

# CSD responds on issue of official visits

In response to a complaint made by council members through the media and on social media yesterday (November 2) alleging that official visits by council members to persons in custody had been suspended since July 2020, thereby hindering their performance of duties and depriving persons in custody of the right to seek assistance, the Correctional Services Department (CSD) gave the following response today (November 3):

The CSD is committed to ensuring a safe and secure custodial environment. Given the unique settings of correctional institutions and the frequent passage in and out, infectious diseases can be rapidly transmitted there. With the spread of COVID-19 since the beginning of this year, there have been large-scale outbreaks of the pandemic in different correctional systems all over the world, adversely affecting the operations of correctional institutions and public healthcare systems.

To protect the safety of correctional officers, persons in custody and various stakeholders, the CSD activated the established Medical Response System early this year by adopting a series of infection control measures, reducing the passage into and out of correctional institutions and avoiding direct contact between persons in custody and outside parties.

At present, persons in custody can receive social visits and official visits at a Social Visit Room and an Official Visit Room respectively. As a glass panel is installed at each visit booth of a Social Visit Room to completely separate persons in custody and visitors, it is more effective for infection prevention compared to face-to-face visiting conducted at an Official Visit Room.

With the surge of the epidemic in July, the CSD decided to suspend all non-emergency official visits to be conducted at Official Visit Rooms. However, official visitors can still apply for official visits if necessary and the CSD will consider the applications on a case-by-case basis. Currently, the official visits so approved are arranged to be conducted at the Social Visit Rooms, where the infection control measures are more effective. Therefore, the repeated assertion by council members that the CSD has suspended official visits is not factually correct.

Apart from social visits and official visits, persons in custody can communicate with the outside world by letter anytime and can also lodge complaints through various channels.

The CSD emphasises that disease prevention is of utmost important at the moment. Given the volatility of the epidemic, the CSD will not hastily cancel the relevant arrangement. The visit arrangements will be adjusted in a timely manner in accordance with the development of the epidemic situation.