

The 13th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group
Notes of the First Meeting

The first meeting of the 13th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group (PLG) was held at the Multi-Purpose Hall, G/F., Fire Services Headquarters Building on 23rd June 2006 at 7:00 p.m.

Opening Remarks

The Department welcomed all members to the first meeting of 13th PLG and thanked them for spending valuable time to participate in public services, and thus facilitated the Department in collecting public opinion. Each departmental representative was then introduced to members.

1.1 **Terms of Reference of the PLG**

1.1.1 The Department introduced to members the terms of reference of the PLG :

- to exchange views on the Department's fire and emergency ambulance services;
- to monitor performance achieved against fire and ambulance emergency services targets; and
- to make suggestions and comments for improving the quality of the services.

1.2 **Meeting Arrangement of the PLG**

1.2.1 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 receive the notes of meeting for reference. 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 two weeks 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 to fsdplg@hkfsd.gov.hk

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 Meeting

3. Activities of the PLG

- 3.1 The Department told members that apart from meetings, members would be invited to attend passing out parades, opening ceremonies of new fire-stations/ambulance depots, Ambulance Service Campaign, Fire Prevention Campaign Launching Ceremony as well as large scale drills held by Operational Commands, in order to enhance members' knowledge on the work of the Department. The Secretary had given the members' name-list to the units concerned, so that they can invite members to attend their activities. The Department also asked members to leave their mobile phone numbers/ e-mail addresses for contact.
- 3.2 The Department stated that since the last meeting, the Department had invited members to attend the 139th Passing-Out Parade held on 10 June. Fire Ambassador Training programmes were also organized for members who were not yet fire ambassadors.

4. World Firefighters Games

- 4.1 The Department informed the meeting that the item was fully reported in the last meeting and the meeting agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

5. Dispatching Ambulance in Order of Priority

- 5.1 The Department expressed that the Steering Committee on Medical Priority Dispatch System would continue to study the proposal.

6. Performance Pledges of Fire Services Department

- 6.1 The Department briefed the meeting about the performance pledges of the Department. With regard to fire calls, FSD pledged to respond within 6 minutes in built-up areas, while for emergency ambulance calls, the pledge was that an ambulance would arrive at the scene within 12 minutes. The target was to achieve these times in 92.5% of all building fire calls as well as 92.5% of all emergency ambulance calls.

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

- 7.1 The Department said that as at the end of May this year, a total of 9 Fire Safety

Ambassador Honorary Presidents' Associations (FSAHPA) had been established in the following districts:

Hong Kong: Wan Chai and Island

Kowloon: Yau Tsim Mong, Wong Tai Sin, Sham Shui Po, Kwun Tong and Kowloon City

New Territories: Shatin and North District

There were a total of 108 Honorary Presidents. It was very encouraging to see the active participation of reputable people from different districts in promoting the Fire Safety Ambassador Scheme and taking up the roles of Honorary Presidents. The Department expected that FSAHPA would be established in the remaining districts eventually. By that time, under the guidance of the FSAHPA and District Fire Safety Ambassador Management Committees, all districts could further promote the Fire Safety Ambassador Scheme and support Fire Safety Ambassador activities within their own districts.

In respect of the questionnaire on the "Award Scheme for Fire Safety Ambassadors", after collecting the returned questionnaires, it was found that many of the respondents agreed to the proposed revision, so amendments would be made to the merit points awarded for each service and to the maximum accumulated points, with a view to encouraging ambassadors and trainers to participate in different kinds of services.

- 7.2 A PLG member restated that it was a general practice to invite singers to perform in the regional fire safety publicity activities, which might be a waste of resources because the activities were all very similar. The Department reiterated that the FSAHPA and Fire Safety Committee of each district would organize the most suitable activities for the residents in their district after taking account of all the factors. As the targets of the activities were local residents, there was no overlapping of resources. However, the Department was ready to pass on her comments to the organizers concerned.

