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SCS writes to colleagues on Accountability System

Following is the full text of the letter issued today (April 17) to all civil servants by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Joseph W P Wong, on the Principal Officials Accountability System:

Dear Colleagues,


The Chief Executive briefed Members of the Legislative Council earlier this afternoon on the plans for introducing the Principal Officials Accountability System. As the plans concern civil service management and policy, I would like to give colleagues a highlight of the main points.

Integrity of the Civil Service System

The Chief Executive made it clear at the Legislative Council that the purpose of introducing the Accountability System was to enable principal officials of the HKSAR Government to assume responsibility for their policy portfolios, to share a common agenda, to have clear directions, to feel the pulse of the community and to understand community sentiments. This was to be done on the basis of maintaining the stability and continuity of the civil service. He stressed that the Accountability System would preserve and enhance the distinctive qualities of the civil service system, namely, permanence, professionalism, political neutrality and an uncorrupt administration. These were the qualities which he, and principal officials under the Accountability System in future, would wish to preserve because they were essential to the good governance of the HKSAR.

Our highly valued principle of political neutrality builds on our allegiance to the Government. The bounden duty of every civil servant is to be loyal to the Chief Executive and the principal officials of the day. We should put forward detailed and honest advice on policy options. But once the Government has taken a decision, we should fully support the decision and execute it faithfully. We should assist the principal officials in explaining policy decisions and in gaining the support of the



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Legislative Council and the public. We should not allow our personal likes and dislikes affect the implementation of government policies, neither should we make known our own views in public. The Chief Executive recognizes this principle of political neutrality and we shall continue to abide by it. Furthermore, a permanent civil service ensures that civil servants will continue to perform their duties conscientiously and serve the community steadfastly irrespective of any change to the Chief Executive and the principal officials.

The Secretary for the Civil Service

I understand that colleagues have been concerned about the position of the Secretary for the Civil Service under the Accountability System. Civil service policy is one of the most important amongst government policies. To highlight the importance which he places on the civil service and to preserve the integrity of the Accountability System, the Chief Executive has decided, after careful consideration, that the Secretary for the Civil Service should be included as a principal official under the new system and be selected from among senior civil servants. This will ensure that the person appointed will have a full understanding and appreciation of the civil service structure and system. The Secretary for the Civil Service, like other principal officials under the Accountability System, will be appointed to the Executive Council. Being a Member of the Executive Council, he will be able to represent the expectations and interests of the civil service in the policy-making process at the highest level of the Government. At the same time, he can also convey the considerations behind major Government decisions to civil service colleagues. This will facilitate full and effective implementation of the approved policies.

In view of the special circumstances and the fact that the person selected for the post of the Secretary for the Civil Service is a professional career civil servant, he will be allowed to return to the civil service, if his age permits, at his original rank after his appointment as the Secretary for the Civil Service. Whether or not he would do so is a matter of personal choice. Once he reaches retirement age, he may draw his pension in accordance with the pension legislation.

Implications of the Accountability System for the Government Structure

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Another major area of concern to colleagues is whether or not their job security will be affected by the introduction of the Accountability System. I must point out once again that the Government believes in the principle of small government. In the past few years, through the joint efforts of colleagues at all levels, we have reduced the size of the civil service establishment by nearly 9% while maintaining the efficiency and quality of our services. After the introduction of the Accountability System, the principal officials will review the resource deployment of the policy bureaux and departments within their respective portfolios and adjust the priority according to practical needs, with a view to enhancing the cost-effectiveness and streamlining the operation in service delivery. To achieve this, the principal officials and their colleagues will strengthen communication with the staff sides and involve them in measures to enhance efficiency. The Government will ensure that fair and reasonable arrangements are put in place to take account of the interests of colleagues.

Concerted Efforts in the Implementation of the Accountability System

The bounden duty of civil servants is to give whole-hearted support to the Chief Executive of the day and the HKSAR Government under his leadership. The smooth implementation of the Accountability System is a major task undertaken by the Chief Executive in the second term. I look forward to your full support in this respect. The introduction of the Accountability System will add a new page to the socio-economic development of Hong Kong. In the process, the Government will strengthen communication and cooperation with the Legislative Council, different sectors of the community and the general public so as to better gauge public opinions and to enhance service delivery. I am confident that the principal officials under the Accountability System will join hands with the civil service in rising to the challenges ahead and share each other's honour and disgrace.

"How shall it be said that you have no clothes? I will share my long robes with you". With this esprit de corps, let us support the implementation of the Accountability System.

End/Wednesday, April 17, 2002

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