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Panel on Security

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 15 January 2021**

Installation of electric locks security system at correctional institutions

Purpose

This paper provides background information and summarizes past discussions by the Panel on Security ("the Panel") and the Finance Committee ("FC") on the installation of electric locks security system ("ELSS") at correctional institutions.

Background

2. The Correctional Services Department ("CSD") administers 28 correctional facilities, including 23 correctional institutions, three halfway houses and two custodial wards in public hospitals, which altogether accommodated about 7 700 persons in 2019. Among the 23 correctional institutions, Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre, established in 1972, is a maximum-security institution which houses both male and female prisoners in all categories (sentenced or on remand) and detainees who require psychiatric observation, treatment, assessment or special psychological care.

3. According to the Administration, the gates currently used in many correctional institutions and facilities are still installed with manually operated mechanical locks. Upon completion of a study conducted by CSD in 2012 on problems associated with the locking/unlocking process of the old system of manually operated mechanical locks, CSD decided to replace the existing locks with ELSS in various correctional institutions by phases in accordance with their respective security and actual operational need.

Members' deliberations

4. The Panel was consulted on the Administration's proposed installation of ELSS at the Tai Lam Centre for Women ("TLCW") and Stanley Prison at its meetings on 7 February 2014 and 5 January 2016 respectively. The funding proposals for the creation of new commitments of \$25 million and \$765.4 million for the installation of ELSS at TLCW and Stanley Prison were approved by FC at the meetings on 12 July 2014 and 6 May 2016 respectively. Subsequently, the Administration consulted the Panel on its proposal to install ELSS in the Pik Uk Correctional Institution ("PUCI") and Shek Pik Prison ("SPP") at its meetings on 8 January 2019 and 7 January 2020 respectively. The relevant funding proposals of \$219.4 million and \$449.5 million were included in the Estimates of Expenditure 2019-2020 and that of 2020-2021 for consideration by the Legislative Council ("LegCo"), and were approved at the Council meetings of 8 May 2019 and 13 May 2020 respectively. The deliberations and concerns of Members relating to the installation of ELSS are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Operation of electric locks security system

5. Members expressed concern about the contingency measures in cases of malfunction or power supply problem of ELSS and any accidents that might cause system failure. Question was also raised about the measures taken in place to protect ELSS from hacking. The Administration advised that ELSS was a highly reliable system with a back-up server and uninterrupted power supply to ensure its continuous operation. It was a closed system that all wirings were enclosed in conduits to protect them from being interfered or damaged. In the event of serious power failure or other emergency situations, ELSS could be manually operated with back-up keys in the same way as the existing mechanical locks system.

6. The Administration further advised that the system of manually operated mechanical locks involved complicated and extensive procedures of keeping, collection, return and distribution of keys. Moreover, the manual locking or unlocking processes were relatively time-consuming and could not fully meet the security and actual operational need of the correctional institutions in modern days.

7. Noting that ELSS was operating in conjunction with the closed-circuit television ("CCTV") cameras, intercoms and call buttons, some members enquired about the need for a CCTV system. The Administration advised that the operation of the manual lock system in TLCW did not require any CCTV system as the locks were opened by CSD staff manually. ELSS was, on the other hand, an electro-mechanical locking system operated by CSD staff in the

control room. Specifically, upon the pressing of a call button by CSD staff to request for the unlocking of a gate operated under ELSS, visual and audio signals would be transmitted to the control room immediately. Having acknowledged receipt of such a request, the staff in the control room would unlock the relevant gate by remote control after verifying the identity of the requesting staff through the intercom and CCTV system. All gates would be automatically locked after being opened for a certain time interval.

8. Concern was also raised on CSD's manpower deployment upon ELSS installation. The Administration explained that the operation of mechanical locks at correctional institutions constituted only a small part of the duties of CSD staff, who were also engaged in other tasks such as patrolling and search of persons in custody ("PICs"). After the replacement of existing locks, CSD would streamline work process and redeploy staff, with a view to strengthening the rehabilitation and counselling programmes.

Adoption of new technology

9. Members noted that facial recognition function for verifying the identity of CSD staff would be introduced in ELSS to be installed in PUCI and SPP in order to enhance the efficiency of prison management and level of security. On members' concern about the cost involved in installation of facial recognition system in PUCI, the Administration advised that it would incur an additional cost of \$25.8 million, accounting for around 11.8% of the overall project cost.

10. Some members enquired about whether the facial recognition function would be incorporated into ELSS installed at other correctional institutions. Some members were concerned about the possible extension of the facial recognition function in the future. The Administration advised that consideration would be given to the addition of facial recognition function at Lo Wu Correctional Institution and TLCW if such function was found reliable at PUCI. Apart from staff identification, there was currently no plan to extend the facial recognition function in ELSS.

Future installation plan

11. Noting that the proposed ELSS at Stanley Prison, PUCI and SPP would not be commissioned until 2025, some members expressed concern about the long lead time for ELSS installation and the estimated financial implications arising from coping with advances in technology and system upgrade or maintenance. According to the Administration, the Stanley Prison was built in 1937 and there were many structural problems to be addressed in the installation process. As PUCI was built over 40 years ago and SPP had been operating

since 1984, some facilities would need to be refurbished or modified before the installation of ELSS. The works concerned had to be implemented by stages and hence would take a longer time. As the lifespan of ELSS was estimated to be around 10 years upon commissioning, the Administration advised that relevant system enhancement and upgrade would be arranged afterwards.

12. Some members expressed concern about the slow progress of installation of ELSS at correctional institutions. There was a view that more wide-angle CCTV cameras should be installed in correctional institutions to prevent PICs from being assaulted at blind spots of CCTVs. The Administration advised that CSD completed the installation of ELSS at LWCI and TLCW (redeveloped areas) in 2014 and 2016 respectively. The replacement of existing manual locks in correctional institutions and facilities by ELSS would be carried out in stages, subject to operational needs and practicality. It was also necessary to examine the specific circumstances of individual correctional institutions and tailor the design of ELSS to the specific circumstances of individual correctional institutions. CSD would take note of the concern and look into the matter when carrying out improvement works in the relevant correctional facilities.

13. The Administration will brief the Panel on its proposal to install ELSS in Siu Lam Psychiatric Centre at the meeting on 15 January 2021.

Relevant papers

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

**Relevant papers on the installation of electric locks security system
at correctional institutions**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Security	7.2.2014 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	12.7.2014 (Item No. 8)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	5.1.2016 (Item VII)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	6.5.2016 (Item No. 2)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	8.1.2019 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	7.1.2020 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes

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