

立法會
Legislative Council

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Legislative Council
Panel on Public Service

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 16 October 2000 at 3:45 pm
in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Briefing on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2000

Members present : Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon LI Fung-ying, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon HUI Cheung-ching
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung
Hon Albert CHAN Wai-yip

Members attending : Hon NG Leung-sing
Hon CHAN Yuen-han

Members absent : Hon Andrew WONG Wang-fat, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, JP
Hon LEUNG Fu-wah, MH, JP

Public officers attending : Mr Joseph WONG Wing-ping, GBS, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Ms Anissa WONG, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (1)

Mr D W PESCOD, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (2)

Miss Jennifer MAK, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (3)

Mr Cletus LAU, JP
Director of General Grades

Mr William NG
Director, Civil Service Training and Development Institute

Mr LEE Lap-sun, JP
Commissioner for Official Languages

Clerk in attendance : Miss Salumi CHAN
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)5

Staff in attendance : Ms Pauline NG
Assistant Secretary General 1

Mr FU Ping-hong
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)7

Action

I. Briefing by the Secretary for the Civil Service on the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2000

At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS) gave a brief account of what was presented by the Chief Executive in his Policy Address about the civil service, and highlighted some major tasks and new initiatives of the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) in the coming year. He briefed members on the following main areas:

- (a) Civil Service Voluntary Retirement (VR) scheme;
- (b) Pilot scheme on team-based performance rewards system;
- (c) Training and development programmes in the civil service;

- (d) Television series on dedicated civil servants serving the community; and
- (e) Quality Service Enhancement Award scheme.

(Post-meeting note: The speaking note of SCS was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1) 60/00-01 on 17 October 2000.)

Civil service establishment

2. Referring to the Chief Executive (CE)'s Policy Address that there would be around 15 000 job opportunities provided by the government next year and the Financial Secretary's Budget Speech delivered earlier that the civil service establishment would be reduced by 10 000 over the next three years, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan considered the relevant policies contradictory. Miss CHAN Yuen-han shared his view. They pointed out that on the one hand, the Administration undertook to help the poor by creating employment opportunities, and yet on the other hand, it created unemployment by reducing the size of the civil service. Mr LEE sought clarification on the impact of the policies, in particular the implementation of the VR scheme, on the civil service establishment, for example, whether the posts of the 11 000 VR-takers would be deleted, or filled by new recruits, after their retirement.

3. SCS clarified that the relevant policies were not contradictory. While the provision of the 15 000 job opportunities aimed to offer relief to the lower income families, the reduction in the size of the civil service was the government's initiative to enhance the productivity and effectiveness of the civil service through streamlined procedures and manpower savings. Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (2) (DSCS2) added that of the 15 000 jobs, 7 000 were new jobs to be created in areas where more social investment was required, including about 2 000 to be created in the welfare sector and 1 700 for the Clean Hong Kong Campaign. As regards the remaining 8 000 posts, a great majority would be in expanded service areas of subvented organizations and voluntary agencies, and only a few hundred would be civil service posts.

4. On the VR scheme, SCS advised that it was introduced to address the potential surplus staff problem of 59 designated grades. In principle, the vacancies arising from the retirement of the 11 000 VR-takers would not be filled, but the detailed arrangements had to be worked out carefully to ensure that the remaining staff would not be overburdened with work nor deprived of promotion opportunities, and the quality of public service would not be affected. Nevertheless, no recruitment would be conducted for the 59 grades in the next five years. In this connection, the Chairman expressed concern about the impact of the VR scheme on the operations of those departments with a large number of VR-takers. SCS advised that operational exigency would be the determining criteria for approving applications and deciding the release date of VR-takers. For those departments with a large number of VR-takers, the Administration would consider releasing the staff concerned on a "first-in-first-out" basis, or in phases over a year or more to tie in with the individual departments' plans for redeployment to ensure that their operations would not be affected. SCS added that a

paper providing further details about the position of the VR scheme would later be presented to the Panel and then to the Finance Committee.

Civil service recruitment

5. Responding to Mr LEE Cheuk-yan, SCS advised that the Administration would review at a later stage whether the freeze on civil service recruitment should be lifted next year. He pointed out that notwithstanding the recruitment freeze, where there was a strong need and a justifiable case to recruit civil servants to meet essential service requirements, Heads of Departments/Heads of Grades might apply for exemption from the recruitment freeze. So far, exemption had been granted to a number of grades.

6. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan was concerned that if the freeze on civil service recruitment was not lifted, the some 7 000 non-civil service contract staff would have no chance of applying for civil service establishment posts. DSCS2 pointed out that non-civil service contract posts were temporary posts created by individual departments or grades to meet short term service needs. Temporary posts were not meant to be permanent posts and were retained for a maximum of three years. There was no guarantee that permanent posts would be available for the non-civil service contract staff upon completion of their contracts.

