

The 12th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group
Notes of the Third Meeting

The third meeting of the 12th Fire Services Department (FSD) Public Liaison Group (FSDPLG) was held at the multi-purpose hall, G/F., Fire Services Headquarters Building on 17th March 2006 at 6:00 p.m.

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Opening Remarks

The Department welcomed all members to the third meeting of the 12th PLG.

2. Confirmation of the Notes of the Last Meeting

2.1 The notes of the last meeting were confirmed without amendments.

Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

3. Activities of the PLG

3.1 The Department informed the meeting that members had been invited to participate in 11 activities since the last meeting, including Fire Prevention Campaign, Ambulance Service Promotion Day, passing-out parades and fire station open days, etc. The Department continued to say that the Secretary to PLG would invite members via e-mail to attend fire station/ambulance depot open days. For members without e-mail accounts, she would inform them by mail. The Department encouraged members to provide their e-mail addresses for better contact.

4. World Firefighters Games (WFG)

4.1 The Department informed the meeting that with the benefits of various conditions, the WFG had been successfully held from 18th to 25th February, having attracted over 3300 participants from 37 countries or regions. The Department continued to say that the FSD had won a total of 489 medals (134 gold, 169 silver and 186 bronze) and, hence, the overall championship. The WFG had not only received wide public support in the form of sponsorship and volunteers' assistance, but had also attracted lots of overseas fire personnel's families to Hong Kong. After the WFG, the FSD had received many letters of appreciation from its overseas counterparts. The Department, on behalf of the Organizing Committee of the WFG, specially thanked the PLG members who had been volunteers.

5. Medical Priority Dispatch System(The original motion: Priority Despatch System)

5.1 The Department told the meeting that the final report on Medical Priority Dispatch System had completed at the end of the previous year. The consultant recommended that the above system should be introduced and the response time for the most emergent calls

should be reduced from 12 minutes at present to 9 minutes in a bid to increase survival rate. For other calls of less urgency, the response time could be extended so that people in need could receive appropriate services. Moreover, the Security Bureau had set up a Steering Committee on Medical Priority Dispatch System last December to study the proposal. This Steering Committee was chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Security and its members included representatives from the medical sector, legislators, and representatives of the management and the staff side of the FSD. The Priority Dispatch Corporation and the Toronto EMS in Canada would be invited to hold seminars for the FSD in early April and a wide consultation on the recommendations of the Steering Committee would follow.

6. Performance Pledge of Fire Services Department

- 6.1 In response to a PLG member's request raised in the last meeting, the FSD has prepared a powerpoint presentation on the response time performance by every 2 hours in January and February this year. The Department explained that the number of fire calls during the time slot from 0000 hour to 0159 hour in January and February was 166 and 107 and the response time performance was 92.77% and 97.20% respectively. These figures seemed to show that as the number of fire calls decreased, the response time performance would enhance. However, he pointed out that the number of fire calls during the time slot from 0600 hour to 0759 hour in January was 125 but the response time performance was only 88.8%. From the above three sets of figures, there seemed to be no direct relationship between number of calls and response time performance. The situation was similar to the response time performance for the ambulance stream. Therefore, the response time performance by every 2 hours was not an effective means of analysis. The Department added by saying that the response time performance had generally met the performance pledge since the beginning of this year. As it took time to prepare the data for the response time performance by every 2 hours while the analysis was not so effective, the Department would not continue conducting such an analysis.
- 6.2 A PLG member enquired whether dry weather was a contributing factor for response time performance. The Department explained that response time performance was mainly affected by factors like road conditions and unexpected incidents, but not directly related to humidity. For the ambulance stream, the availability of ambulance would also be a determining factor.

7. Making the Best Use of Community Resources to Promote Fire Protection, Calamity Prevention and Hazard Abatement

- 7.1 The Department stated that it was reported in the last meeting that eight District Fire Safety Ambassador Management Committees (DFSAMC) had been established while DFSAMCs in the remaining ten districts would be established one by one. The FSD hoped to promote fire prevention at the district level through the appointment of local dignitaries as Fire Safety Ambassador Honorary Presidents. The Honorary Presidents would sponsor the FSA activities in their respective districts and the Honorary President Associations could on their own decide what appropriate activities would be organized in their respective districts while the FSD would offer assistance. In response to a PLG member's enquiry, the Department said that generally speaking, Divisional Commander of the FSD would liaise with the respective District Office of the Home Affairs Department to collect the information on the people who were interested in serving as FSA Honorary Presidents before contacting them. Honorary President Associations would be set up and FSA activities would be organized

