

Supplementary Information for the Home Affairs Panel

Proposal for the Creation of an Additional Post of Press Secretary

Introduction

At the meeting held on 12 June 2001, Members of the LegCo Home Affairs Panel asked for supplementary information regarding the Administration's proposal to create an additional post of Press Secretary in the Information Services Department. This note aims to provide the required information.

Background

2. The duties and responsibilities of the current post of Press Secretary to the CS and the FS have increased substantially and have grown in complexity over the years. With the CS' and the FS' continued commitment to strengthening communication with the community and the media, locally and overseas, the support from one Press Secretary to the two most senior principal officials of the Government has been grossly inadequate. Therefore, it is proposed to create an additional post of Press Secretary, at the rank of AOSGC (D2), so that the CS and the FS will each have a dedicated Press Secretary to provide advice on the PR aspects of and public reaction to existing or new policy initiatives.

Job Descriptions and Responsibilities

3. The general job descriptions of the two Press Secretary posts are set out at Enclosures 1 and 2 to this note. The main responsibilities of the Press Secretaries are to gauge and assess media reaction, community demands and public opinions on issues under the CS' or the FS' respective policy portfolios, and to help devise public relations strategies and publicity programmes to ensure more effective and focused communication to the public of major policies and initiatives of an open and transparent Government. The Press

Secretaries are required to sit through policy discussions and tender advice on possible public reaction as well as how a particular policy initiative should be presented. On issues cutting across a number of policy bureaux, the Press Secretaries are also required to ensure a coordinated approach on the PR front. The job nature of the two Press Secretaries is similar but the contents would be diverse as they will each deal with a large and different group of policy bureaux under the different portfolios of the CS and the FS respectively. With a dedicated and experienced Press Secretary each for the CS and the FS, the timeliness, effectiveness and quality of advice and support provided to the two principal officials should improve in terms of a firmer grasp of public reaction to existing and new policy initiatives, better coordinated media and public relations efforts, and a more proactive approach in dealing with members of the media and the community in general throughout the communication processes. At present, with one Press Secretary serving both the CS and the FS, effective press and public relations support for one principal official is often made possible at the expense of the other. The current situation is clearly undesirable.

Workloads and Problems

4. The current arrangement requires redeployment of the already stretched resources of ISD to meet the service demands of the CS and the FS on an ad hoc basis when both principal officials need public relations support. The problem is more acute during, for example, the preparation of the annual Budget which straddles over a few months and involves extensive consultations with LegCo members, political parties, business, the media and other community groups, and intensive coordination with the relevant bureau secretaries throughout the process. The mapping out of pre-Budget and post-Budget publicity strategies and plans, and the oversight of the implementation programmes to ensure the FS' effective response to public reaction to the Budget, require focused attention and full-time efforts of the Press Secretary. During this period, it has been necessary for ISD to make special makeshift arrangements to provide the CS with the necessary media and public relations advice. Such an arrangement is unsatisfactory. Against the staffing constraints of ISD, the Department already encounters difficulties in fielding an additional experienced officer from time to time to provide the necessary advice to the CS or the FS as the case may be. Furthermore, the makeshift arrangement implies that different information officers may be re-deployed for

the ad hoc services at different times. There is hence no consistency in terms of service quality and the seeing through of a comprehensive PR strategy or publicity programme. As an indication, the number of functions and events that the CS and the FS each attended in Hong Kong in 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 is around 150. On top of that, there were duty trips outside Hong Kong during which the CS and the FS were required to attend many public functions including media interviews and conferences. With the continued commitment of the Government to strengthening communication with the community and the media, it is expected that the figures will remain at a high level.

Proposed ranking: level of responsibilities

5. To provide proper PR support for the two most senior principal officials of the Government, the Press Secretaries must be experienced and mature enough to handle a wide range of policy issues for the CS and the FS and in dealing with the media. The incumbents should also have comprehensive understanding and good grasp of Government policies promulgated by the different bureaux generally. To this end and as an integral part of a Press Secretary's duties, he is required to sit on the policy groups or committees of the CS and the FS and advise the principal officials of the possible media and public reaction to the proposed policies or initiatives, and help devise effective publicity programmes to promulgate and explain the new policies or initiatives. The Press Secretary will also be required to coordinate with the relevant bureau secretaries regularly to fine-tune the PR strategy and publicity programmes to ensure effective implementation of the strategy. In this regard, we consider it appropriate and necessary to pitch the Press Secretary post at the level of AOSGC or D2.

