

The 20th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group

Notes of the Third Meeting

The third meeting of the 20th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group (PLG) was held at the Multi-Purpose Hall, G/F., Fire Services Headquarters Building on 26th March 2014 at 6:30 p.m..

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Opening Remarks

The Department welcomed all members to the third meeting of the 20th Fire Services Department (FSD) Public Liaison Group (PLG) and introduced each departmental representative in attendance.

2. Confirmation of the Notes of the Last Meeting

2.1 The notes of the last meeting were confirmed with amendments proposed by PLG members.

Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

3. Activities of the PLG

3.1 The Department said that the FSD had invited PLG members to attend the following activities in the past few months:

- Kwai Tsing District Fire Safety Carnival (8 December 2013)
- Kowloon City Fire Prevention Publicity Campaign Fun Day (15 December 2013)
- Tsuen Wan District Fire Safety Carnival (15 December 2013)
- 165th Passing-out Parade (20 December 2013)
- Tuen Mun District Fire Safety Carnival (25 January 2014)
- Fire Safety Carnival cum Pok Fu Lam Fire Station and Pok Fu Lam Ambulance Depot Open Day (23 February 2014)
- Eastern District Fire Safety Carnival (2 March 2014)

4. Performance Pledges of the FSD

4.1 The Department mentioned that the FSD responded to a total of 36 773 fire calls and 31 115 special service calls in 2013. 93.6% of all building fire calls were responded to within the graded response time of 6 minutes, which was higher than our performance pledge of 92.5%. During the said period, a total of 720 179 ambulance calls were received, i.e. 1 973 calls per day on average, and 94.4% of all emergency ambulance calls were responded to within the target response time of 12 minutes.

5. Publicity Activities of the FSD

5.1 The Department told the meeting that as at the end of February 2014, the number of visitors to the Fire Safety Education Bus had reached 57 600 and the Department had received a tremendous amount of booking requests. The Bus would continue to visit schools, housing estates and community halls, etc. in various districts to conduct fire safety promotion and education activities. The Department had also been granted Government funding to acquire a new Fire Safety Education Bus to replace the Publicity Unit, which had been put in use for many years, to conduct fire safety promotion and education activities. The new Bus was expected to be put into service in mid-2017.

6. Maintenance, Repair and Replacement of Ambulances

6.1 The Department said that during the period from 5 January 2009 to the end of February 2014, a total of 383 new ambulances had been put into service, including 290 replacement ambulances, two Ambulance Land Rovers and 91 additional ambulances. These additional ambulances would be deployed to deal with the ever-increasing ambulance calls and strengthen maintenance and logistic support. Moreover, the FSD would also replace 10 and procure 25 town ambulances by the end of 2014.

7. Fire Protection and Ambulance Services Promotion

7.1 The Department said that the Department was producing a new fire safety promotion DVD package on topics including household fire prevention and means to assist the disabled in escaping in case of fire. Basic shooting of the

video clips was completed at the end of January 2014 and the post-production work (such as adding sign language and subtitles) was underway. The DVD package was scheduled for launch in the second quarter of 2014. In addition, the Department's Fire Safety Education in Kindergartens Programme, which was launched in November 2011, had received very favourable response. As at the end of February 2014, 1 347 fire safety talks had been conducted and a total of 85 252 children had taken part in the Programme. The kindergartens that the FSD had visited had been asked to fill out a survey and provide their feedback, and the majority of these schools concurred that the Programme was extremely productive and hoped that it would be continued. The Department hoped that members of the public could acquire the knowledge on fire protection and realise the importance of fire safety early in their lives, and that the schoolchildren would bring the message home, thereby enhancing the knowledge of fire protection among the general public. The Department said that the Programme was welcomed by most of the kindergartens and the schoolchildren were excited about the visit of the fire personnel. The Department hoped that by continuing the Programme, the children could disseminate fire prevention messages to their families and the knowledge of fire safety would be enriched in family level.

