

**Information Note
for the LegCo Panel on Public Service**

Promotion of Integrity in the Civil Service

Purpose

This paper presents to Members the work of the Civil Service Bureau in the promotion of integrity in the civil service.

Overview

2. An honest and clean civil service is vital to maintaining public support for and trust in the Government. It is an important cornerstone of effective governance. The Administration is committed to upholding the highest standard of integrity and conduct in the civil service. Such a commitment is reflected in the civil service rules, regulations and system of declaration of investments which prescribe clear guidelines against malpractices.

Integrity Management

3. Over the years, CSB has been working closely with ICAC and departments to promote a clean civil service and to instil a culture of integrity amongst staff.

4. We have, in the past 18 months, been focusing our efforts on :-

- (a) reviewing and updating the central guidelines governing conflict of interest and conduct-related matters to ensure their adequacy and clarity in present-day circumstances;
- (b) assisting departments to draw up supplementary guidelines on avoidance of conflict of interest situations specific to departmental operations; and
- (c) providing support to departments in promoting staff awareness of the need to avoid conflict of interest situations

and of the rules on acceptance of advantages, through organising tailor-made training courses.

5. A two-day “Ethical Leadership Forum” was organized jointly with the ICAC in March 2000 for business leaders and government officials. In September 2000, we published a handbook “Ethical Leadership in Action” for senior managers in the civil service, highlighting the importance of leadership by example in nourishing and sustaining a culture of integrity in the work place.

6. Following a review of the central guidelines, we had promulgated in May 2001 a revised circular on declaration of investments by civil servants which introduced a number of enhancements to further strengthen the effectiveness of the declaration arrangements. The opportunity was taken to remind officers of the sanctions we would invoke against failure to report any real or potential conflict of interest between an officer’s duty and his private interests, including his investments.

7. On the management of staff indebtedness cases in the civil service, we have issued an up-dated circular on the subject. It reminds all civil servants of the importance of prudent management of their personal finance. It also provides added guidelines for departmental management on actions that should be taken to ensure that the personal financial difficulties, if any, of individual officers would not impair operational efficiency or the integrity of the civil service as a whole.

8. We are also at the final stages of promulgating two revised circulars which contain clearer guidelines to staff covering respectively the acceptance of advantages by civil servants and gifts or entertainment offered to an officer in his official capacity. These two circulars will be issued following staff consultation.

9. In promoting the integrity message at the departmental level, representatives from CSB and ICAC had, in the two years ending March 2001, jointly visited 67 departments to help them formulate their departmental plans on integrity management, including the drawing up (or the up-dating) of their own departmental guidelines on conduct and discipline matters, guidelines that are specific to their needs and operating circumstances.

10. At the same time, tailor-made training courses on corruption prevention had been held for officers in individual departments to help raise staff awareness of the standard of integrity and conduct expected of a

civil servant. Since April 1999, over 1,840 training sessions had been organised for over 51,000 civil servants. We are encouraged by the importance that departments have attached to having such training courses for their staff.

Assistance rendered to departmental managers

11. We recognize the pivotal role of departmental managers in the continued promotion of ethical values among their staff. To help them gain deeper insight into the subject and to equip them for a further expansion of the integrity programmes in their individual departments, CSB and ICAC had jointly organised a “Seminar on Integrity Programme Implementation” in November 2001 for our departmental managers. A guest speaker from a reputable multi-national corporation was invited to share with us their experience in building up an ethical organisational culture. Representatives from two departments noted for their success in gaining staff support for integrity management measures were also invited to speak on the subject. Some 100 participants from over 50 departments attended the seminar. Their active participation and positive feedback speaks well for their commitment to this important area of work.

12. In addition, CSB has jointly developed with ICAC an electronic “Resource Centre on Civil Service Integrity Management” (RCIM), providing departmental managers with easy access, through the intranet, to reference materials on integrity promotion. The site was launched in December 2001. Apart from the relevant legal provisions and civil service guidelines, reference materials up-loaded to the site include samples of departmental codes on conduct and discipline, publications produced by ICAC to promote ethics, as well as linkages to overseas sites on integrity management. By assembling materials relevant to integrity management at one place, the RCIM site will facilitate the work of departmental managers at various levels in embedding an ethical culture within their organisations.

Sanctions

13. Civil servants who commit acts of misconduct and malpractices which involve a criminal element will be prosecuted including :-

- (a) prosecution under the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance (“PBO”), where a civil servant solicits or accepts an advantage without permission (section 3) or where he solicits

or accepts an advantage as an inducement for abusing his official position (section 4);

- (b) prosecution under say the Crimes Ordinance, where the abuse involves falsification of documents; and
- (c) officers who are criminally convicted under (a) or (b) above are subject to disciplinary action under the Public Service (Administration) Order. Officers convicted of a charge under the PBO may be dismissed or compulsorily retired from the service.

14. Even if an investigation into an officer's conduct does not reveal any criminal element, disciplinary action may be taken against the officer where there are grounds to suggest a breach of civil service rules. Upon establishment of the disciplinary charge, the punishment may range from warning to dismissal, depending on the gravity of the misconduct.

Future efforts

15. Actions showing strong visible support from senior government officials for anti-corruption measures are important for sustaining the impetus of our drives to promote and maintain an ethical culture in the civil service. As part of our on-going efforts to enhance vigilance against corruption and abuse of office, CSB and ICAC are planning to stage, in the last quarter of 2002, a high-level "Ethics Forum" involving senior government officials and officers from public organizations. More specifically, current integrity issues and concerns, as well as new challenges on the horizon, will be raised for close examination in the coming Forum, with a view to setting the direction for our endeavours in integrity management in the foreseeable future.

16. In parallel, we will continue to work closely with ICAC to further strengthen the present ethics infrastructure. These include :-

- (a) continuous efforts to keep our guidelines on conduct and discipline matters up-to-date;
- (b) plans to enhance the content of the RCIM site referred to in paragraph 12 above; and
- (c) continuous efforts to organize training and experience-sharing sessions for the purpose of upkeep staff awareness of the

importance of a culture of probity in the civil service.

17. We will also closely monitor the effectiveness of the sanctions currently in place as a deterrent against malpractices.

Civil Service Bureau
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