

**For discussion  
on 2 April 2019**

**Legislative Council Panel on Security  
The “Animal Watchers” Scheme of the Police and  
the Government’s Cooperation with Multiple Agencies  
in the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

**Introduction**

This paper gives an account of the “Animal Watchers” Scheme to be launched by the Hong Kong Police Force (“the Police”) in 2019-20 and the Government’s cooperation with multiple agencies in the prevention of cruelty to animals.

**Background**

2. The Government has always attached great importance to safeguarding animal welfare and been concerned with animal cruelty cases. According to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Ordinance (Cap. 169) (“the Ordinance”), any person who cruelly beats, kicks, ill-treats, over-rides, over-drives, overloads, tortures, infuriates, or terrifies any animal, or, by wantonly or unreasonably doing or omitting to do any act, causes any unnecessary suffering to any animal commits an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine of \$200,000 and to imprisonment for 3 years.

3. Under the existing legal framework, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (“AFCD”) and the Police will conduct investigation and prosecution against animal cruelty cases. From 2014 to 2018, AFCD and the Police received an average of 276 suspected animal cruelty reports each year. Upon investigation, most of them were found not involving criminal elements. For cases concluded in the same period (as at the third quarter of 2018), 94 persons were prosecuted for breaching the Ordinance and amongst them 81 were convicted. The penalties imposed ranged from a fine of \$2,000 to imprisonment for 16 months.

## **“Animal Watchers” Scheme**

4. Relevant government departments, including the Police, AFCD and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (“FEHD”), have adopted a multi-agency approach for years to form a partnership with animal welfare organisations and the public, so as to make joint efforts to promote and support the policy and measures on caring for animals and combat cruelty to animals.

5. To consolidate the relevant measures, the Chief Executive announced in the 2018 Policy Address that the Police would implement the “Animal Watchers” Scheme in the financial year 2019-20 with a view to pooling together the efforts of animal lovers at the community level through a four-pronged approach of education, publicity, intelligence gathering and investigation; raising public awareness on prevention of cruelty to animals; encouraging the public to report in a timely manner; and providing information that could help investigation. The Police will, by drawing from its past experience in organising the Junior Police Call and the Senior Police Call, bring together animal lovers in the community to participate in activities which can help preventing cruelty to animals. Participants of the “Animal Watchers” Scheme may, through planning and participating in various animal welfare promotional activities, disseminate messages on caring for animals and prevention of cruelty to animals to the community. Besides, the Police will continue to coordinate and consolidate its cooperation with the stakeholders (including relevant government departments, animal welfare organisations and animal lovers).

6. The implementation arrangements will be made at the “Headquarters” and the “District” levels. At the “Headquarters” level, the Police will form a Central Advisory Committee in this year, comprising community leaders, representatives of animal welfare organisations, relevant academics and experts, etc. to provide professional advice and suggestions to the Police in the area of education, publicity, formulation of measures against cruelty to animals, etc. At the “District” level, each police region will increase the number of dedicated staff to strengthen the direct communication with local stakeholders and community leaders, and recruit members of the public as “Animal Watchers”. The Police will plan and coordinate the participation of “Animal Watchers” participants in the relevant education and publicity programmes in order to further consolidate animal lovers’ efforts.

7. On education and publicity, an inauguration ceremony for the launch of the “Animal Watchers” Scheme and an appointment ceremony for “Animal Watchers” participants will be held in this financial year, so as to strengthen the awareness and care of the general public on the issue of cruelty to animals and animal welfare. “Animal Watchers” participants will assist the Police in the planning and implementation of the relevant activities, and enlist community support and participation. Different communities and age groups will be enrolled in the activities, so that the message of prevention of cruelty to animals can effectively reach out to the public. The activities will mainly be coordinated by each Regional Crime Prevention Office of the Police in collaboration with “Animal Watchers” participants, police officers of the districts, animal welfare organisations and local organisations. Large scale publicity campaigns will be launched based on situation of individual districts and the content will involve disseminating promotional leaflets about anti-cruelty to animals, displaying promotional objects carrying the relevant messages, organizing exhibitions, workshops, etc. with a view to enhancing public awareness on animal abuse so that timely report can be made, as well as promoting the message of caring for animals and respect for life.

8. In addition, the Police will collaborate with relevant stakeholders and animal welfare organisations in launching various kinds of education and publicity programmes to further promote the “Animal Watchers” Scheme. The Police will also promote the Scheme and enhance public awareness on prevention of cruelty to animals through the use of various Police’s platforms including Police Magazine, Police Public Page, Hong Kong Police Facebook, Hong Kong Police Instagram, Hong Kong Police Twitter, Hong Kong Police Weibo, District Fight Crime Committees, Junior Police Call, etc.