8. Recruitment Arrangement

- 8.1 The Department informed the meeting that in 2006/07, the Department was given approval to conduct an open recruitment exercise for 304 posts, mainly for the filling of vacancies due to natural wastage. As regards the Shenzhen-Hong Kong Western Corridor project, provision had preliminarily been approved. The Department was liaising with the policy bureau concerned to increase the number of post approved (304) for open recruitment in 2006/07 to 338, i.e. an increase of 4 station officers (operation), 18 firemen (operation/maritime) and 12 ambulancemen. The application was still pending a reply.

9. Arrangements for Rescue Operation

9.1 The Department informed the meeting of a question raised by a PLG member through e-mail concerning a fire accident which broke out in a residential building at 67 Lai Chi Kok Road, Mong Kok on 24 May this year. After the fire had been extinguished, a man was found unwell after smoke inhalation, and it was at that time that the Fire Services Communication Centre (FSCC) dispatched an ambulance from Pak Tin to the scene. After arrival of the ambulance, it was found that the dense smoke inhaled by the man had triggered the onset of asthma and caused him to faint. A reservation at the Kwong Wah Hospital was made eventually. With regard to this incident, A PLG member asked whether the Department would review the number of vehicles to be sent in response to No. 1 alarm fire call and reinstate the previous standard of “No 1 Alarm Fire Attendance Schedule” (i.e. four fire appliances and one ambulance). The Department said that unless a number of calls reporting the outbreak of a particular fire were received at the same time, or when there were some people or casualties trapped at the scene, it was not necessary to send an ambulance in response to the fire call. Regarding the above incident, upon arrival of the firemen at 1313 hours, it was suspected that an elderly caretaker had an asthma attack due to nervousness and inhalation of a bit of smoke. The commander at the scene called an ambulance for assistance at 1318 hour, while the First Responder helped the patient put on breathing mask right away, so as to deliver oxygen to help the patient breathe. The ambulance speedily arrived in 7 minutes (1325 hour) and sent the elderly caretaker to the hospital for treatment.

9.2 A PLG member also raised a question through e-mail. He said that for regular No 1 alarm fires, only fire appliances would be sent to the scene. In a No. 1 alarm fire call in Mong Kok, after the firemen put out the fire, a casualty was found fainted at the scene after smoke inhalation, which triggered the onset of asthma. However, under the existing system, there was no ambulance was on standby at the scene, so the ambulance supervisor had to contact the Kwong Wah Hospital immediately for making reservation. That member asked whether this reflected any problem with the mobilizing system. The Department expressed that in respect of strategy used and deployment of resources, the Department strived to handle matters flexibly and in an appropriate manner. If there was no actual need, emergency resources should be preserved to increase the flexibility in the deployment of ambulances. In handling fire cases, if there was an actual need for medical help, the First Responders would provide immediate rescue and at the same time ask for ambulance support. As the Department had reduced the deployment of ambulance in No 1 alarm fires in general, the number of ambulances available for deployment in other situations relatively speaking had increased and the response time of ambulance had improved as a result.

10. API on Ambulance Service

10.1 The Department told the meeting that the Hospital Authority (HA) and the Department of Health had agreed to broadcast the promotional video “A life at stake. Do not misuse the ambulance service.” in hospitals and clinics under their charge. It was expected that this measure would be implemented in the near future. The promotional video had been uploaded to the website of the FSD as well.

11. Arrangements for Vehicles with Passengers when Refueling

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

12. The 13th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group

12.1 The Department told the meeting that this item had been fully reported in the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting.

13. Proposal on “Fire Services College”

13.1 The Department told the meeting that this item had been fully reported in the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting. Regarding the FSD Rescue Training Centre in West Kowloon, this item would be discussed under “Matters for Discussion”.

14. Outsourced Catering Services for the Operational Staff

14.1 The Department told the meeting that this item had been fully reported in the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting.

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

15.1 The Department told the meeting that this item had been fully reported in the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting.