- 7.2 A PLG member asked whether the Department would upload the said fire safety promotion video clips onto the FSD website. The Department mentioned that the video clips would be uploaded onto the departmental website for public viewing when the production was completed.
- 7.3 Regarding the promotion of the message of “do not misuse ambulance service”, the Department mentioned that the Ambulance Command had worked with the Hospital Authority, the Auxiliary Medical Service and the Hong Kong St. John Ambulance in organising the “Do Not Misuse Ambulance Service Roving Exhibition” on 8 March 2014 (Saturday) at Carpenter Road Park, Kowloon City. The Ambulance Command had held education talks on ambulance services, ambulance aid knowledge and proper use of ambulance resources in 15 primary and secondary schools as at the end of February 2014. The Ambulance Service Publicity Vehicle had also been deployed from time to time to various locations in Hong Kong, including primary and secondary schools, community centres and private/public housing estates to hold roving exhibitions. In the first two months of 2014, the Ambulance Service Publicity Vehicle had organised 13 exhibitions in various districts and received great response with over 10 000 visitors.

7.4 The Department continued that to step up publicity and education on ambulance service, the Department had produced the *Ambulance Elites' Caring Show 2013* last year. The programme was broadcast on TVB Jade and HD Jade on 14 December 2013 with the highest audience rating of 15.8 (or about 1 million viewers).

7.5 A PLG member said that he had recently learnt from newspapers that a schoolchild had fallen from height in school, but the school had called the St. John Ambulance Brigade instead of the FSD for assistance. He was not sure whether the St. John Ambulance Brigade could arrive at the scene more rapidly, but he guessed that the school was worried about media coverage that might come along with calling the “999” hotline and thus chose not to do so. He pointed out that as the Government had introduced the digital radio communication system in recent years, the media should be unable to monitor the conversations in the communication channel of the FSD, and so he suggested the Department stepping up the promotion of the proper use of the “999” hotline in schools. The Department said that the Department had also learnt of the incident from newspapers. In fact, it was beyond the FSD’s control as to which organisation the school called for assistance. The Department had been actively promoting the message of “do not misuse ambulance service” and educating the public on the ways to facilitate timely arrival of the ambulance personnel, such as directing the ambulance at road junction and appealing to drivers to give ways to ambulances, etc. He believed that members of the public knew well about the service provided by the Department. As for whether introducing the digital radio communication system would mean the media unable to acquire first-hand information, the Department mentioned that with the advance in technology, the media could obtain latest information through diverse channels, and it was difficult for the FSD to ensure that callers’ calling the “999” hotline would not attract media coverage. FSD personnel might make use of the education talks organised for primary and secondary schools as a convenient channel to explain the situation. He emphasised that patients’ benefits should come first and the Department was always prepared for the provision of emergency paramedic service.

7.6 A PLG member said that the St. John Ambulance Brigade provided auxiliary service only but not emergency paramedic service. He also asked about the criteria for disseminating information from the digital radio communication system. The Department mentioned that the caller had the right to call whichever organisation for service. The FSD was ready for provision of

emergency paramedic service upon request. Regarding the digital radio communication system, the Department would release incident information to the media every 30 minutes through the Government News and Media Information System. The Department would upload information about cases involving receipt of multiple calls for service, requests for assistance from the FSD, turnout of search and rescue unit, use of hoses/turnout of breathing apparatus team, evacuation, upgrading of fire alarm and multiple casualties onto the System. Considering that the ambulance cases might involve patients' privacy, the Department would not upload information about incidents that did not involve multiple casualties or arouse public concern onto the Government News and Media Information System.

8. Future Developments of the FSD

8.1 A PLG member expressed in writing before the meeting that with the rapid development of the Western District in recent years, many large-scale housing estates had been completed in succession, while the construction works of Mass Transit Railway (MTR) West Island Line would also soon be completed. He asked whether the Department had considered expanding the existing Kennedy Town Fire Station and increasing the number of rescue vehicles and staff to cope with the needs arising from the development of the Western District (Kennedy Town). The Department said that the FSD would review its fire and ambulance services from time to time. If the existing fire station or ambulance depot required the deployment of additional fire appliances or ambulances, but there was a lack of space in the station, the FSD would consider the plan of re-provisioning the station. At the moment, the FSD did not have plans to re-provision Kennedy Town Fire Station.

