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Panel on Security

Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 1 March 2016

Amendments to the First Schedule to the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap. 134) ("DDO") and summarizes the past discussions by the Panel on Security ("the Panel") relating to the legislative amendments to the First Schedule to DDO since the Fourth Legislative Council ("LegCo").

Background

2. DDO, which was first enacted in the 1960s, is the principal legislation dealing with dangerous drugs. Under DDO, substances included in Part I of the First Schedule are dangerous drugs and are subject to the control of a licensing scheme administered by the Department of Health ("DH"). DDO is enforced by the Police, the Customs and Excise Department ("C&ED") and DH. The Police and C&ED are responsible for enforcing DDO in respect of trafficking, manufacture, and other non-medical use of dangerous drugs, while DH is responsible for licensing of import, export, manufacture, sale and supply of dangerous drugs for medical purposes.

Deliberations of the Panel

Inclusion of a substance under legislative control

3. Noting that many new types of synthetic drugs had emerged in recent years, members expressed concern about how the Administration assessed whether a new drug was prevalent in Hong Kong. Members also expressed concern whether the Administration's proposal to include a substance under legislative control could catch up with the emergence of new drugs.

4. According to the Administration, it was keeping track of emergence of new drugs in different areas, including the latest recommendations of the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence ("ECDD") of the World Health Organization and the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs ("UNCND"), as well as reports on the drug situation in other jurisdictions, in considering proposals for legislative control of any new psychotropic substances. The objective was to bring newly emerging dangerous drugs under control before they became prevalent in Hong Kong.

5. Some members were of the view that the inclusion of new drugs in the list of dangerous drugs should mainly be based on the drug situation in Hong Kong. There was no need for the Administration to wait for the recommendations of ECDD or UNCND to propose amendments to DDO.

6. According to the Administration, DDO was reviewed on a regular basis. Besides keeping track of the latest recommendations of ECDD and UNCND as well as findings of other jurisdictions, the Administration would also monitor the latest drug trend in Hong Kong. All these would be taken into consideration at the same time and there had been past examples of new drugs proposed for addition to the list of dangerous drugs in Hong Kong before a recommendation for control by international bodies.

Publicity on the harmful effects of new dangerous drugs

7. Some members were concerned about the Administration's publicity efforts on the harmful effects of new dangerous drugs and expressed the view that publicity drives should be launched by the Administration to educate the public on such harmful effects before the Administration's proposed legislative amendments were enacted. The Administration stressed that the serious harms caused by drugs were publicized as part of its on-going anti-drug work.

Monitoring of drug abuse

8. On measures to monitor the latest trend of drug abuse and tackle the abuse of new drugs, members were advised that the Administration monitored the latest trend of drug abuse through analysis of information obtained under the Central Registry of Drug Abuse as well as through the exchange of intelligence with other jurisdictions and attending international conferences on drug abuse. The Police and C&ED had all along been working closely with the customs authorities and law enforcement agencies of other places to combat transnational drug trafficking activities. Information and intelligence were regularly exchanged. Where necessary, legislative amendments would be introduced to bring new drugs under control.

Medicines containing substances classified as dangerous drugs

9. Members were also concerned about the regulatory control over the carrying of medicines or medical products containing substances classified as dangerous drugs under DDO but used medicinally overseas into Hong Kong by travellers in small quantities. The Administration advised that importation of unregistered medicines required import licences issued by DH. For travellers carrying such medicines, proof of medical use of them from medical practitioners would need to be produced and approval by DH was also required. As for cases where travellers brought such medicines into the territory with certificates issued by medical practitioners but without seeking prior approval from DH, they would be dealt with having regard to the circumstances of individual cases and whether there was a breach of the laws of Hong Kong. Investigations would be carried out by C&ED as and where necessary.

Relevant papers

10. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

Appendix

Relevant papers on amendments to the First Schedule to the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Security	11.11.2010 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
	13.5.2014 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
	10.4.2015 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes

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