Matters for Discussion

16. Fire Safety Mobile Publicity Unit

16.1 The Department told the meeting that a PLG member had raised the following question

via fax: “Mobile Publicity Unit (MPU) was turned out for more than 100 times annually at the invitation of organizers of fire safety activities. Does the FSD have any plan to deploy the MPU to the regions with frequent fire outbreaks for publicity?” The Department replied that the FSD currently had one MPU which would be sent to public housing estates, schools and other organizations for fire safety publicity about 2 to 3 times a week. To cater for the needs in the dry season, the MPU would also be deployed for some special publicity activities.

- 16.2 In addition, the Department told the meeting that a PLG member had given his opinion via fax that facilities of the MPU should be improved to facilitate the visit of disabled people. That member also asked whether Braille leaflets were available to enrich the fire safety knowledge of the disabled. The Department stated that the MPU was equipped with a stairlift for wheelchair-bound persons. Regarding the needs and resources for printing Braille fire safety booklets or publicity leaflets, the FSD would discuss the issue with the departments concerned and the Hong Kong Blind Union.

17. Complaints concerning FSD

- 17.1 The Department told the meeting that a PLG member had raised some questions via fax. That member said that from a positive perspective, complaints could bring improvement in the service to the public. In this connection, That member would like to know about FSD’s mechanism of handling complaints, the total number of complaints received in the past 3 years, the number of valid complaints and their nature. The Department gave an introduction to the mechanism of handling complaints and provided the figures as follows:

Mechanism of handling complaints

- CFO(HQ) is designated as the Departmental Complaint Officer to ensure that complaints are dealt with fairly and properly and that the Department will take appropriate actions.
- Written complaints received at station/depot/division/Command level and oral complaints received by the FSCC shall be forwarded to CFO(HQ).
- After receiving a complaint, the unit concerned shall issue the complainant with an Acknowledgement Card GF17. Upon receipt of an oral complaint, FSCC will give a verbal acknowledgement to the complainant and tell the complainant that an investigation will be conducted.
- CFO(HQ) will preliminarily study the complaint and refer the matter to the Senior

Commander concerned, who will appoint an Investigating Officer/Team to deal with the case. The appointed Investigating Officer/Team must be from a unit not involved in the case.

- The Investigating Officer/Team will interview the complainant for the purposes of:
 - obtaining additional information about the complaint;
 - explaining the Department’s policies/procedures of handling complaints;
 - clarifying the stance of the Department.
- The Investigating Officer/Team will conduct the investigation and submit a report within two weeks.
- The Senior Commander will forward the investigation report to CFO(HQ).
- If CFO(HQ) is satisfied with the report findings, a formal reply will be given to the complainant .
- Reply in writing would be made in the language of the complaint or according to the request of the complainant.
- A Complaints Register will be kept in the HQ Command and the Command concerned.

Figures of complaints

	2003	2004	2005
No. of complaints received	234	221	261
No. of valid complaints	13	12	10
No. of partly valid complaints	20	16	15

The Department continued that annually there were about 30 complaints that are valid or partly valid. The complaints are mainly about fire services, ambulance services, conduct of Fire Service or Ambulance staff, traffic issues, abuse of government vehicles, noise nuisance, late arrivals, fire safety, licensing and certification issues, departmental quarters, complaints from members of the Service, etc.

17.2 A PLG member asked what the FSD would do if the complainant was unsatisfied with the findings/report. The Department replied that if the complainant was dissatisfied with the investigation method or findings, the Department would appoint another Investigating

Officer to investigate the complaint again. Thorough investigation would be conducted fairly and objectively. If the complainant was still not satisfied, he could file the complaint with the Security Bureau or Office of the Ombudsman.

18. FSD Website

18.1 The Department told the meeting that a PLG member had raised the question via email that whether the FSD would consider upload the documents regularly onto its website because the latest notes of PLG meeting were very often not uploaded in time. The Department stated that notes of the 3rd meeting of the 12th PLG were not uploaded in time because proposed amendments were received from a number of members and it took some time to complete the amendments. As for the notes of 9th to 12th PLG meetings, they had all been uploaded onto the Department's website.

