel on the implementation of the integrated model at its meeting on 11 March 2013.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
5 March 2013

Relevant papers on services for offenders

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	11 July 2011 (Item IV)	Agenda
Finance Committee	8 March 2012	Administration's replies to members' written questions in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2012-2013 Pages 1026 - 1027
Panel on Welfare Services	12 April 2012 (Item IV)	Agenda
Panel on Welfare Services	21 January 2013 (Item I)	Agenda
Panel on Welfare Services	19 February 2013 (Item V)	Agenda

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