8.2 A PLG member expressed in writing before the meeting that the construction works of the Hong Kong Section of the Express Rail Link would be completed next year, and asked whether the Department would set up a railway rescue team and procure special purpose equipment. The Department mentioned that the FSD had made the necessary arrangements and formulated the relevant contingency plans in the light of the potential risks and rescue operations associated with the Express Rail Link project. In fact, the FSD had already drawn up contingency plans against incidents in various railway systems. The two Mobile Firefighting Supporting Machines (LUF60) of the Department were currently deployed at Sheung Wan and Shek Kip Mei Fire Stations respectively to handle railway tunnel fires. The FSD would also introduce two dual-purpose

fire appliances which could run on normal road tunnels and railway tracks, and planned to deploy them at Pat Heung Fire Station, which was near the Shek Kong emergency rescue siding of the Hong Kong Section of the Express Rail Link. When emergency incidents occurred, the dual-purpose fire appliances could enter the railway tunnel rapidly via the emergency rescue siding. The Department would also procure long duration breathing apparatus sets and install them on the dual-purpose fire appliances to facilitate firefighting, search and rescue operations in case of railway tunnel incidents.

- 8.3 A PLG member asked whether the two dual-purpose fire appliances the FSD planning to introduce could only run on the track of the Express Rail Link. The Department said that currently the dual-purpose fire appliances were specially designed for the Express Rail Link tracks. Given the relatively numerous stations along the MTR lines (i.e. the distance between stations was rather short), fire personnel could easily get onto the railway tracks from a MTR station for rescue operations. However, given the longer distance between Express Rail Link stations, the Department had to implement more ancillary measures to ensure operational efficiency. The dual-purpose fire appliances would be deployed at Pat Heung Fire Station due to its close proximity to the Shek Kong emergency rescue siding of the Hong Kong Section of the Express Rail Link.
- 8.4 A PLG member mentioned that platform screen doors were installed in MTR stations in phases in recent years to prevent passengers from falling onto the track. The Department said that when the railway company had plans for new initiatives, the Department would provide professional advice on the designs and matters concerning rescue operations.
- 8.5 Regarding a PLG member's enquiry about the gas supply of breathing apparatus, the Department said that the gas supplied by the new 8-litre cylinder could usually last for 43 minutes, while the working time was 33 minutes, but the amount of gas consumed might vary from person to person under different situations. All fire personnel had received adequate training on the safe use of breathing apparatus. A breathing apparatus entry control point would also be set up at the scene of incident to arrange breathing apparatus for fire personnel to ensure their safety. At present, the Department was also equipped with twin cylinders (two 8-litre cylinders) breathing apparatus, and so the time of gas supply could be extended to about one hour.

8.6 A PLG member asked about the condition when the fire personnel would bring the “Rescuee Breathing Aid” to the scene of incident. The Department said that each Rescue Unit was currently equipped with one set of “Rescuee Breathing Aid”. Fire personnel would evaluate the situation and bring the “Rescuee Breathing Aid” to the scene of incident when deemed necessary. In case of multiple casualty incidents, the officer-in-charge at the scene would request for reinforcement.

9. Post-dispatch Advice (PDA)

9.1 The Department said that as at the end of February 2014, Fire Services Communications Centre (FSCC) operators had provided PDA for 15 580 cases, including 11 584 bleeding cases, 1 522 fracture and dislocation of limbs cases, 381 burn cases, 1 910 convulsion cases, 142 heat stroke cases and 41 hypothermia cases. During the period from 1 May 2011 to 28 February 2014, the FSD conducted a telephone survey of callers who had received PDA. Of the 8 439 respondents, 99.5% were satisfied with the PDA they received; 99.2% agreed that the advice was useful for handling the patients; and 99.7% agreed that the Department should continue to provide PDA in the future. The Department would continue to liaise with various stakeholders, such as patient groups, elderly homes and medical groups, to listen to their comments on the PDA service, thereby enhancing the standard of emergency ambulance service.