19. First Responder

19.1 The Department said that since the implementation of "First Responder Programme" in September 2003, both "First Responder" and ambulance would be sent to the scene for accidents involving emergency patients. "First Responder" could increase the survival rate of patients by providing them with basic life support before the arrival of ambulance personnel. A PLG member made an enquiry via email about the number of cases in which patients' lives were saved by sending "First Responder" to the scene in the past year. The Department stated that from May 2005 to May 2006, there were 8 cases in which patients had resumed breathing and regained the pulse after being treated by "First Responder" on the scene.

19.2 A PLG member suggested that the number of depots and medical motor cycles be increased to cope with emergency calls in the long run. The Department reiterated that the FSD would seek additional resources when there was such a need. At the same time, the Department would also study how to better utilize the current resources. The "First Responder Programme" was a value-added service provided by the Fire Services personnel (operational) through better utilization of existing resources.

19.3 A PLG member asked whether a majority of firemen (each team in each station) had received training on First Responders. The Department replied that there were First Responders in every watch of 64 fire stations and there were a total of over 1 600 First Responders.

19.4 In response to the enquiry raised by a PLG member, the Department expressed that when there was a fire call after the mobilization of First Responders, the firemen in the nearby

fire stations would be sent to deal with the incident, as in case where firemen from nearby stations were mobilized in response to lift traps. Therefore, the rescue capacity of FSD would not be weakened after implementation of the First Responder Programme.

20. FSD West Kowloon Rescue Training Centre

20.1 The Department informed the meeting that the FSD facilities and Civil Aid Service (CAS) facilities located in Ferry Street, Yau Ma Tei were separately built but some of the above facilities such as the Rubble Ground and the drill yard would be shared by the two departments for the sake of cost-effectiveness. A PLG member stated via e-mail that because all the training sessions and activities originally conducted at the three training centres of the CAS would be transferred to the West Kowloon Rescue Training Centre after its commission, it might result in a surge of the usage rate of the common facilities. That member asked whether the FSD had measures to coordinate the use of the common facilities by the two departments. The Department replied that only few training facilities in the FSD West Kowloon Rescue Training Centre would be commonly used by the FSD and the CAS. The facilities included a sports climbing wall located at the external wall of the Centre, a Rubble Ground simulating the situation after the collapse of buildings, and a 2,000-square-foot open drill yard which could be used for passing-out parades. These common facilities would be managed by the CAS. If the FSD needed to use them, it would inform the CAS in advance for arrangement and record. The two departments would coordinate with each other and make appropriate arrangements in drawing up the training schedule so that the facilities could be fully utilized.

20.2 A PLG member enquired about the completion date of the FSD West Kowloon Rescue Training Centre and whether the Department would arrange outsiders to receive training in the Centre. The Department informed the meeting that acceptance tests of the facilities had yet to be done by the departments concerned so the completion date could not be confirmed yet. The Department stated that the Centre would provide a simulated real-fire environment for training and therefore only experienced firemen were suitable for receiving training in the Centre, and it was expected to be completed in early August this year.

21. The Helmets of Fire Personnel

21.1 The Department informed the meeting that a PLG member had raised the following question via e-mail: “The FSD had chosen several kinds of helmets last year for trial use by its staff and what were the results?” The Department replied that the Department had arranged two times last year the trial use of three kinds of new helmets by the fire personnel responsible for operational/marine duties. However, it was found that all the

samples were not suitable for use by the Department. The Department stressed that the FSD would only consider using any new helmets if they were better than the existing ones.

- 21.2 A PLG member said that firemen had to conduct search and rescue or investigation at the fire scene. That member asked whether they could use rubber bands for fixing torches on their helmets, so as to facilitate their work. The Department replied that fixing torches on their helmets with rubber bands was not a proper way of practice. The Department said that there were helmets with built-in torches, but after trial use by staff members, it was found that the helmets were too heavy and the batteries were not durable, so they were not suitable for daily use at work.

