

立法會

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Panel on Security

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 6 March 2018

Measures adopted by the Police to prevent and combat deception activities

Purpose

This paper summarizes past discussions of the Panel on Security ("the Panel") on issues relating to measures adopted by the Police to prevent and combat deception activities.

Background

2. According to information provided by the Police on the crime situation in Hong Kong, 7 091 cases of deception were recorded in 2017, representing a drop of 2.3% as compared with 2016. Among these, there were 1 996 online business fraud cases, 235 romance scams cases and 991 telephone deception cases.

Deliberations of the Panel

Telephone deception

3. Members were advised that there were three main modi operandi of telephone deception, viz. calls made by fraudsters claiming that the victims' children or family members were being detained in an attempt to demand a ransom, calls made by fraudsters who impersonated the victims' relatives or friends to cheat them out of money with various excuses, and calls made by fraudsters who impersonated Hong Kong Government or Mainland officials claiming that the victims had violated Mainland laws and asking them to

transfer money to a designated bank account in the Mainland (i.e. "pretend officials" cases"). Members also noted that about 43% of victims of telephone deception cases were persons aged over 61 and about 51% were housewives. However, among the victims suffering monetary loss in "pretend officials" cases in which fraudsters had successfully defrauded victims of huge amount of money, around 75% of the victims aged below 30, and around 53% were new arrivals, including those who came to Hong Kong for study, work, visiting relatives and new immigrants. Members were concerned about the specific measures put in place by the Police to tackle various types of telephone deception, in particular the resurgence of "pretend officials" cases.

4. The Administration advised that the Police had all along been adopting a three-pronged strategy which included prevention of crime, carrying out intelligence-led operations, and conducting prompt investigations to combat deception activities including telephone deception. According to the Administration, telephone deception in Hong Kong was mainly a cross-boundary criminal activity. Such crime first emerged in Taiwan, where it grew significantly and subsequently occurred in the Mainland and Hong Kong and thereafter in the Philippines, India, Thailand and the United States of America. The Police maintained close liaison with local, Mainland and overseas law enforcement agencies ("LEAs") for exchanging intelligence and taking intelligence-led law enforcement actions.

5. In respect of crime prevention, members were advised that the Police had established the Anti-Deception Coordination Centre ("ADCC") in July 2017 to further strengthen the efforts and resources of the Police in targeting deception syndicates, enhance cooperation with relevant stakeholders, and raise the anti-deception awareness among members of the public. ADCC had set up an "Anti-Scam Helpline 18222" that operated round-the-clock to handle public enquiries. Besides, ADCC also proactively cooperated with banks to intercept payments made by victims.

6. The Administration further advised that the Police had been stepping up their multi-pronged publicity to disseminate information on various common types of scams to the public through different channels. For instance, the Police had worked in conjunction with major mobile telecommunications operators and sent short messages to more than six million phone numbers to remind the public of telephone deception prevention, with a view to disseminating such a message in a more direct and extensive manner. Since some of the telephone deception victims were Mainland exchange students and new arrivals, the Police's Regional Crime Prevention Offices had been working in collaboration with tertiary institutions to display publicity posters on compuses, send anti-deception e-mails to students and organize anti-deception

seminars. Moreover, the Police's Designated Subject Team had cooperated with the Hong Kong Mainland Students Association to disseminate telephone deception prevention messages to over 25 000 of its members in Hong Kong through the association's social media platform.

7. Noting that most of these fraudulent calls were made from outside Hong Kong to evade detection, some members expressed concern whether the Police had sought the assistance of telecommunication operators to block bogus telephone calls from places outside Hong Kong. The Administration responded that the Police had discussed with the Office of the Communications Authority ("OFCA") and the telecommunications industry the measures to help the public identify fraudulent calls. To this end, OFCA had required the insertion of a "+" sign in the calling number display of mobile phones as a prefix for all incoming calls originating from outside Hong Kong. Furthermore, the Police were collaborating with a local university to develop a mobile application to assist in the identification of fraudulent calls.

8. Some members were of the view that bank accounts in which proceeds from telephone deception were deposited should be frozen for involvement in money laundering. Members were informed that there were designated teams in the Police's crime headquarters and each police region for dealing with cases involving money laundering.

Online deception cases

9. Members also expressed concern about online deception cases involving "romance scams". They were concerned about the measures adopted by the Police to combat the problem and the related publicity efforts of the Police.

10. Members were advised that the Police were combating the problem through cyber patrol, undertaking intelligence-led operations and cooperation with LEAs of other jurisdictions. Publicity and education activities, including through social media platforms, were launched by the Police to educate the public on the prevention of these crimes. The Police also organized seminars, such as seminar on cyber security, and reminded members of the public to be vigilant towards suspicious electronic mails. Close communication was maintained with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer and Hong Kong Computer Emergency Response Team Coordination Centre to monitor the overall situation of network security in Hong Kong.

11. Members were further advised that the investigation of online business fraud was generally difficult because such crime was usually cross-boundary in nature and the evidence might not have been preserved by victims.

Nonetheless, the Police maintained liaison with banks for suspension of the transactions concerned, if and when necessary. Moreover, the bank had a duty to exercise due diligence in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Hong Kong Monetary Authority.

Relevant papers

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

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
28 February 2018

**Relevant papers on
measures adopted by the Police to prevent and combat deception**

| Committee | Date of meeting | Paper |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Panel on Security | 3.3.2009 (item VII) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Security | 27.1.2015 (item I) | Agenda Minutes |
| Legislative Council | 28.10.2015 | Official Record of Proceedings (Question 10) |
| Panel on Security | 26.1.2016 (item I) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Security | 11.11.2016 (item VI) | Agenda Minutes |
| Panel on Security | 24.1.2017 (item I) | Agenda Minutes |

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