

The 11th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group

Notes of the First Meeting

The first meeting of the 11th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group (PLG) was held at the multi-purpose hall on G/F, Fire Services Headquarters Building on 23 April 2004 at 7:30 p.m.

Opening Remarks

The Department welcomed all members to the first meeting of the 11th PLG and thanked them for spending valuable time to participate in public services and contribute to the society. Each departmental representative was then introduced to members.

2. Terms of Reference of the PLG

2.1 The Department indicated that policy matters were not within PLG's scope of discussion and introduced its terms of reference as follows:

- exchange views with the Department on fire and emergency ambulance services;
- monitor the fire and emergency ambulance services to ensure that performance targets are met; and
- put forward suggestions and views to improve the service quality.

The Department added that performance pledge leaflets had been placed on the table for members' reference.

3. Meeting Arrangement of the PLG

3.1 The Department stated that at least three meetings would be convened every year and they were usually held on weekday evenings at the Fire Services Headquarters Building. Members would be informed of the date of meeting by post. Members wishing to propose matters for discussion at the meeting could submit the proposed agenda item or discussion paper to the Secretary of the PLG prior to the meeting by one of the following means:

- by mail to 8/F, Fire Services Headquarters Building, 1 Hong Chong Road, Tsim Sha Tsui East, Kowloon
- by fax at 2367 0973
- by e-mail at hkfsdenq@hkfsd.gov.hk

The Department added that PLG members could also forward their discussion items or opinions to the Chairman direct.

3.2 According to the Department, a member pointed out that it was too early to meet at 6 p.m. Another member suggested that the meeting could be postponed to 6:30 p.m. or 7 p.m. in future. Members subsequently voted on the proposed time of meeting. One member abstained from voting and there were 10 votes each for the meeting to be held at 6:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. After discussion, members agreed that the second meeting would be held at 6:30 p.m. and the third meeting at an earlier time because members of the next PLG would be decided by ballot and a thank-you dinner would be held.

3.3 In response to a member's enquiry, the Department said that no time limit had been set for the meeting, and the meeting would be adjourned after members had discussed all the items and expressed their views.

4. Activities of the PLG

4.1 The Department indicated that apart from meetings, PLG members would be invited to passing-out parades, fire station/ ambulance depot open days, new fire station/ ambulance depot opening ceremonies, 2004-05 Fire Prevention Campaign Launching Ceremony to be held at Kowloon Park on 5 December this year, Ambulance Service Campaign to be held at Shatin City Hall on 12 December this year and fire exercises at operational fire commands, with a view to enhancing members' knowledge of the work of the Department. The Department encouraged members to actively participate in these activities in order to understand the Department better.

5. Ten Years' Review of the PLG

5.1 The Department stated that a PLG member pointed out by fax, "As the 11th PLG had been formed, it was hoped that the Department could review the effectiveness of PLG's work over the past ten years and brief new members about it at the next meeting." The Department thanked the member for his suggestion and indicated that 10 residents were selected every year from each of the regions, namely Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories, for the formation of the PLG since its establishment in 1994. The main purpose of setting up the PLG was to enhance communication between the Department and members of the public, with a view to improving services of the Department. Such intangible effectiveness would be quite difficult to measure.

For all these years after its establishment, the PLG was very effective in promoting exchange between the Department and members of the public. The following examples were cited for illustration:

- To enable members of the public to have a better understanding about the Department and its latest development through the PLG, PLG members were briefed from time to time about the contents of new projects, including Community Relation Division, Fire Safety Ambassador Scheme, typhoon shelter fire prevention measures, the Second and the Third Generation Mobilizing Systems, Year 2000 Contingency Planning, Building Safety Improvement Loan Scheme, Special Rescue Squad, paramedic ambulance services, First Responder Scheme, etc.
- While new projects were introduced to PLG members, they also reflected their views on fire services from time to time, enabling the Department to understand the demands of the public. For instance, they had put forward suggestions such as increasing the number of 50m turntable ladders, adding the Department's homepage and email addresses onto the departmental letterhead, arranging pulmonary resuscitation training for members, publishing PLG notes of meeting on the Department's homepage, arranging fire safety ambassador training/ talks for domestic helpers, and uploading the last five years' aims and targets of the three areas of services, namely fire services, fire prevention and ambulance services, as well as the fire figures during the period onto the Department's homepage.
- The Department would answer PLG's enquiries on fire and ambulance services through meetings and activities. Such enquiries included how to obtain information on fire service installation contractors, whether advertisement signs at the external of buildings would constitute a fire hazard, safety belts on fire appliances, recruitment matters, codes and guidelines adopted for handling major disasters (e.g. building collapse at Sze Shan Street in Yau Tong, gas leakage incident at Tsui Chuk Garden and the accident in which a bus plunged down a slope on Tuen Mun Road).

6. Confirmation of the Notes of the Last Meeting

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

7. Activities of the PLG

- 7.1 The Department invited members to express their views on PLG's activities. A member said that he joined the group only at the end of last year and participated in the activities at a later stage, including fire exercises and visits to Fire Services Training School and Airport Fire Contingent. He considered that the Department had tried its best to arrange activities for PLG members. These meaningful activities would not only boost staff morale and increase PLG's transparency, but also facilitate members' understanding about the work of the Department. He stated that he would try to attend PLG's activities as far as possible in future. He also suggested that visits be arranged to units not under Headquarters Command to enhance internal communication within the Department. The Department thanked the member for his support and suggestion, and pointed out that last year's fire exercises were all inter-command activities and were held at the three operational commands, namely Hong Kong, Kowloon and New Territories Commands. The Department had issued internal correspondence to relevant operational commands to convey PLG members' positive response to the activities and their appreciation of the staff's earnest reception. The Department hoped that serving members would continue to support the PLG's activities so as to learn more about the Department and give their valuable opinions.

Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

8. Civic Education

- 8.1 Members were informed that pulmonary resuscitation training, fire safety ambassadors and fire safety talks for foreign domestic helpers had been discussed previously under this item. The Department continued that the Smart Teen Challenge Camp had been recently organized together with the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) and students were offered a series of training and courses incorporated with materials on fire services. Over 4,500 students had participated in this project since its implementation. Participating principals and teachers remarked that many students had made significant improvements in their way of thinking and behaviour after the training. Therefore, the Department and EMB would continue to co-organize the Smart Teen Challenge Camp.
- 8.2 A PLG member enquired why the Smart Teen Challenge Camp was only provided for secondary students. The Department replied that the course was designed to include overnight accommodation, physical training, fire prevention and fire abatement training, so it was not desirable for primary students, who were younger, to participate. As for university students, they were not included in the EMB's project.

8.3 A member suggested that priority should be given to building attendants, security guards, etc. when organizing fire safety training. The Department thanked the member for his opinion and indicated that moral education for teenagers was one of the key working areas of the government, so the EMB needed to give priority to this area of work. The Department added that it had given priority to building attendants, security guards, etc. when organizing fire safety courses.

8.4 In response to a member's enquiry, the Department said that the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme did not include any overnight accommodation. The Smart Teen Challenge Camp was coordinated by the EMB and arrangements were made for two teachers to stay overnight with the students.

8.5 The Department concluded that apart from the core services, it had shouldered a wider variety of work and provided diversified services to the public in co-operation with other departments, with a view to making greater contribution to the society with the existing resources.

9. New Fire Appliances and Ambulances

9.1 The Department remarked that although this item had been deleted, members would be informed when new vehicles were introduced. The Department continued that after the new heavy-duty foam cannon had been assembled, arrangements would be made for members to view fire exercises at the Tsing Yi oil terminal.