9. On intelligence gathering and investigation, the Police will invite relevant government departments, experts and animal welfare organisations to deliver workshops for “Animal Watchers” participants, content of which will cover the related policies, legislations, modus operandi and trend of crime, etc. “Animal Watchers” participants will, through their community networks, assist the Police in gathering intelligence relating to the prevention of cruelty to animals, such as illegal operation of animal breeding facilities in the neighborhood. They will also remind the public to stay alert on possible animal cruelty incidents in the neighborhood and on the Internet and make timely report.

10. The Police will form a dedicated team at the Headquarters level to coordinate the implementation of the above work, with the support from the enhanced dedicated manpower in each police region.

### **Government's Cooperation with Multiple Agencies**

11. The Government has always attached great importance to its collaboration with various agencies in the community level, including listening to views through the Animal Welfare Advisory Group ("AWAG"), to prevent cruelty to animals. AWAG was established in 1996 to advise the Government on animal welfare and related matters. Its current membership comprises representatives from a wide spectrum of fields covering animal welfare organisations, veterinary science, pet trade as well as other professionals.

12. Moreover, with a view to enhancing the cooperation between relevant government departments and agencies in handling animal cruelty cases, AFCD set up an inter-departmental special working group in 2011 together with the Police, FEHD and the Society for Protection of Cruelty to Animals ("SPCA") to hold regular discussions on the handling of individual cases and formulate guidelines for enhancing the efficiency in detecting and preventing animal cruelty cases.

### *Animal Watch Scheme*

13. In 2011, the Police launched the Animal Watch Scheme ("AWS") in collaboration with AFCD, FEHD, SPCA, other animal welfare organisations and veterinary organisations (including the Hong Kong Veterinary Association and the China (Hong Kong) Veterinary Association) to combat cruelty to animals through a four-pronged approach of education, publicity, intelligence gathering and investigation. AWS aims to reinforce collaboration among various relevant stakeholders and strengthen the Police's efforts in the investigation of animal cruelty cases. The City University of Hong Kong's Jockey Club College of Veterinary Medicine and Life Sciences has participated in AWS since 2017.

14. On education and training, the Police invite AFCD and SPCA officers to explain the multi-agency approach for the investigation of animal cruelty cases to police officers participating in foundation training courses and criminal investigation training courses. The Police invite

relevant officers to share their experience at seminars from time to time, include topic on the handling of animal cruelty cases in the training days of various police districts, and launch relevant e-learning software to provide an additional learning platform for frontline officers to better grasp the latest situation and trend of cruelty to animals. The Police will continue to strengthen training, with a view to enhancing police officers' professional standards and knowledge in handling animal cruelty cases.

15. On publicity and promotion, the Police promote AWS to the public through various channels, such as Police Magazine and the Police's social media (e.g. Facebook), as well as encourage frontline units to organise various publicity campaigns in collaboration with AFCD, veterinary associations, SPCA and other animal welfare organisations to engage and secure support from the community, with a view to enhancing public awareness of prevention of cruelty to animals. Last year, the Police organised the One-Arm Push Up charity fundraising event to express their full support for caring for animals and to draw the public's attention to this problem.

16. Furthermore, AFCD established a dedicated team in 2011 to disseminate messages on caring for animals and responsible pet ownership, appeal to the public not to abandon pets or unnecessarily surrender them to the Government for disposal, emphasise the need for dog licensing and rabies vaccination, as well as promote the benefits of neutering pets. The team also organises activities such as dog adoption carnivals, pet adoption days, dog training programmes, as well as school and estate seminars. Announcements in the Public Interest are also produced and broadcast on public buses and online channels to raise public awareness of caring for animals.

17. On intelligence gathering, we encourage veterinarians, animal concern groups and members of the public through AWS to report any persons or activities suspected to be involved in cruelty to animals, so as to strengthen the intelligence gathering network. SPCA also runs a 24-hour hotline for public enquiries about animal cruelty cases.

18. On case investigation, the Police, AFCD and SPCA have established a cooperation mechanism, whereby AFCD and SPCA officers will provide professional advice to the Police and assist in investigation at the scene of an animal cruelty case where necessary. Moreover, a dedicated criminal investigation team comprising officers with experience in investigating and handling serious crimes has been set up by the Police in each of all 22 police districts with criminal investigation teams across

the territory since April 2018 to take up the investigation of animal cruelty cases. The Police have also set up an online depository for the dedicated criminal investigation teams to share their investigation experience and knowledge, as well as provide relevant training for officers from time to time.

## **Conclusion**

19. The Government will continue to maintain close partnership with relevant organisations to join hands in safeguarding animal welfare and combating cruelty to animals, as well as further consolidate community efforts through the Police's "Animal Watchers" Scheme to prevent cruelty to animals together.

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