

For discussion on
7 April 2009

Legislative Council Panel on Security
Latest Developments in the Provision of Rehabilitative Services by the
Correctional Services Department

Purpose

This paper updates Members on the latest developments in the provision of rehabilitative services by the Correctional Services Department (CSD).

Background

2. At the Panel meeting on 8 July 2008, Members were briefed, vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2481/07-08(02), on the latest developments in the provision of rehabilitative services by CSD. This paper seeks to update Members on the provision of vocational training to adult prisoners and the outcome of a review, with a view to strengthening the Department's provision of rehabilitative services and programmes for offenders. We will also explain the latest developments in relation to home detention and electronic monitoring of inmates.

Provision of Rehabilitative Services by CSD

3. CSD is committed to providing a safe and humane environment for the detention of prisoners and facilitating their return to the community after they have served their sentence through the provision of suitable rehabilitative services. The aim of these services is to facilitate offenders' smooth reintegration into society. Through the daily routine of prisoner life, the Department helps prisoners establish a regular living pattern with an organised schedule for work and rest, and lead a disciplined and orderly institutional life. The Department offers vocational training to help improve their vocational skills and enhance their chance of securing gainful employment after release. Different psychological and counselling services are also in place to address specific offending behaviour,

e.g drug addiction, so as to reduce the incidence of recidivism. To ensure prisoners are provided with the appropriate services that will improve their likelihood of successful re-integration into society, CSD has been keeping its rehabilitative programmes under constant review. Paragraphs 4 to 13 below set out the enhanced rehabilitative services recently introduced by the Department, and the latest development of on-going initiatives.

Vocational Training for Adult Offenders

4. CSD has been strengthening its provision of pre-release vocational training to prisoners in recent years. It will continue to provide full-time vocational training courses for adult local prisoners with remaining sentences from three to 24 months on a voluntary basis. Furthermore, CSD has secured the support of a number of non-government organisations (NGOs) and agencies¹ in providing part-time vocational training for adult prisoners. In 2009, about 630 part-time and 200 full-time training places will be provided for adult offenders in penal institutions. This represents a 14% increase in the number of training places as compared with 2008. Based on past enrolment experience, we expect most of the adult prisoners who apply for such training courses and fulfil the relevant criteria would be given an offer.

5. As a further step to strengthen vocational training for prisoners, CSD has conducted a review of the Correctional Services Industries (CSI) in 2008 to explore whether vocational training elements could be added to the industrial production process in which the prisoners are currently engaged as required by law. The review confirmed that the CSI should continue to play an important role in maintaining prison stability and supporting the safe and humane custody of prisoners. It also indicated that there was scope for strengthening the elements of vocational training, whereby prisoners could benefit from participating in the production process in the prison workshops while acquiring vocational skills at the same time.

6. Having regard to the review results, and with a view to achieving better co-ordination with the provision of rehabilitative services,

¹ The non-government organisations and related agencies include the Employees Retraining Board, Vocational Training Council, Construction Industry Council Training Academy, Occupational Safety & Health Council, Hong Kong College of Technology, Clothing Industry Training Authority, etc.

CSD has transferred the CSI Unit from the Operations Division to the Rehabilitation Division and merged it with the Vocational Training Unit since February 2009. The new combined unit has been renamed as the “Industries and Vocational Training Section”. After this organisational change, the Department has already taken the first steps to increase the element of vocational training in a few industries. For example -

- (i) prisoners working at commercial laundries are offered laundry assistant training courses financed by the Employees Retraining Board;
- (ii) prisoners working at the precast concrete workshop are provided with training to facilitate them to take the trade test for concreter of the Construction Industry Council Training Academy; and
- (iii) prisoners working in the printing and graphic design workshops are assisted to apply for accreditation with certificates issued by the Vocational Training Council through the Recognition of Prior Learning Mechanism under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework.

Prisoners engaged in these training courses will be given the necessary classroom training as well as on-the-job instructions by qualified instructors. With this new initiative, more prisoners will be given the opportunity to receive vocational training, and attain external accreditation and recognised qualifications in the course of their production processes in prison workshops. As a start, CSD is planning to offer around 180 such training places in 2009. In the years ahead, the Department will continue to explore opportunities for further development in this area, taking into account the operational experience gained at this initial stage.