10. World Firefighter Games (WFG)

10.1 New members were briefed on the background of WFG and the progress of the event was presented. The Department indicated that it would send a team of about 50 representatives to participate in the 8th WFG in UK. Some of the representatives would take vacation leave for the competition. Since the Department had more than 9 000 staff, sending a team of about 50 members would not adversely affect the efficiency of the Department. The Department stressed that when organizing or joining such activities, it would ensure operational efficiency would not be affected. Moreover, the Department explained that in light of occupational needs, staff members were always encouraged to undergo various sports and physical training to maintain their physical fitness, and to develop team spirit and habits for a healthy lifestyle.

11. New Training Facilities

11.1 Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

12. Fire Hazard Abatement Notice

12.1 Members were briefed on the progress and effectiveness of the project. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

13. Third Generation Mobilizing System (TGMS) and Fire Tunics

13.1 The Department remarked that the testing of TGMS was still underway and visits would be arranged for members when it was commissioned officially. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

14. The 11th Fire Services Department PLG

14.1 Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

15. First Responder Programme

15.1 New PLG members were briefed about the content, progress and effectiveness of the Programme. The Department emphasized that First Responders provided basic life support service, whereas the ambulance personnel provided pre-hospital care service requiring higher professional skills. Therefore, the Programme was merely a value-added service and the Department had no intention to replace the ambulance personnel by First Responders. Since its implementation on 8 September last year, the Programme had received positive response from the general public and the Government. The First Responders had handled over 1,000 cases so far, and from 10 May onwards, the number of fire stations participating in the Programme would be extended to 36. The Department would continue to make arrangements for the fire personnel to receive Advanced Ambulance Aid Training. According to our plan, the number of fire stations participating in the Programme would gradually increase to 64 by the end of 2004. The meeting agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting and discuss the progress of the Programme at the end of the year. [Post-meeting note: After the meeting, a PLG member inquired about the establishment of First Respondents. At present, each fire station participating in the Programme had nine First Responders, i.e. three for each duty watch.]

16. Despatching Ambulances in Order of Priority

16.1 The Department briefed the meeting about the concept and indicated that the Department was considering to appoint a consultant in due course to conduct a study. PLG members were encouraged to discuss this idea with their relatives and friends and forward the views collected to the Department.

17. Performance Pledge of the Fire Services Department

17.1 The Department said that a PLG member made the following remarks by fax: "The chairman indicated that the performance pledge would be formulated based on available resources, and relevant information would be uploaded onto the Department's home page. I hope the Department can seriously review its performance pledge, and I think a higher target should be set in order to fulfill the Department's pledge of continuous improvement, especially when the 3G communication system can now fully provide effective and efficient services." The member added that the public expected the Department to strive for excellence and continuous improvement in the provision of service by taking the initiative to work out a mechanism of reviewing the performance pledge. He then indicated that the performance pledge on the Department's home page and that currently distributed by the District Offices were both the 2003 edition, which would inevitably make people think that the Department was behind the times. He also suggested that the Department should enhance internal communication to continuously improve its service. The Department thanked the member for his comments, and welcomed other PLG members to express their views on the Department's service. The Department then indicated that its management personnel would monitor the quality of services provided 24 hours earlier by its staff on a daily basis and would make every effort to improve the service. For example, if the target response time performance of an individual fire station was affected by road repair works in the vicinity, the Station Commander had to make proper arrangements such as directing members to stand by at the road nearby.

18. Review and Improvement Plan on False Fire and Ambulance Calls and Delayed Responses

18.1 The Department indicated that although there were still over 20,000 cases of false alarms last year, the figure had decreased significantly by more than 3,100 cases as a result of improved design of the automatic alarm system and the adoption of a series of

measures. The Department indicated that as the system was a mechanical device, failure was unavoidable, and that efforts had been made to minimize the number of false alarms. As regards ambulance service, the Department had implemented the staggered shift system and established an urgent care fleet with a view to further improving the emergency ambulance service.

19. Departmental Expenses of the Fire Services Department

19.1 The Department indicated that explanations had been given on departmental expenses in the previous meeting, and detailed information was available at the web site of 2004-05 Budget (www.budget.gov.hk).

