

**Legislative Council Panel on Public Service
Meeting on 17 December 2001**

Promoting a Customer Service Culture in the Civil Service

Purpose

This paper informs members of the initiatives undertaken by the Government in promoting a customer service culture in the delivery of public service.

Background

2. As our community has become more sophisticated and well-educated, the public's expectation on the quality and standard of service provided by the government has concurrently increased. Against this background, the Government has, over the years, worked hard towards building up in the civil service a customer service culture that recognizes the public as the paying customers and offers the best services we can provide. Since early 1990's, we have launched a customer service programme to encourage civil servants to place greater emphasis on serving the community, better understand their needs and improve the efficiency and quality of the service and timeliness of response. The major initiatives of the programme are outlined in the following paragraphs.

Making performance pledges

3. Since 1992, all government departments directly serving the public have published performance pledges informing their customers what services are available, what the standards are and how these standards are monitored and met. The aim is to ensure that the Government provides the best possible services to the public and to help engender a culture of service which regards the public as customers. It also greatly enhances the transparency as the public can better understand the standards to be expected. The performance pledges are updated annually to ensure that they reflect the customers' needs and expectations, with the aim to achieve continuous improvement in the quality of service provided. To date over 60 departments publish their performance pledges annually.

Developing vision, mission and values

4. Many departments have developed their Vision, Mission and Values statements to provide a steer to their staff on managing their business. We encourage departments to include references to quality service in developing their statements. To date, about 90% of departments have published their Vision, Mission and Values statements which feature the elements of caring and customer-focus.

Enhancing work process

5. Many departments encourage their staff to set up Work Improvement Teams to identify areas for improvement of service. These teams, which involve staff at different levels, review existing operational procedures and identify areas for enhancement. They often come forward with creative and innovative ideas to provide a more cost-effective and professional customer service.

6. Through the greater application of information technology, many departments have also streamlined their work processes to enable the public to obtain a variety of public services on-line.

Enhancing communication with customers

7. Departments have put in place various measures to enhance communication with customers and to obtain feedback to evaluate and make changes where necessary to improve their customer service. These measures include:

- Conducting customer opinion surveys on a regular basis to ascertain how satisfied their customers are with the level and standard of services.
- Establishing Customer Liaison Groups which meet customers periodically to discuss service improvements and allow customers to express their views. About 30 departments have set up such groups, which provide very useful feedback on how the performance and service standards should be further enhanced. Through this forum, customers are also made aware of the constraints and difficulties encountered by the service providers.
- Provision of an efficient 24-hour interactive telephone enquiries system and informative home pages to introduce existing and new services departments delivered.

- Establishing a complaints management system to follow-up on complaints lodged by the public. The complaints are investigated and remedial action are taken where required to avoid further occurrence.

Securing staff commitment

8. Staff attitude and commitment is crucial to providing quality service that the public expects. In this regard, the Civil Service Training and Development Institute and the departmental training units provide on-going customer service training to front-line staff. In addition to classroom training, a cyber learning center has been launched to provide civil servants with anywhere-anytime access to a wide variety of learning resources through the Internet, from which they can learn how to be positive, helpful and courteous.

9. To further develop staff commitment and motivate them to continuously enhance the standard of service, many departments have designed different awards to recognize outstanding customer service. In addition, at the central level, the Civil Service Bureau has introduced a service-wide Customer Service Award Scheme since 1999 to further promote a customer-oriented service culture in the Civil Service and to give recognition to colleagues who provide good customer service. The Scheme has drawn very favourable response from both staff and departments. Representatives from the professional bodies and the private sector, and District Councillors are invited as the adjudicators of the Award Scheme.

Customer Service Excellence Award

10. The Customer Service Award Scheme is now in its third year. In the last two years, we gave out awards on an individual and team basis. The focus of this year's award is on the overall services of departments. Twenty-eight departments will be competing for the Customer Service Excellence Award which will be presented to those departments which have excelled in quality customer service. For the first time, members of the public are involved in the adjudication process. 40,000 sampled households have been invited to select the best departments in a questionnaire survey and their votes will contribute towards selecting the eight finalists for the final adjudication. The department that obtains the highest score from public voting will be presented the Best Public Image Award.

11. The prize presentation ceremony of the Customer Service Excellence Award will be held on 4 February 2002 at the Hong Kong Central Library. In conjunction

with this event, we will organize a large-scale exhibition on the services of 48 departments to enhance public understanding of government service and to further promote the concept of good customer service. A roving exhibition of these exhibits will follow in major shopping centres and government office buildings from February to June 2002.

Central financial support for projects to promote quality customer service

12. At the central level, the Civil Service Bureau has been providing financial support to departments to conduct projects geared to promote customer service and to educate staff on customer-oriented attitude. Since 1998/99, about \$10 million have been allocated to over 40 departments for 84 projects, which include launching customer satisfaction surveys, organizing seminars to promote awareness and to share experience on customer service, producing video and other self-learning packages to enhance the standard of public services, and publishing publicity material to introduce to the public the quality services that departments deliver.

13. To enable departments to upgrade their services, the Civil Service Bureau has also been providing funds to departments to embark on projects to improve the physical environment of offices which provide direct service to the public. These projects include enlargement of public waiting areas, renovation of public enquiry counters, provision of directory signs and improvement of telephone enquiry service. Since 1993, we have allocated some \$30 million to 48 departments for more than 200 projects.

Way Forward

14. Providing good customer service is an integral part of civil servants' work. To meet the aspirations of the community, all bureaux and departments will continue to do their best to enhance the quality of their services and strengthen their efforts to serve the community.