9.2 A PLG member expressed in writing before the meeting that FSCC operators were very busy during major fire/incidents or system failures, and the provision of PDA would only add to their heavy workload. He asked, during such hectic periods, whether FSCC operators should pick up callers’ calls (core service) first or spend ten minutes or so to provide PDA to the callers; and whether the Department had drawn up any guideline to the effect that members were not required to provide PDA during such hectic periods. Moreover, the Department would conduct a telephone survey of callers who had received PDA. He asked about the survey contents and the areas of dissatisfaction identified by those who did not appreciate the PDA service provided by the FSD. The Department said that before the provision of simple PDA to the public, the Department had given detailed considerations to the manpower arrangement and provided the FSCC with additional manpower for the provision of the PDA service to cope with the anticipated increased workload. Meanwhile, before the launch of the new

service, the FSCC had drawn up a set of well-deliberated and detailed internal guidelines on, inter alia, the simple PDA revised by the departmental medical director (i.e. the consultant) and the implementation instructions issued by the unit commander of the Mobilising and Communications Group (i.e. FSCC). All FSCC members must strictly follow the guidelines when performing such duties. The guidelines also stipulated that FSCC members must accord priority to handling all emergency calls. When a major fire or emergency incident occurred in Hong Kong or the computerised mobilising system of the FSCC was unstable, the FSCC would implement the contingency plan immediately. The watch commander of the FSCC would handle the situation according to the established procedures and flexibly deploy manpower resources to respond to all the emergency calls.

9.3 The Department continued that since the launch of the PDA service, the Department had been conducting a telephone survey of callers who had received PDA to solicit their views on the service. The survey respondents were invited to express their views on:

- (1) The extent to which they were satisfied with the PDA service received;
- (2) The usefulness of the PDA service for callers to handle patient's condition; and
- (3) The continued provision of the PDA service by the FSD to callers in the future.

9.4 The Department told the meeting that the great majority of the respondents had answered "satisfied" or "agreed" to the three questions above. The reasons why a small number of the remaining respondents answered "not satisfied" or "not agreed" in respect of the provision of the new service could be broadly categorised as follows:

- (1) Some callers could not stop the patients' bleeding even following the PDA provided by FSD personnel;
- (2) Some callers had difficulty in listening to the PDA over the phone and handling the patient simultaneously;
- (3) Some callers thought that whether the PDA could be followed depended on the actual situation at scene and the callers' comprehension of the PDA;
- (4) Some callers suggested that it was not necessary for the operator to hang up first and then call back, and instead they should stay on the

phone for immediate provision of PDA service; and

- (5) Some respondents who worked as security guards currently said that the PDA was not useful as all of them had already obtained the first aid qualification.

9.5 A PLG member asked whether the watch commander of the FSCC would decide to suspend the PDA service under exceptional circumstances. The Department said that FSCC operators would accord priority to handling emergency calls, and the PDA service was only an added service. However, as mentioned previously, the FSCC was already given additional manpower for providing PDA. As such, providing the PDA service would not affect other emergency service even in case of major incidents.

9.6 A PLG member enquired about the feasibility of providing PDA to the caller by phone by ambulance personnel en route to the scene of incident; and whether the service was also provided by control centre personnel in other countries. The Department said that the current PDA service provided by the Department was protocol-driven. Such approach was adopted by most of the countries implementing the Medical Priority Dispatch System and PDA was also provided by communication centre personnel in these countries. Members responsible for providing PDA were not allowed to alter the given contents of PDA on their own and such advice would not involve any personal judgement. Regarding PLG member's suggestion, in fact, ambulance personnel en route already had to handle designated tasks. If they were required to provide PDA to callers over the phone when proceeding to the scene, they might be distracted. The Department considered that the existing arrangement best met the needs of the public and could provide quality service.