20. Maintenance of Face Masks

20.1 The meeting agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

21. Development and Implementation of Paramedic Service

21.1 The Department indicated that 664 (i.e. 82%) ambulance supervisors had attained the qualification of Emergency Medical Assistant II, and it was anticipated that full implementation of paramedic service would be possible by 1 April next year. The meeting agreed to delete this item for the time being and discuss it again early next year.

22. Change of Fire Services Department's Web Site Address

22.1 The Department reminded the meeting that with effect from 1 May 2004, the web site addresses of all government departments would be in the form of *www.<short title of department>.gov.hk*. The Fire Services Department's web site address would then change from *www.info.gov.hk/hkfsd* to ***www.hkfsd.gov.hk***. This had been recorded in the notes of the previous meeting.

23. Fire Service Statistics

23.1 The Department informed the meeting that the fire service statistics had been uploaded onto the Department's web site. Hong Kong Fire Services Review of 2002-03 would

also be uploaded onto the Department's web site for public access as soon as it was completed.

Matters for Discussion

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

24.1 The Department informed the meeting that a PLG member made the following enquiry by fax: "How does the Fire Services Department make the best use of community resources to promote fire protection, calamity prevention and hazard abatement?" The Department indicated that since the implementation of the Fire Safety Ambassador Scheme in 1997, over 43,000 people had been trained up as Fire Safety Ambassadors. Having received basic fire protection training, Fire Safety Ambassadors were required to fulfill civic responsibilities that included disseminating fire protection messages, enhancing public awareness of fire safety, assisting in the abatement of fire hazards and reporting fire hazards to the Fire Services Department. Furthermore, District Fire Safety Committees had been set up in various districts of Hong Kong by the Government in 1998. To make the best use of community resources to promote fire protection education, the Department would regularly hold meetings with Committee members and representatives of various government departments as well as organizing various kinds of fire protection activities with them. To enhance public awareness of fire protection, the Department would also collaborate with various community organizations from time to time in organizing fire protection publicity campaigns, which included fire station open days cum district fire protection carnivals, fire protection quiz, fire safety roving exhibitions, fire drills and fire protection seminars. Suggestions from PLG members on this subject were welcome.

24.2 A PLG member said that he had been a Fire Safety Ambassador (FSA) for several years. He thought FSAs were generally not active enough and since there were not many of them, relevant training and activities might not be adequate. It also seemed that FSA training had not yet been standardized. He suggested that the Department should strengthen fire safety education and take greater initiative to get across the message of "prevention" to the public through strategic publicity. In addition, existing community resources, such as schools, residential premises and property agencies, should be used more flexibly for spreading fire prevention messages. [Post-meeting note: the FSD indicated that it had a standard course syllabus for the training of FSA.]

24.3 A PLG member pointed out that the FSA Scheme had shortcomings in its management.

For example, he had once received two FSA membership cards and two FSA Trainer membership cards. He also said that many FSAs still did not know anything about the Department's award scheme. He hoped that the Department would increase its publicity of the award scheme and evaluate its effectiveness. He expressed that FSA activities were of variable quality and as a FSA trainer, he had not yet been given any opportunity to teach courses and would like to draw the attention of the Department to these matters. [Post-meeting note: the FSD indicated that membership cards of the FSA and FSA Trainer did not have photographs at first. Therefore, new ones were issued to old-card holders afterwards and they were already informed by the Community Relations Division (CRD) to return their old cards. Moreover, there had been a number of reports on the FSA Award Scheme in the FSA Newsletters. The CRD had also uploaded the details of the Scheme to the FSA website and stepped up publicity through API. FSAs could also dial the hotline on 2417 5707 for enquiries.]