6. The current Press Secretary to the CS and the FS is established at AOSGC level, and the core competencies called for include strategic foresight, comprehensive and meticulous planning ability, effective communication skills, sound judgment and political acumen, and analytical skills. It would be essential to require the same competencies and qualities of the Press Secretary proposed for the FS, should Members agree to provide two dedicated Press Secretaries, each for the CS and the FS.

7. It is relevant to note that there is no D1 rank in the Administrative Service or the Information Officer Grade. D2 is the basic rank in the directorate structure. Similar to the existing Press Secretary establishment, the proposed Press Secretary for the FS will be working on his own; there will not be any officer or subordinate support to the post holder.

Manpower support for the Secretary for Justice and Policy Bureaux

8. There are twelve Secretariat Press Office (SPO) teams set up to support Government bureaux. They are responsible for advising bureaux officials on public relations matters, assisting in formulation and implementation of public relations and publicity plans, handling media and public enquiries, preparing press releases, organising press conferences and briefings and special promotional activities.

9. Each SPO team is headed by a Chief Information Officer (MPS 45-49), who will normally be supported by a PIO (MPS 40-44), an SIO (MPS 34-39) and/or an IO (MPS 28-33)/AIO (MPS 11-27), depending on service need and operational requirements.

10. A list of the twelve SPO teams is set out at Enclosure 3 for Members' reference.

11. The Secretary for Justice and the Department of Justice are together served by a team headed by a CIO, supported by a PIO and an IO. The CIO serves the Secretary for Justice in a similar way as the Press Secretary does to the CS and the FS. However, he is required to look after a smaller scope of policy areas which require a lesser extent of coordination. To ensure quality service and support to the Secretary for Justice and the Department, the CIO receives strategic direction and professional guidance from the ADIS(Public Relations) in ISD. Like all other posts, the ranking of the post is about right, based on the level of responsibilities and service need.

Information Services Department
June 2001

**Proposed Job Description of the post of
Press Secretary to the Chief Secretary for Administration
(AOSGC)**

To assist the Director of Information Services in providing the following service to the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS):-

- (a) gauging and assessing media and community views and opinions on issues under CS' policy schedules, collating feedback and advising on responses;
- (b) advising and participating in implementation of media and public relations plans and strategies;
- (c) handling media enquiries relating to the CS, and acting as his spokesman;
- (d) preparing public speeches and messages for the CS , and reviewing issues which may have a bearing on the CS' media and public relations responses;
- (e) assessing media and public relations requests for the CS, and overseeing the press arrangements for the CS; and
- (f) liaising and advising bureaux on Government responses under the CS' policy schedules where appropriate.

**Proposed Job Description of the post of
Press Secretary to the Financial Secretary
(AOSGC)**

To assist the Director of Information Services in providing the following service to the Financial Secretary (FS):-

- (a) gauging and assessing media and community views and opinions on issues under the FS' policy schedules, collating feedback and advising on responses;
- (b) advising and participating in implementation of media and public relations plans and strategies for issues under the FS' policy schedules;
- (c) handling media enquiries relating to the FS, and acting as his spokesman;
- (d) preparing public speeches and messages for the FS, and reviewing issues which may have a bearing on the FS' media and public relations responses;
- (e) assessing media and public relations requests for the FS, and overseeing the press arrangements for the FS;
- (f) liaising and advising bureaux on Government responses under the FS' policy schedules where appropriate.

Complement of Secretariat Press Office Teams

No. of Secretariat Press Office Teams : 12

- Security (1 CIO, 1 PIO, 1 SIO, 1 AIO)
- Constitutional Affairs (1 CIO, 1 SIO, 1 IO)
- Home Affairs (1 CIO, 1 SIO, 1 IO)
- Civil Service (1 CIO, 1 PIO, 1 IO)
- Commerce and Industry & Economic Services (1 CIO, 1 PIO, 1 SIO, 1 IO)
- Education and Manpower (1 CIO, 1 PIO, 1IO)
- Finance (1 CIO, 2 PIO, 1 SIO, 1 IO)
- Environment and Food (1 CIO, 1 PIO, 1 SIO, 1 IO)
- Health and Welfare & Information Technology and Broadcasting
(1 CIO, 1 PIO, 2 SIO, 1 IO)
- Works (1 CIO, 1 PIO, 1 SIO, 1IO)
- Planning and Lands (1 CIO, 1 PIO, 1 SIO, 1 IO)
- Housing and Transport (1 CIO, 1 PIO, 1 SIO, 1 IO)

Legend

- CIO: Chief Information Officer
PIO: Principal Information Officer
SIO: Senior Information Officer
IO: Information Officer
AIO: Assistant Information Officer