

For discussion
on 5 November 2013

Legislative Council Panel on Security Recent Enhancement Initiatives in Penal Institutions

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the recent enhancement initiatives in penal institutions.

Enhancement Initiatives

2. The Correctional Services Department (CSD) is committed to providing a secure, safe, humane, decent and healthy environment for persons in custody. To achieve the above objectives and to uphold the principles of “caring for people, caring for the environment and caring for the community”, CSD endeavours to study various measures to improve the daily operations of penal institutions. Apart from taking care of the physical and mental well-being of persons in custody, these efforts also aim to educate and encourage them to share the responsibility of caring for the community and protecting the environment.

3. In recent years, CSD has implemented enhancement initiatives in selected penal institutions including the “Waste No Food Scheme”, the smoke-free penal institution and the introduction of X-ray body scanner. The details of these initiatives are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Waste No Food Scheme

4. To promote the conservation of precious resources and minimise pollution, the Government has launched the “Food Wise Hong Kong Campaign” to encourage the public as well as the industrial and commercial sectors etc. to reduce food waste. CSD has all along been adopting the principles of environmental protection and caring for the community in its management and has accordingly taken proactive actions to tie in with the overall government policy by promoting measures to reduce food waste in penal institutions. Against this background, CSD has implemented the “Waste No Food Scheme” (the Scheme) in Lo Wu Correctional Institution (LWCI) to support the above campaign.

5. Currently, the dietary scales of persons in custody are designed on the recommendation of the dieticians of the Department of Health. According to the survey conducted by CSD in the 29 penal institutions in Hong Kong in early 2013, it was common to have leftovers from the meals provided to persons in custody. In general, female persons in custody produced more food waste than male persons in custody, in particular on their staple food (namely rice, chapatti or potatoes). After consideration, CSD decided to launch the trial scheme at the largest female penal institution in the territory (i.e. LWCI).

6. The Scheme was introduced in April 2013. At the beginning, CSD launched publicity and education programme for the persons in custody of LWCI to explain to them the importance of cherishing resources and protecting the environment. CSD also encouraged persons in custody to participate in the Scheme on a voluntary basis having regard to their personal needs. For those persons in custody who have voluntarily registered for the Scheme, the portion of the staple food they receive for each meal is reduced by 60 grams of rice or 50 grams of chapatti or potatoes. The reduced portion is roughly equivalent to one sixth of the original portion. The portion of other food items (such as meat, vegetables and fruits, etc.) remains unchanged.

7. At the early stage of implementation, about 40% of the persons in custody in LWCI signed up for the Scheme. In mid-October 2013, the participation rate increased to nearly 80% with the number of participants over 840. In the first six months of implementation, CSD estimated that LWCI has achieved cumulative savings of about 9 000 kilograms of rice, 250 kilograms of potatoes and 50 kilograms of wheat flour, which represent average monthly savings of some 1 500 kilograms of rice, 40 kilograms of potatoes and 8 kilograms of wheat flour, thereby reducing the carbon dioxide emission by some 470 kilograms per month. The amount of leftovers at LWCI was also reduced from 200 kilograms - 300 kilograms every day to 150 kilograms - 160 kilograms every day, representing a decrease of over 40%.

8. Apart from saving food and reducing food waste, LWCI has also installed a food waste decomposing system to convert food waste into useful organic fertilisers. The system can process around 100 kilograms of food waste per day and transform uncooked food materials (such as peels and leaves that are not suitable for eating) and leftovers into about 10 kilograms of fertilisers through biological treatment process. A total of about 300 kilograms of organic fertilisers can be produced each month. Some of the organic fertilisers will be used for growing plants in the

vicinity of LWCI for greening the environment and some of them will be donated to charitable organisations interested in making good use of the compost. CSD will also sell some of the fertilisers at their annual Autumn Fair and the proceeds of the sale will be donated to different charitable organisations for contribution to the community.

9. For the persons in custody, their participation in the Scheme can help them develop values on cherishing resources. Moreover, they can contribute to the society and play a part in environmental protection during their imprisonment, thereby sharing social responsibility with the rest of the community.

10. In view of the favourable response on the Scheme, CSD plans to launch a similar scheme in the coming year in Ma Hang Prison, which is an institution with a large number of elderly persons in custody. CSD also makes proactive efforts to study the feasibility of gradually extending the Scheme to more institutions to promote the culture of reducing waste and cherishing food. Moreover, CSD will explore the feasibility of introducing food waste decomposing system into other institutions, thereby converting the food waste into useful fertilisers for recycling purposes and to support environmental protection.