22. Rescue Cushion

- 22.1 The Department informed the meeting that a PLG member had raised the following matter via fax: “It was noted that rescue cushions could not be used on many occasions due to environmental constraints. The FSD only had Hose Layers and Lighting Tenders to transport rescue cushions and fans to the scene where people were attempting to jump from a height. Yet the number of rescue cushions was insufficient, especially in the New Territories. That member hoped that when the Department procured new appliances like Major Rescue Units and Major Pumps, the appliances could be fitted with light rescue cushions and fans. Moreover, the number of Lighting Tenders, rescue cushions, fans and transporting appliances should be increased so that every division would be equipped with such facilities.” The Department explained that in the market, there was no rescue cushion that could have its size adjusted to meet the needs under different situations. Among the number of calls from June 2005 to May 2006, there were 17.5 emergency incidents requiring the inflation of rescue cushions every month on average. At present, the Department had 10 rescue cushions in total. Hong Kong and Kowloon Regions had three rescue cushions each while the New Territories had four. According to these figures, the Department had enough rescue cushions to cope with the present demand. As to the feasibility of using other appliances to transport rescue cushions, since huge amount of space was required for the storage of rescue cushions, other appliances simply did not have enough space to store them.
- 22.2 A PLG member said that from time to time it was reported in the news that the people attempting to jump from a height had jumped before the rescue cushions could be inflated. The Department replied that due to the large size of the rescue cushions, time was required for their inflation. Furthermore, the people attempting to jump from a height were emotionally unstable, making rescue more difficult.

23. Disciplinary Action

- 23.1 The Department informed the meeting that a PLG member had raised a number of questions via fax: “Under what circumstances will disciplinary action be taken against a member of the FSD personnel? What kinds of disciplinary action could be imposed based on the seriousness of the offences? In the previous financial year, how many members of the FSD personnel in the i) operational stream, ii) mobilizing and communication stream and iii) ambulance stream were disciplined? In the previous financial year, were there any complaints against members of the FSD personnel for delay in providing services, e.g. complaining about fire appliances not reaching the scene as soon as possible?” That member also stated that several months ago, one of the staff working in the Mobilizing and Communication Group had committed a mistake in the course of his work which resulted in the ambulance arriving at the scene an hour after the FSD had received the call. That member enquired about the disciplinary action taken against the member of staff concerned and what rectifying measures had been taken. The Department explained that 13 offences against discipline were listed in Schedule 1 of the Fire Services Ordinance (Cap. 95). For example, an offence against discipline would be committed if a member of the FSD personnel was guilty of cowardice in the performance of his duty; or without good and sufficient cause failed to carry out any lawful order, whether written or verbal; or without proper authority or reasonable excuse absented himself from duty. Any member of FSD personnel who was found to have committed any of the above offences against discipline would be subject to preliminary investigation by his superior and was required to give an explanation. If the investigation results showed that the case was of a serious nature and there was enough prima facie evidence to show that the member of staff had committed an offence against discipline, the Divisional Commander concerned would appoint appropriate officers to conduct a disciplinary hearing. If the adjudicator of the disciplinary hearing found the accused guilty after hearing the evidence and statements of the prosecution and the accused, that member of staff would award appropriate punishments in accordance with the Fire Services Ordinance. However, if preliminary proceedings showed that the case was not of a serious nature, e.g. the member of staff was slightly late for work or wearing uniform which was slightly untidy, the Commander concerned would through informal disciplinary procedures give a reprimand to the member of staff.
- 23.2 The Department continued that appropriate punishments would be awarded to the defaulters according to the seriousness of the offences. Such punishments included dismissal, compulsory retirement, reduction in rank, stoppage or deferment of increment, fine, severe reprimand, reprimand or extra duties, etc. In the financial year from 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006, some 20 members of staff, including one of officer rank, had received disciplinary punishments. The Department remarked that in the financial year