once there were enough Honorary Presidents. As the Honorary Presidents were involved in community affairs in their respective districts, they would immerse themselves in organizing the activities. The Department remarked that with a minimum number of three Honorary Presidents, an Honorary President Association could be established. In reply to a PLG member's enquiry, the Department said that the FSD was collating the opinions on improving the "FSA Award Scheme" and it was hoped that opinions of the PLG members could be solicited by questionnaires in April.

- 7.2 A PLG member stated that in general, singers were invited to perform in district fire prevention publicity activities. Performances of this kind seemed to be a waste of resources. The Department reiterated that after taking various factors into account, the Honorary President Associations would organize activities that were most appropriate to the residents in their respective districts. As the target participants of the activities were local residents, there was no overlapping of resources.

8. Recruitment Arrangement

- 8.1 Regarding a PLG member's enquiry via e-mail on the number of posts of different ranks involved in the open recruitment exercise in 2006-07, the Department said that in a bid to reduce the number of civil servants to 160 000 next year, the Government had frozen the recruitment of civil servants in the past several years. As a result, the FSD needed to make special request in order to conduct open recruitment exercises. The FSD was given approval for an open recruitment of 304 posts next year, including 30 Station Officers, 10 Ambulance Officers, 177 firemen and 87 ambulancemen.
- 8.2 The Department told the meeting that, according to the Department's experience, most applicants were unable to pass the physical fitness tests. In the light of this, the FSD had organized two Physical Tests Trial Days in Sai Wan Ho Fire Station and Tin Sum Fire Station this February. Interested applicants could try the "Physical Fitness Test" and the "Job-related Performance Test" and they were given guidance by physical training instructors when trying each test on the spot. There were totally over 1 700 participants in the two trial days. The FSD would continue organizing such physical tests trial days in the future.
- 8.3 A PLG member stated that the actual number of open recruits could not reflect whether there was actual expansion of the departmental establishment. He added that the work of the FSD had direct bearing on the public well-being. Therefore, he urged the FSD to take heed of the actual increase in manpower, especially when the number of recruits fell short of the number of vacancies due to retirement, the FSD should reflect the situation to the Security Bureau (SB) and request more resources. He also hoped that the FSD would inform the SB that PLG members were in support of the FSD for allocation of additional resources. The Department thanked the member for his opinion and continued that the FSD tried its best every year to request more Government funding. In 2006-07, the Department was allowed to conduct an open recruitment for a total of 304 posts, among which there were additionally created posts after the filling of vacancies due to natural wastage. The Department undertook that the FSD would reflect the actual need to the SB.

9. Arrangements for Rescue Operation

- 9.1 The Department informed the meeting that a PLG member had raised the following

question via e-mail: “Will someone be punished if he makes false fire or ambulance calls to the FSD? Moreover, if the police insist that the suspect should be sent to hospital, can the suspect have the right to refuse? Will the FSD personnel tie up the body of the suspect with bandages or cloth/equipment?” The Department replied that in accordance with Section 28 of the Fire Services Ordinance (Cap. 95), “any person who gives or causes to be given an alarm of fire or other calamity which he knows to be false to the FSD or to any member shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to a fine at level 2 and to imprisonment for 6 months”. The police would be responsible for the security of any suspect under their custody. If the suspect was injured, the police would call an ambulance for him/her. If the suspect refused to be sent to hospital, he/she could complete the “Refusal Form” and return it to the ambulance personnel. In addition, the police would decide whether it was necessary to tie up the suspects for the sake of security.

[Post-meeting note: The FSD is seeking legal advice from Department of Justice on whether a person makes an ambulance call which he knows to be false is governed by Section 28 of the Fire Services Ordinance (Cap. 95).]

