

For discussion on
12 December 2003

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

Implementation of measures to address gambling-related problems

Purpose

This paper informs members of the progress of measures implemented to address gambling-related problems.

Background

2. The Administration committed to implement a series of preventive and remedial measures to address gambling-related problems. We also undertook to report to this Panel on the progress of such measures by the end of this year.

Establishment of The Ping Wo Fund

3. Home Affairs Bureau established the Ping Wo Fund in September 2003 to finance preventive and remedial measures to address the gambling-related problems. The Hong Kong Jockey Club (HKJC) has undertaken to contribute a total of \$24 million within the first two years and \$12 million to \$15 million each year in the following three years. The Fund also welcomes donations from the public.

4. The main objects of the Ping Wo Fund are to finance the following measures:

- (a) research and studies into problems and issues relating to gambling;
- (b) public education and other measures to prevent or alleviate problems relating to gambling; and
- (c) counselling, treatment and other remedial or support services for problem and pathological gamblers and those affected by them.

5. The use and application of the Fund would be determined by SHA. The Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee was set up in September 2003 to advise SHA on the management and use of the Fund.

Progress of measures

6. We are implementing various preventive and remedial measures which are financed by the Ping Wo Fund. The details are set out below:

A. Research on gambling-related issues

7. We intend to commission academic institutes to conduct research and studies on gambling-related issues, which mainly include the following –

- a) tracking surveys on the impact of gambling participation, and prevalence of problem and pathological gambling in Hong Kong, and;
- b) the effectiveness of different types of screening methodology as well as counselling and treatment services for problem / pathological gamblers and their family members.

8. On item (a), we are planning to invite all local universities to submit proposals on the study in early 2004, with reference to the framework of the study on “Hong Kong People’s Participation in Gambling Activities” conducted by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in 2001. As regards item (b), we would be inviting universities to submit proposals by the end of this year, with a view to commencing the study in early 2004.

B. Public education campaign for preventing gambling-related problems

a) Education measures targetting the general public

9. The public education programme targetting the general public is primarily intended to prevent them from becoming problem and pathological gamblers, by making them better informed to decide whether and how to participate in gambling, and to guard against compulsive gambling behaviour. Posters and banners to warn against excessive gambling have been produced and are displayed in various locations including all Off-course Betting Branches of the HKJC, public sports and recreational facilities as well as public housing estates. TV Announcement of Public Interest (API) and radio API to disseminate messages about the adverse

consequences of excessive gambling have also been produced and broadcast since July 2003. A TV documentary drama series on problem gambling produced by Radio Television Hong Kong will be broadcast starting from 13 December 2003. Some other APIs on gambling-related problems, including one on problem and pathological gambling, would successively be produced in the future.

b) Education campaign targetting the adolescents

10. We commissioned the Hong Kong Education City (Hkedcity), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Education and Manpower Bureau, to launch a two-year education programme targetting young people, school students, teachers and parents on gambling-related issues. The campaign, which is known as “Say No to Gambling Action”, commenced in late October 2003. The primary objectives of the programme are to: -

- (a) enhance the understanding of young people, school students, teachers and parents of gambling-related problems;
- (b) strengthen students’ and youngsters’ ability to exercise self-control, so as to prevent themselves from becoming addicted to, developing compulsive or pathological behaviour in any activity (including gambling); and
- (c) increase awareness of problem and pathological gambling among the young people.

11. The campaign includes a dedicated website (www.saynotogambling.net) which provides on-line activities aimed at disseminating information and arousing young people and students’ concern about gambling and its inherent risks. The website also contains major reference materials on problem and pathological gambling. Activities such as debating competitions, seminars, project-based learning activities and outdoor activities would also be organized to increase the awareness of adolescents on the subject.

12. Since the launch of the campaign, a total of 17,000 page views have been recorded in response to contents on the dedicated website. More information and interactive games on problems associated with gambling are being compiled for inclusion in the website shortly. A seminar on gambling problems among the youths was organized in late October 2003. Other seminars on how to organize gambling-related educational activities and deal with students with gambling

problems for teachers and social workers will be organized starting from early 2004. The HKedcity is planning to arrange for appropriate presentations to schools and organize educational activities on gambling-related problems.

C. Counselling and Treatment Services for problem and pathological gamblers

13. Caritas and the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals were selected to operate two pilot dedicated counselling and treatment centres for problem and pathological gamblers serving New Territories and Kowloon and Hong Kong Island respectively. The two centres and the gambling counselling hotline service commenced operation in mid-October 2003.

14. The two centres provide specialized counselling and treatment services for problem / pathological gamblers and their family members. They are also intended to facilitate the development of the best practices for remedial services and screening of problem and pathological gamblers in Hong Kong, and collect data and statistics for the sake of enhancing understanding about the behaviour and risk factors of problem and pathological gambling. Moreover, they would also be providing training to help concerned professionals build up expertise in working with problem and pathological gamblers; and organizing education programmes for general public on problem and pathological gambling and how to prevent and cope with the gambling-related problems.

15. Until end November 2003, the two centres have received a total of 686 calls which require telephone counselling or follow-up action, and a total of 206 new cases which require face-to-face counselling or other referral services.

**Home Affairs Bureau
December 2003**