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Panel on Security

Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the special meeting on 23 January 2018

Crime situation in Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper summarizes past discussions by the Panel on Security ("the Panel") on the crime situation in Hong Kong.

Deliberations of the Panel on Security

2. It has been the standing arrangement for the Commissioner of Police to brief the Panel at the beginning of each year on the overall law and order situation in Hong Kong in the preceding year. The major concerns expressed by members at previous meetings are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Technology crime

3. Members expressed concern about the Police's work and the difficulties encountered in combating technology crime. Some members also expressed concern about blackmail cases involving "naked chat" and "romance scams". Members also enquired about the measures adopted by the Police to combat the problem and the related publicity efforts of the Police.

4. Members were advised that the Police were combating the problem through cyber patrol, undertaking intelligence-led operations and cooperation with law enforcement agencies of other jurisdictions. To combat technology crime, the Police also maintained cooperation with local and overseas Internet service providers and major operators of local critical infrastructures, including banks and financial institutions, communication service, transport and maritime service. Regarding "naked chat" and "romance scams", the Police considered that the most effective way to tackle the crime would be publicity and education. Publicity and education activities, including through social media platforms,

were launched by the Police to enhance the public's awareness of these forms of deception and educate them on the prevention of these crimes.

Criminal intimidation

5. Members noted with grave concern that most cases of criminal damage and criminal intimidation were related to debt collection activities. Concern was raised over the enforcement difficulties faced by the Police in combating illegal practices of debt collection agencies ("DCAs"). Information was sought on whether the Police would, in view of the trend and seriousness of illegal practices employed by DCAs in recovering debts, consider introducing new enforcement measures to curb the improper practices of DCAs or suggesting the relevant policy bureau to introduce legislation to regulate debt collection activities of DCAs.

6. Members were advised that the Police had adopted a multi-pronged approach and taken rigorous enforcement action to crack down on loan-sharking syndicates and unscrupulous DCAs by closely monitoring the conduct of DCAs and mounting large-scale operations. Cases of criminal nature, such as criminal damage or intimidation, would be referred to the Criminal Investigation Teams for investigation. Enforcement actions would be taken depending on the circumstances and prosecutions would be instituted in accordance with the law. Non-crime reports assessed to be "high threat" cases would be referred to the Criminal Investigation Teams for follow-up.

Unscrupulous business practices of financial intermediaries

7. Some members expressed concern that some members of the public who reported unscrupulous business practices of financial intermediaries had been informed by frontline police officers that the matter was civil in nature and could not be followed up. Members were advised that the Police would follow up reports of unscrupulous business practices of financial intermediaries, regardless of whether the cases concerned were criminal or civil in nature, and the handling of such cases were coordinated by the Commercial Crime Bureau ("CCB").

8. Some members were of the view that the Money Lenders Ordinance (Cap. 163) was outdated and expressed concern about whether the Police had informed the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau ("FSTB") of the enforcement difficulties. They considered that the Police should establish a database on money lenders, financial intermediaries and law firms involved in unscrupulous business practices.

9. Members were advised that the Police maintained close communication with FSTB and had informed the latter of the difficulties in combating such

unscrupulous business practices, including difficulties in gathering evidence on the relationship between the money lender and financial intermediary. A database on money lenders, financial intermediaries and law firms involved in unscrupulous business practices was maintained by CCB.

Sexual offence

10. Some members raised concern about the measures taken by the Police to prevent indecent assault, "under skirt photo-taking" within the Mass Transit Railway ("MTR") stations.

11. According to the Police, crowded railway stations with high passenger flow often created an environment conducive to crimes, including indecent assault and "under skirt photo-taking". There was an increasing number of these two types of crimes at MTR premises. With the co-operation of the public and station staff, the detection rate of crimes committed at MTR premises was slightly higher than the overall detection rate. The Police would step up patrol at train compartments and encourage victims to report their cases to the Police.

Public order and handling of public meetings and public processions

12. Some members enquired whether public meetings and public processions could be arranged to be held at different places and time in order to minimize the impact on other road users. Members were advised that the Commissioner of Police might impose conditions under the Public Order Ordinance (Cap. 245) on a notified public meeting or procession to ensure public order and public safety as well as minimize impact on other road users. Where there were road closure or traffic diversion arrangements, the Administration would inform members of the public through different means, including issuing press releases and disseminating such information during press conferences. The Police would also upload the procession route and the conditions imposed on a public order event to the Police webpage.

13. Some members also raised concern over situations in which public order events organized by various social groups with different views on a subject matter were held at the same time as well as at same venue and later developed into confrontations and conflicts between the groups.

14. Members were advised that the Police's enforcement policy was to strike a balance by striving to facilitate the smooth conduct of lawful and peaceful public meetings and processions on one hand, while on the other, minimizing the impact of such events on other members of the public and road users, as well as ensuring public order and public safety. In the event that groups with different positions held public order events at the same place, the Police would

adopt appropriate segregation measures, including the designation of "public activity areas" for various groups, to facilitate their expression of views. Where necessary, the Police might arrange people whose personal safety was under threat to leave the scene.

15. As a related issue, some members expressed concern that with the community becoming increasingly polarized, the pressure experienced by frontline police officers had been increasing. They asked whether there had been an increase in the number of police officers seeking psychological support in recent years.

16. According to the Police, psychological counselling service for police officers provided by 11 clinical psychologists and 19 welfare officers was available to all officers. The number of clinical psychologists had increased in view of the significant pressure encountered by officers stemmed from increasing public order events in the past 10 years. Some police officers had established the Carelinks Cadre and Carelinks Helpline on a voluntary basis to provide peer support to police officers.

Relevant papers

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

**Relevant papers on
Crime situation in Hong Kong**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Security	31.1.2008 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	21.1.2009 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	27.1.2010 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	26.1.2011 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	17.1.2012 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	29.1.2013 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	30.10.2013	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 8)
Panel on Security	28.1.2014 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	27.1.2015 (item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	26.1.2016 (item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	24.1.2017 (item I)	Agenda Minutes