- 9.2 A PLG member indicated that there had been a domestic dispute case in which the police, in dealing with a dispute between two persons, called an ambulance to send one of them to hospital. That member opined that it was unfair to send one of the two parties to hospital whilst the ambulancemen had no knowledge of the actual situation of the dispute. The Department said that no matter whether there was someone disputing or losing emotional control, if the police had reasons to believe that someone might injure the others, the police could ask the FSD to offer assistance. He stressed that the decision to send the one that had lost control of himself to hospital was made by the police. The Department stated that the police had the responsibility to stop the dispute between the two parties in dealing with such cases, particularly aiming at avoiding any injuries like bodily harm or verbal threat. Sending one party to hospital was an effective means to stop the dispute. The Department concluded that because disputes between two persons might affect third parties, such calls could not be treated as false ones. To send people involving in the disputes to hospital was a decision solely made by the police. The ambulancemen arriving at the scene were only offering assistance to the police. Under normal circumstances, the ambulancemen would not tie up the person who needed to be sent to hospital. However, if this person was extremely emotionally unstable, his/her body might be fixed on a stretcher by bandages to avoid any injuries.

10. API on Ambulance Service

- 10.1 The Department told the meeting that the ambulance service campaign reported in the last meeting had been launched. The publicity slogan was “A life at stake. Do not misuse the ambulance service.” The Department said that the number of ambulance calls had reduced recently and hoped that those who were in genuine need could receive faster services. Moreover, the FSD had produced an information programme named “Know more about the Fire Services Department” to be broadcast in Roadshow on buses for eight consecutive weeks, starting 6th February this year. The contents included an introduction to the paramedic ambulance service, the First Responder Scheme, the knowledge on household and building fire prevention, etc. The Department took this opportunity to thank Roadshow for providing a free channel for our publicity and said that the FSD would continue making use of every chance for publicity. In response to a PLG member’s suggestion, the Department said that if the transmission of data was feasible, the FSD would consider uploading the API onto the departmental website for public browsing.

- 10.2 A PLG member enquired whether a patient could ask for not being conveyed to the nearest hospital. The Department replied that since 1st November 2005, ambulancemen would convey all patients to the Accident & Emergency Department of the nearest hospital. Such measure could ensure prompt conveyance of patients to hospitals for treatment, which was beneficial to the patients and the operation of ambulance service. The FSD had also reached an agreement with the Hospital Authority. Those who required treatment in a designated hospital would have obtained a medical certificate. Upon production of such certificates, the ambulancemen would send the patients to the designated hospital.

11. World Trade Organization – Hong Kong Ministerial Conference

- 11.1 The Department told the meeting that this item had been fully reported in the last meeting and members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

12. Arrangements for Vehicles with Passengers when Refuelling

- 12.1 Regarding a PLG member's proposal raised in the last meeting on legislation by the FSD to require all passengers to get off a vehicle when refuelling, the Department said that the FSD had collected information from overseas counterparts and found that at present, there was no such regulation in the United Kingdom, Singapore or Sweden. The FSD had explained in the last meeting that in accordance with the existing law, a passenger or intending passenger on a public bus, public light bus or taxi should not enter or remain in or on the vehicle when requested not to do so by the driver or an authorized person on the grounds that the petrol or oil tank of the vehicle was to be filled.

13. Design of Fireboat

- 13.1 The Department told the meeting that the FSD would apply for Government funding to procure a new fireboat to replace the No.4 Fireboat. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

14. The 13th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group

- 14.1 The Department informed the meeting that a total of 77 application forms had been received and new members of the next PLG would be selected by a ballot after the meeting.

15. Fire Inspectors

- 15.1 This item had been fully reported in the last meeting and members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

16. Personnel of the Fire Services Communication Centre

- 16.1 This item had been fully reported in the last meeting and members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

17. Knapsack Pump

- 17.1 This item had been fully reported in the last meeting and members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

18. Attending Calls Involving Patients with Heart Attacks

- 18.1 This item had been fully reported in the last meeting and members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

19. Computerized Fire Alarm Transmission System (CFATS)

- 19.1 The Department informed the meeting that the open tender exercise for this service had been closed on 2nd March this year and the FSD expected to award five contracts. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

20. Further Studies in Spare Time by the FSD Personnel

- 20.1 This item had been fully reported in the last meeting and members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