- 24.4 A PLG member expressed that he was a retired police officer and had become a FSA for over two years. He had spread fire safety messages to about 3 000 people in China and abroad. He had also assisted in the firefighting work of the Hunan province. He indicated that the FSD should travel to mainland and overseas more often to promote the FSA Scheme and for exchange of ideas, so as to reduce the departmental staff's workload. He considered FSA too small in scale when compared with JPC, which had a membership of more than 130 000. He suggested that the CRD should offer more FSA training courses.
- 24.5 A PLG member stated that FSA training courses, activities and publicity were all inadequate. She had to call fire stations to get relevant information herself. She hoped that the Department would attach more importance to civic education. Another member said that she still had not received any FSA Newsletters or other publicity material about FSA activities after becoming a FSA for almost one year. She expressed her wish to take part in FSA activities. [Post-meeting note: notices about FSA activities would generally be placed on the FSA Newsletters and uploaded onto the FSA website. Local fire stations would also notify members of FSA activities by post. The CRD encouraged members to read FSA Newsletters on the Internet to support environmental protection. FSAs who had not received any FSA Newsletters could contact local fire stations, or the CRD at 2417 5707 for enquiries.]
- 24.6 The FSD thanked all members for their comments and suggestions, and indicated that the FSA Scheme would be given a wider coverage and community resources would be used more effectively for promoting fire safety education. The Department also understood that fire prevention was more important than firefighting, so it would attach more importance to fire safety education in future. Moreover, the FSD explained that the number of FSA members could hardly compare with that of JPC members, as the

latter had a history of 30 years while the former had just formed in 1997. At present, around 9 000 people would be trained as FSAs annually, exceeding the original target of 5 000. The suggestions on improvement put forward by members would be referred to the CRD for follow-up action.

25. Progress of Preparations for the Fire Services Exhibition Hall

25.1 The Department was planning to collaborate with a private developer to build a Fire Safety Education Centre cum Museum at Ma Wan. Its main objective was to educate the public about fire safety. It would be modeled after the “disaster preparedness” education centre in Japan and designed as an interactive education centre. It was noted that the Department was discussing the design and operational arrangements of the proposed centre with the developer. Moreover, the Department was seeking professional advice from the Planning Department, Lands Department as well as Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau on the transfer of land ownership.

26. Civilianization Study

26.1 The Department said that a PLG member had raised the following question via fax: “As the FSD cannot recruit a large number of staff frequently, is it feasible to employ civilian staff to take up the work relating to recreation, physical education and public relations? In so doing, uniformed staff will be redeployed to operational units and the problem of front-line manpower shortage will certainly be alleviated.” The FSD replied that no posts were established for handling matters relating to recreation or public relations. As for the existing 35 members in the RTE unit, they were responsible for conducting annual physical fitness assessments and recruitment exercises as well as providing physical training for members in fire stations and ambulance depots. The Department also explained to members the difficulties encountered if these posts were taken up by civilian staff.

26.2 Members noted that the Efficiency Unit had embarked on a departmental civilianization study this January. The preliminary findings revealed that a number of uniformed posts could be civilianized. The final results would be submitted to the Security Bureau and the Chief Secretary for Administration. The FSD added that the timetable for restructuring the CRD had been drawn up. The uniformed staff involved would be redeployed to various operational commands while the duties would be undertaken by contract staff.

Any Other Business

27. Customer Service Contest

27.1 The meeting was informed that the results of the contest organized by the Civil Service Bureau, including the Best Public Image Award and Outstanding Customer Service Award, would be announced at an award ceremony cum variety show to be broadcast on TVB on 30 May 2004(Sunday) from 9:30 to 10:30 p.m.

28. Publicity Leaflets and Posters

28.1 A PLG member expressed that as a property management personnel, he also assisted in promoting fire safety and organizing fire drills and other activities. He found it difficult to obtain various publicity leaflets, posters etc. since the government started to face with financial difficulties. He suggested that the Department could produce a certain quantity of publicity leaflets based on public demand and cut down on the quantity of publications with lower demand, such as the booklet on performance pledge, to optimize the use of resources. The FSD thanked the member for his suggestion.

29. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Fire Services Department

May 2004