Civil Service Reform

7. Mr Albert CHAN considered that the Civil Service Reform initiatives, such as the VR scheme, were targeted at the civil servants of the lower ranks, and that the overwhelming response to the VR scheme reflected their frustrations. SCS clarified that the Civil Service Reform was not targeted at civil servants at any particular ranks. Apart from the VR scheme, the Administration had also introduced the Management-initiated Retirement scheme to allow senior management to initiate early retirement of directorate officers.

System of accountability

8. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted from the CE's Policy Address that the Administration was studying how the accountability of principal officials for their respective policy portfolios could be enhanced. Mr CHEUNG welcomed the study and asked for the timetable of the exercise. However, he noted that for other levels in the civil service, a system of accountability had already been in place and that the officers concerned were subject to disciplinary procedures and if the case was established, the appropriate penalties. He queried why principal officials were not subject to the same disciplinary procedures and penalties.

9. SCS clarified that all civil servants were subject to the same disciplinary procedures regardless of their grades and ranks. In the event that a disciplinary case was established, appropriate penalties would be meted out and if a criminal offence was involved, the case would be referred to the Police or the Independent Commission

Against Corruption for prosecution. As regards the system of accountability for principal officials, it was envisaged that principal officials would be held accountable for the formulation and implementation of the policies within their respective policy portfolios. They might have to assume political responsibility which transcended the question of civil service discipline.

10. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong queried why the Director of Housing had not been held accountable for the piling problems in public housing. SCS pointed out that the subject had already been debated in the Council in the previous term. Nevertheless, if there was evidence showing that the piling problems were directly attributable to any civil servant, he or she would be held accountable and might be subject to disciplinary proceedings. The Chairman pointed out that a number of investigations had been initiated by the authorities to address the public concern about the poor quality of public housing and that the subject was being followed up by the Panel on Housing.

Post-retirement employment of directorate officers

11. Mr Albert CHAN observed that over the last few years, some senior civil servants, including directorate officers, had joined business corporations soon after their retirement and took up posts which were directly related to their areas of work previously in the government. In view of the potential conflict of interest, Mr CHAN asked how the Administration could convince the public that "an honest, trustworthy and impartial civil service" could still be sustained.

12. Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (1) (DSCS1) advised that there was an established policy governing the acceptance of post-retirement employment by civil servants, including directorate officers. The objective of the policy was to ensure that former civil servants would not enter into any business or employment which might constitute a conflict of interest with their previous employment in the civil service or embarrass the government. In pursuing the policy objective, the Administration had to take into account the right and freedom of individuals to have further pursuits in business or employment after retirement.

13. In response to Mr Albert CHAN's request, DSCS1 undertook to provide the latest figures on the applications for post-retirement employment by directorate officers.

(Post-meeting note: The latest figures provided by the Administration on the applications for post-retirement employment by directorate officers were circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1) 75/00-01 on 24 October 2000.)

Mutual trust and unity in the civil service

14. Miss CHAN Yuen-han welcomed CSB's efforts in promoting mutual trust and unity in the civil service through better consultations and communication. Referring to the proposed corporatization of the Survey and Mapping Office of the Lands

Department and the greater private sector involvement in the Housing Authority's estate management and maintenance services, Miss CHAN asked how CSB would address the staff anxiety about job security and maintain their morale. Mr Michael MAK was also concerned about the morale of the civil service as a whole.

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15. SCS advised that CSB had strengthened communication with the staff sides in the recent two months through formal and informal meetings with the four central staff consultative councils and other staff associations. He pointed out that when he took up the post of SCS on 1 August 2000, he had issued a letter to all civil servants, reassuring them that no serving officer would be forced to leave the service or would have his or her pay and conditions of service reduced under the pretext of the reform initiatives. Since then, he had been visiting various government departments to discuss with both the departmental management and the staff sides on matters of general concern. At the suggestion of the Chairman, SCS agreed to provide a copy of his letter to Miss CHAN Yuen-han for her reference.

16. The Deputy Chairman noted that the CE had stated in the Policy Address that before any new measure was introduced, the Administration would hold extensive consultation and communicate with the staff sides. She asked whether the Administration would modify or withdraw a proposed measure which was not supported by the staff sides. SCS pointed out that the Administration had previously accepted the views of the staff sides and modified its proposed measures, for example, the adoption of a team-based performance rewards system instead of a system based on individual performance appraisal reports.

Training and development programmes

17. In reply to Mr HUI Cheung-ching's question, SCS advised that the details of the three-year Training and Development Programme for civil servants were being worked out. However, substantial amount of resources would be used for the training of civil servants at the lower ranks, especially those in the 59 designated grades under the VR scheme. SCS undertook to provide the Panel with a paper giving details of the three-year programme.

(Post-meeting note: The paper provided by the Administration on the three-year Training and Development Programme was circulated to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1) 172/00-01 on 16 November 2000.)

II. Any other business

18. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 4:50 pm.

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Legislative Council Secretariat
14 November 2000