Matters for Discussion

21. Proposal on “Fire Services College”

- 21.1 The Department told the meeting that a PLG member had suggested via e-mail that the Fire Services Training School (FSTS) and the Ambulance Command Training School (ACTS) should be merged and upgraded to a “Fire Services College”. The Department continued to say that the FSD was committed to upgrading the standard of internal training. Apart from local training, the FSD also arranged overseas training for the staff. As the fire and the ambulance streams were two different professional disciplines, different training modes were required. In the light of this, there were FSTS and ACTS. Regarding the training for the fire stream, the FSD, in reference to the “Integrated Personal Development System” by the Fire Service College in UK in 2003, was studying the “Personal Training and Development System”, aiming at equipping the staff with the techniques and knowledge required when working in different posts. The FSD had set up a working group recently with members including representatives from the Education and Manpower Bureau to study how to incorporate the concept of “Qualification Framework” into the “Personal Training and Development System” in a bid to develop a “Fire Services Department Qualification Framework”. This framework included the cooperation between the FSD and academic institutions, aiming at developing a continuous learning system for the staff. If necessary, courses on EQ or management, for instance, would be conducted by lecturers from local institutions so as to be more economical. As for ambulance training, good teaching quality was ensured under the present teaching mode which, after years of adoption, had been developing well. The training materials for paramedic assistants came from the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC) in Canada. The qualifications of the departmental coordinators and instructors for paramedic assistants and the paramedic assistants trained by

them were accredited by JIBC. The Department concluded by saying that the establishment of a Fire Services College was a long-term plan and vision. However, due to the factors such as sites, instructor qualifications and the number of trainees, it was not an appropriate time to merge the FSTS and the ACTS and upgrade them to a Fire Services College at present.

- 21.2 A PLG member said that there was still much land in the FSTS and suggested the FSD should construct new teaching blocks and libraries on such land. She also suggested the FSD should re-site the ACTS and build a more advanced ambulance training school. The Department responded by saying that there was not much land in the existing FSTS. If the school premises was extended and the number of enrollment was increased, the existing drillyard could hardly accommodate additional trainees. Moreover, the scale of the training school should match the actual number of intakes so as to avoid wastage of resources. The Department continued by saying that the FSD had a library in the headquarters building at present and he believed that the training materials for the trainees were already quite sufficient. So, there would not be much use for establishing another library in the FSTS. As for the ACTS, there were practical difficulties in re-siting. In a bid to extend the school premises, a five-storey annex had been built at the end of 2004.
- 21.3 Regarding a PLG member's suggestion on establishing a credit transfer system and arranging international examinations in Hong Kong, the Department stated that there were no diploma/certificate/degree programmes on fire/ambulance/paramedics at local tertiary institutions. However, the fire personnel could take a higher diploma or a degree or master's course on fire engineering which was jointly run by the School of Continuing and Professional Education of City University of Hong Kong and the Central Lancashire University of the UK. The Department said that in Hong Kong, ambulance personnel could take a degree course on Health Sciences organized by the Victoria University in Australia and a certificate course on the Management of the Health and Care System of China through the Ambulance Service Institute (Hong Kong Branch).
- 21.4 The Department stated that at present, the FSD was using the training premises at Argyle Street on loan from the Civil Aid Service to provide staff training. As the Government would resume that piece of land, a new training block had already been built in West Kowloon. A PLG member expressed that both the new training block and the FSTS had a huge iron cage in which staff could receive the breathing apparatus training, that member considered this an overlapping of resources, the Department explained that the target trainees of the new training block and the FSTS were existing staff and new recruits respectively. As the facilities in the two premises was different, there was no overlapping of resources. After the commissioning of the new training block, arrangements for PLG's visit might be made.

22. Outsourced Catering Services for the Operational Staff

- 22.1 The Department told the meeting that a PLG member had made an enquiry on outsourced catering service via e-mail. The Department continued by saying that the FSD had signed with a new contractor and the new contract would be effective from 1st April. In a bid to make the operation more flexible, only cooking services would be outsourced under the contract while food types would be determined by the staff themselves.

Any Other Business

23. Number of People Allowed to Accompany the Patients Being Sent to Hospital

23.1 In response to a PLG member's question on the number of people accompanying the patients on an ambulance, the Department said that normally one person was allowed to accompany the patient, but considering the space of the ambulance compartment and the fact that the ambulancemen might need to look after the patient or even render emergency care, the ambulancemen had the discretion to allow or decline the request for accompanying. The Department concluded by saying that if there were too many people inside the compartment, it would affect the ambulancemen's care towards the patient and that the number of people allowed to accompany the patients being sent to hospitals should depend on the actual situation.

24. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50p.m.

Fire Services Department
May 2006