10. Reduction in Conditioned Working Hours of Fire Personnel

10.1 A PLG member expressed in writing before the meeting that the Department would only make known to the public that the "New 51 Proposal" had been running smoothly since its launch. Therefore, he asked how the Department evaluated the trial scheme and assessed it as satisfactory, such as whether any actual objective standards had been adopted; and whether the Department could provide objective data showing that the service quality of the FSD was not affected. The Department said that the Department had developed various performance indicators when formulating the "New 51 Proposal" with the primary aim to ensure that 92.5% of all calls could be responded to within the

graded response time. Since the launch of the trial scheme, the Department had been closely monitoring the operation of the units concerned. The Department had also conducted evaluation on and analysis of the operational efficiency of firefighting and rescue operations involving the fire appliances concerned so as to get the picture of whether the “New 51 Proposal” would affect the work (referring to a total of 14 core duties such as water supplying, blasting and casualty handling) of frontline fire personnel at the scene of incident. The results showed that of more than 2 000 incidents concerned since the launch of the trial scheme, the operational efficiency of frontline fire personnel was not affected by the “New 51 Proposal”.

11. Incident and Fire Safety Support Unit (IFSSU)

11.1 Members agreed to delete this item from next meeting’s agenda.

12. Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team

12.1 Regarding a PLG member’s suggestion about visiting the USAR Training Ground in Sheung Shui, the Department said, as mentioned in the last meeting, the Training Ground was not suitable for PLG members’ visit on safety grounds. He considered it more suitable to arrange PLG members to visit USAR-related training facilities after the completion of the new Fire Services Training School. Nevertheless, the USAR team had produced a video about their night-time training to so that PLG members could gain an initial understanding of the Training Ground. The video was played in the meeting for the members. A PLG member asked whether the Department would upload the video onto the FSD website. The Department said that the video would not be uploaded onto the departmental website as it was not a matter of public concern.

12.2 Members agreed to delete this item from next meeting’s agenda.

13. Work of the Diving Unit

13.1 Members agreed to delete this item from next meeting’s agenda.

New Items

14. Matters Concerning Hill Fire Fighting

14.1 A PLG member suggested before the meeting that if a hill fire occurred in areas with numerous visitors (such as Sai Kung), the Department might make use of the water in the reservoirs or service reservoirs nearby and carry water in large dangling water tanks to put out the fire at the scene. He suggested that the Department should deploy fire appliances to hiking trails if resources allowed to raise public alertness. The Department mentioned that the Department had conducted risk assessments and made strategic considerations when selecting a site for a new fire station. During the peak seasons of hill fire, such as Ching Ming Festival and Chung Yeung Festival, the Department would deploy fire personnel to hill fire “black spots” to distribute leaflets and to appeal to hikers and grave-sweepers to take extra care when handling fire for the purpose of preventing hill fire.

Any Other Business

15. A PLG member suggested that wet towels should be specified when the Department promoted the “three useful items in case of fire” (i.e. towel, mobile phone and keys). The Department said that it would be the best if people could bring along the wet towels during escape. However, under certain circumstances, they might not be able to get access to water. Advertising effect of the fire safety promotion activities of the Department was already achieved if members of the public could learn about the points to note when escaping from fire. If everything was explained in a detailed manner in the publicity activities, the public might not be able to get hold of all information in one go and the advertising effect would be affected.

16. Regarding a PLG member’s suggestion about organising visits to the Ambulance Command Training School and Driving Training School for members of the PLG, the Department said that the Ambulance Command Training School had a tight schedule in terms of training courses and might not be able to arrange visits for PLG members. As regards the Driving Training School, it was using part of the areas of the fire station as its office and most of the driving trainings were conducted on the street. As such, PLG members might not be able to get a glimpse of the training even if they visited the Driving Training School. He suggested organising visits for PLG members when the new Fire Services Training School with driving training facilities was completed.

17. There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Fire Services Department

May 2014