Smoke-free Penal Institution

11. Given the unique nature of prisons, penal institutions are currently exempted from the application of the Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance (Cap. 371). CSD has designated smoking zones in penal institutions with adult persons in custody¹. To minimise the effects of second-hand smoke on non-smokers, smoking booths with ventilation systems are provided in workshops and dormitories of penal institutions for adult persons in custody.

12. Although adult persons in custody are allowed to smoke in penal institutions under the law, CSD has been actively promoting a non-smoking culture in its penal institutions and encouraging persons in custody to quit smoking in line with the government policy and for their physical and mental well-being. CSD has set up a Steering Committee on Smoking Control in Correctional Facilities in 2010 to implement and monitor anti-smoking measures in penal institutions. Educational talks and individual counselling are arranged for persons in custody to encourage and help them quit smoking. Furthermore, CSD seeks to enhance the awareness of the

¹ Smoking is banned in correctional institutions that accommodate young persons in custody.

persons in custody on the harmful effects of smoking by conducting anti-smoking publicity in penal institutions through displaying publicity posters, organising poster design competition and conducting smoking cessation courses etc.

13. Other than the above measures, CSD also hopes to reinforce the determination of those persons in custody who have quitted or are in the process of quitting smoking by providing a smoke-free environment. Such an environment can prevent those persons in custody from relapsing into smoking under the influence of smokers and can protect their health from the adverse impact of second-hand smoke. As such, CSD established a “smoke-free prison zone” for trial in Tung Tau Correctional Institution (TTCI), which is for male adult persons in custody, in 2012. Its management actively encouraged persons in custody who had smoking habit to quit smoking and at the same time admitted persons in custody of the corresponding security category who were non-smokers or had intention to quit smoking. With the tireless efforts of the institutional staff, a cumulative total of more than 700 persons in custody were willing to abstain from smoking and purchasing cigarettes by the end of 2012. On 1 January 2013, CSD officially designated TTCI as the first smoke-free adult penal institution which only accommodates adult male persons in custody who do not smoke. As at mid-October 2013, there were a total of some 320 persons in custody in TTCI and they all indicated that they would neither smoke nor purchase cigarettes.

14. Apart from TTCI, CSD has progressively set up “smoke-free prison zones” in other institutions (including Stanley Prison, Pik Uk Prison, Tai Lam Centre for Women (TLCW), Hei Ling Chau Correctional Institution and LWCI) so as to accommodate those persons in custody who are non-smokers or are determined to quit smoking with a view to promoting a non-smoking culture.

X-ray Body Scanner

15. To ensure the good order of penal institutions and to maintain a drug free environment for the persons in custody, CSD has spared no efforts in taking preventive measures to stamp out the smuggling of drugs and unauthorised articles into penal institutions. It is therefore imperative for CSD to arrange newly-admitted persons in custody to undergo rectal search or isolation for sanitisation process to prevent them from smuggling drugs into penal institutions through internal concealment.

16. To put the concept of “caring for the people” into further practice, CSD has explored the use of scientific means to replace the practice of manual rectal search in recent years. In December 2012, CSD introduced the first X-ray body scanner (the Scanner) into Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre (LCKRC) to search newly-admitted male persons in custody. While the radiation dose of each scan is minimal that it will not affect the health of the persons under scanning, the Scanner can reveal alien objects concealed in the rectum and can hence replace the manual rectal search. Currently, LCKRC uses the Scanner to examine newly-admitted persons in custody while those refusing to be scanned will be subject to manual rectal search.

17. From the introduction of the Scanner to LCKRC in December 2012 and up to September 2013, there were 21 cases of internal concealment of drugs by persons in custody which were detected by the Scanner. CSD considers that the effectiveness of the Scanner has deterred attempts to smuggle drugs into penal institutions.

18. CSD is carrying out preparatory work for the procurement of three additional scanners, and it is expected that Pik Uk Correctional Institution, LWCI and TLCW will each be installed with a scanner in 2014-15.

Way Forward

19. CSD will continue to review and refine various development projects and improvement measures so as to enhance the professionalism of correctional services and to live the spirit of caring for the community, caring for the staff and the stakeholders, and caring for the environment.

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