

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

(A) Background

1.1 In the past three years, Hong Kong has seen a significant rise in the number of young people (under the age of 21) abusing psychotropic substances. The increase has reversed the trend of overall decline in the total population of drug abusers for the past decade. Nearly all young drug abusers take psychotropic substances instead of traditional drugs like heroin. Some young people have been misled into thinking that it is trendy to take drugs, and that those substances are not harmful or addictive. As there may not be any immediately obvious withdrawal symptoms and that the harmful effects may not be recognised until after a few years, the drug abusing behaviour may remain “hidden” in the meantime. The damage to the body may have become permanent and irreversible when the problem is eventually identified.

1.2 In addition to physical harm, drug abuse also causes or aggravates other problems to the abuser, including poor family relationships, school or work performance, social relationships, daily activities and self image. Society as a whole also pays dearly for it through health care, the criminal justice system, social welfare, economic productivity and competitiveness. Furthermore, drug abuse is highly transmittable through peer influence where a drug abuser may pass on his drug abusing behaviour to his friends, schoolmates or colleagues at work. If left unchecked, the problem will undermine the fabric of our society. The Administration is therefore determined to arrest this trend in a concerted and holistic manner.

(B) Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse

1.3 In October 2007, the Chief Executive in his Policy Address announced the appointment of the Secretary for Justice, the incumbent Deputy Chairman of the Fight Crime Committee (FCC), to lead a high level inter-departmental task force to tackle the youth drug abuse problem. The Task Force would make use of the existing anti-crime and anti-drug networks to consolidate strategies to combat the problem from a holistic perspective.

1.4 The Task Force would review current anti-drug measures, spearhead cross-bureaux and inter-departmental efforts, and enhance collaboration among Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), stakeholders and the community, with a view to identifying areas of focus and improvement. Initiatives that the Task Force would consider spanned over the five prongs of the anti-drug strategy, i.e. preventive education and publicity, treatment and rehabilitation, legislation and law enforcement, research and external cooperation. Bureaux and departments have been requested to revisit their existing programmes and put forward concrete proposals for submission to the Task Force for discussion. The membership and terms of reference of the Task Force are at **Annexes 1** and **2** respectively.

1.5 Given the pressing nature of the problem, the Task Force has given itself one year's time to complete its task. It started with a general overview of the drug abuse situation and devised a series of initial measures that could be implemented in the short to medium term, for which around \$53 million has been allocated in 2008-09. The Task Force then considered in detail each of the five prongs of the anti-drug strategy and engaged the stakeholders in earnest with a view to drawing up long-term, sustainable and comprehensive strategies.

(C) Consultation through Anti-drug and Fight-crime Networks

1.6 Over the past year, while spearheading cross-bureaux and inter-departmental efforts, the Task Force has maintained a close

partnership with the existing fight crime and anti-drug networks including FCC, the Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN), the Research Advisory Group (RAG), and the Drug Liaison Committee (DLC). The Task Force appreciates the enormous amount of efforts these bodies have dedicated to advising the Administration in the past, and has benefitted from their wise counsel in the course of Task Force deliberations.

1.7 To further tap the views and expertise of various stakeholders, we have also met with a wide spectrum of bodies and individuals, and benefitted from many submissions and comments received through various channels. Our hearty thanks go to many school principals, teachers, parents, frontline anti-drug and social workers, the medical profession, treatment and rehabilitation agencies, District Councils (DCs), District Fight Crime Committees (DFCCs), young people themselves, and many others. **Annex 3** sets out the NGOs, bodies and individuals who have been consulted and/or who have submitted views to the Task Force.

(D) Way Forward

1.8 The Task Force has summed up its work in the past year in this Report, setting out its recommendations on further measures to be pursued immediately and sustainable, comprehensive strategies to be implemented in the longer term. The publication of this Report concludes the mandate of the Task Force but inaugurates an intensified and strategically considered battle on youth drug abuse by the Administration and the community.

1.9 The bureaux and departments concerned will focus on the implementation of the recommendations individually and collectively. The Commissioner for Narcotics will be responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the recommendations. Regular reports will be made to ACAN and FCC.

1.10 The Task Force appreciates that youth drug abuse is merely a manifestation of more deep-rooted problems related to their families, studies or development. The Administration need to and will continue to

work closely with ACAN, FCC, NGOs, and other stakeholders including parents, social workers, schools, healthcare professionals, academia, the media and the wider community. Whether Hong Kong can arrest the tide of youth drug abuse and protect our next generation from its scourge depends on the determined and collaborative efforts of everyone. The Task Force sincerely hopes that this Report and the measures which are already underway will strengthen that resolve and collaboration.