from 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006, the FSD had received a total of five complaints about the late arrival of ambulance at the scene. After investigation, two of the complaints were not substantiated. For the other three complaints, the respective reasons for the late arrival were: the caller had given an incorrect address of the incident; traffic congestion; and there were many calls at the time so an ambulance was not dispatched immediately to deal with a non-emergency call for transferring a patient to hospital. For the complaint on 19 December 2005, the Fire Services Communication Centre (FSCC) received an ambulance call at 1614 hours. While a FSCC member was dealing with the mobilization, another FSCC member received another emergency ambulance call and both members had assigned the same ambulance to deal with the above two different incidents. When the ambulance supervisor asked for verification of the mobilization orders, one of the above FSCC members had noticed the mistake but due to some kind of misunderstanding, that FSCC member had not reviewed the reasons for the two different mobilization orders and failed to re-assign another ambulance. As a result, only after the caller of the first incident called again over an hour later that the case was dealt with. After conducting a thorough investigation, the FSD had awarded appropriate punishment to the FSCC member concerned. Meanwhile, the mobilization programmes of the computer system had been adjusted in a bid to avoid the repetition of the above human error.

Any Other Business

24. Overcrowding of Ambulances at Queen Elizabeth Hospital on 19 June 2006

24.1 The Department informed the meeting that it was reported in the newspaper on 20 June that there was a rare overcrowding of ambulances at Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) in the afternoon of 19 June. The Department explained that each hospital had its catchment area and that of QEH was relatively large. Generally speaking, during the period from 1pm to 3pm on weekdays, there were on average 23 cases of patients being sent to QEH by ambulances. Nevertheless, during the same period on 19 June, there were 38 cases of patients being sent to QEH by ambulances. The FSD had held a meeting with the Hospital Authority (HA) to discuss this unusual incident and recommended redefining the hospitals' catchment areas. The Department said that from 23 June onwards, the FSD had adopted provisional measures to alleviate the pressure on QEH caused by receiving casualties from the ambulances. As for the demarcation of the hospitals' catchment areas, the FSD would jointly decide with the HA after considering the ability of hospitals for coping with casualties, the experience of the FSD and the results of scientific data analysis.

24.2 A PLG member said that FSCC could make better decisions on mobilization by evenly

deploying ambulances to different hospitals, or ambulances could inform FSCC which hospitals they were heading. The Department expressed that the ambulances would send patients to different hospitals according to actual situations, therefore the FSCC would not know which hospital the ambulance would go to. The Department received about 1 600 emergency ambulance calls every day and if in every case the ambulance informed FSCC of the hospital it went to, FSCC would be unable to handle the workload.

24.3 A PLG member suggested that when it was found that similar situations might occur in hospitals, the hospital coordinators could inform the FSCC or HA to deploy ambulances to other hospitals. The Department stated that admitting patients was the decision of hospitals. In this connection, FSD would work with HA on improving the mechanism. In the long run, the HA should consider reviewing the hospitals' catchment areas.

24.4 A PLG member said that the working pressure of frontline ambulance personnel was tremendously high. Moreover, the incident reflected that the communication between FSD and the management of HA was inadequate. That member hoped both parties would join hands to work out an improvement plan. The Department explained that both FSD and the management of HA knew nothing about the incident beforehand, otherwise something would be done to prevent it. In response to the enquiry raised by that member about the abuse of ambulance service, the Department said legal advice was being sought from the Department of Justice on whether the issue of an apparently-known-to-be-false ambulance call was governed by Section 28, Chapter 95 of the Laws of Hong Kong.

25. The Third Generation Mobilizing System (TGMS)

25.1 A PLG member pointed out that it was reported in the newspapers that the TGMS had an overloading problem after a thunderstorm. The Department replied that every computer system had its usage limit. If there were too many citizens calling for help at the same time, the network would be congested and the calls would not get through.

26. Hong Kong Fire Services Review (the Review)

26.1 The Department told the meeting that a PLG member had made a suggestion via fax that the Review should be distributed to members. And copies of the Review for 2004-2005 were already placed on the table for members' reference.

27. Mongkok Ambulance Depot

27.1 The Department told the meeting that a PLG member had stated via fax that the new fire station at Tai Kok Tsui, Kowloon had not invited members for its opening ceremony.

The Department explained that the Mongkok Ambulance Depot was a newly established unit. Although it had come into operation, there were still some furnishing works in progress. Therefore, it was not yet formally opened.

28. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:30p.m.

Fire Services Department

August 2006