Pre-release Preparation for Local Prisoners

7. In order to provide better support services to rehabilitated persons after their discharge from penal institutions, CSD has, since October 2006, engaged the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP)² to provide follow-up employment services for rehabilitated offenders who had completed pre-release vocational training

² SRACP is the major provider of post-release support services to rehabilitated persons.

provided by CSD. In addition, the following measures have been implemented since February 2009 to encourage rehabilitated persons to seek assistance from SRACP and other NGOs if needed after release –

- (i) needs and services assessment are conducted on prisoners prior to their discharge (e.g. three months prior to discharge for long-term prisoners, on admission for those with less than three months sentence). Prisoners who have been identified of having welfare needs and are willing to accept assistance will be referred to SRACP or other related NGOs for follow-up services;
- (ii) to give prisoners a better understanding of the post-release support services provided by SRACP, social workers of SRACP are invited to introduce their services to prisoners during the Pre-release Reintegration Orientation Course³. This initiative has been implemented since February 2009 at eight institutions on a trial basis, and will be reviewed in six months;
- (iii) as it is difficult to arrange suitable rehabilitative programmes for prisoners with short sentences, social workers of SRACP will pay more visits to this type of prisoners to address their rehabilitative needs; and
- (iv) a video introducing the services provided by SRACP is shown to prisoners periodically. Posters containing such information are also posted at prominent locations in CSD's institutions.

Risks and Needs Assessment and Management Protocol for Offenders

8. CSD has implemented the Risks and Needs Assessment and Management Protocol for Offenders since October 2006. Through the implementation of the Protocol, the Department aims to deliver rehabilitative programmes to offenders in a more targeted and effective approach. As at February 2009, more than 8 600 offenders have undergone re-offending risks and rehabilitative needs assessments. In addition, a total of about 9 100 sessions of rehabilitative programmes have been organised for about 11 750 participants.

³ The Pre-release Reintegration Orientation Course is organised by CSD for all local prisoners prior to their release to facilitate their reintegration into society.

9. Since the Protocol has only been implemented for two and a half years, CSD will continue to take a step-by-step approach for its implementation and fine tune the Protocol in the light of operational experience. It will closely monitor the performance of discharged offenders in the coming years and conduct a full review in 2011.

Community Involvement

10. The effectiveness of CSD's work in rehabilitation is not only affected by the quality of the custodial regime and rehabilitative programmes, but also the motivation and responsiveness of offenders towards such programmes, as well as community acceptance of rehabilitated persons. Against this background, CSD will continue to organise education and publicity campaigns to appeal for community's support for rehabilitated persons.

11. To leverage on the resources available within the community, CSD will continue to work with NGOs and community organisations in enhancing rehabilitative services for offenders. At the present moment, over 60 NGOs are involved in the provision of such services.

12. Apart from NGOs and community organisations, CSD is looking to forge a stronger partnership with the commercial sector. For example, CSD has recently lined up the co-operation of a commercial enterprise and SRACP for the establishment of a social enterprise to provide employment opportunities for rehabilitated persons. The Department will continue to facilitate such kind of cooperation for the benefit of rehabilitated persons.

13. Regarding promotional efforts on offender rehabilitation and crime prevention targeted at the youth, CSD promulgated the "Rehabilitation Pioneer Project" in September 2008. Participants of the project are invited to attend education talks on offender rehabilitation and student forums on the untoward consequences of committing crime. They will also have the opportunity to visit correctional institutions, personally meet rehabilitated offenders and listen to their experience.

Home Detention as a Non-custodial Sentencing Option

14. At the panel meeting on 8 July 2008, some Members raised the idea of home detention, with the assistance of electronic-monitoring device, as a non-custodial sentencing option in Hong Kong. It was considered that the option might help relieve the problem of prison overcrowding and facilitate offender rehabilitation. We have studied the suggestion and the findings are set out below –

- (i) we have made reference to a number of overseas jurisdictions that have adopted home detention. According to overseas experiences, home detention is mainly applied to those offenders who have committed comparatively minor offences and imprisonment is considered not necessary. In the case of Hong Kong, a range of non-custodial penalties are already available to such offenders, e.g. the Police Superintendent Discretionary Scheme, probation, Community Service Order and suspended sentence. Overseas experience also serves a note of caution as there have been precedent cases that offenders committed serious crimes (e.g. murder) when they were under electronic monitoring ;
- (ii) at present, there is no overcrowding problem in medium and minimum security institutions and we do not anticipate such problem in the next few years. In addition, as aforementioned, there is already a range of non-custodial penalties available in Hong Kong to those offenders who have committed comparatively minor offences. Therefore, we do not see the need to introduce home detention solely for the purpose of relieving prison overcrowding in the foreseeable future;
- (iii) home detention does not ensure the necessary condition or environment for offenders to lead a disciplined life whilst serving his/her sentence. Given the compact living environment in Hong Kong, an offender, even if made subject to electronic-monitoring device, can readily mingle with undesirable peers day in day out. On the other hand, the parallel introduction of direct supervision and suitable rehabilitative programmes for individual offenders are best arranged in CSD institutions only.; and

- (iv) the rehabilitative programmes provided to offenders during their custody, such as re-offending risks and rehabilitative needs assessments, welfare and counselling services, education and vocational training, are contributory to offenders' successful re-integration into society. It would not be practical or cost-effective to truncate these integrated services for delivery to and at an offender's home setting.

Way Forward

15. CSD will continue to keep its rehabilitative programmes under constant review with a view to promoting offender rehabilitation across the community in the interest of building a safer and more inclusive society.

Security Bureau
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