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Panel on Public Service

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 17 October 2005 at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon James TO Kun-sun
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon Bernard CHAN, JP
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, SBS, JP
Hon Howard YOUNG, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon KWONG Chi-kin

Member attending : Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC

Member absent : Hon LEE Cheuk-yan

Public officers attending : Mr Joseph W P WONG, GBS, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mrs Rebecca LAI, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Miss Jennifer MAK, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (1)

Mr K S SO
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (2)

Mr Christopher WONG
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (3)

Mr Duncan PESCOD, JP
Head, Efficiency Unit

Mr David PAO
Deputy Head, Efficiency Unit

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

Staff in attendance : Ms Pauline NG
Assistant Secretary General 1

Ms Rosalind MA
Senior Council Secretary (1)8

Ms Guy YIP
Council Secretary (1)1

Ms May LEUNG
Legislative Assistant (1)8

Action

I. Briefing by the Secretary for the Civil Service on the policy initiatives of the Civil Service Bureau featuring in the Chief Executive's 2005-06 Policy Address

(LC Paper No. CB(1)17/05-06(01) — Paper provided by the Civil Service Bureau

LC Paper No. CB(1)17/05-06(02) — Paper provided by the Efficiency Unit

Relevant documents

(a) Address by the Chief Executive at the Legislative Council meeting on 12 October 2005 — “Strong Governance For the People”; and

(b) The 2005-06 Policy Address — “Policy Agenda”.)

Policy initiatives of the Civil Service Bureau featuring in the Chief Executive's 2005-06 Policy Address

Briefing by the Secretary for the Civil Service

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS) briefed members on the prevailing plan to roll out the seven on-going initiatives on the management of the civil service under the chapter of "Effective Governance" of the 2005-06 Policy Agenda. He highlighted the following points:

- (a) On development of an improved civil service pay adjustment mechanism, the Administration had appointed a consultant in June 2005 to proceed with the pay level survey field work for completion in early 2006. Following the appointment of the consultant, the Administration had been preparing for an intensive job inspection process to ascertain the job-related characteristics of the civil service benchmark jobs. The Administration would keep the Panel informed of the progress of the survey. The Administration would also continue to discuss with the staff sides and consult the Panel on other issues pertinent to the development of an improved pay adjustment mechanism, including the development of an effective means for implementing both upward and downward pay adjustments.
- (b) On the comprehensive review of civil service allowances, the Administration had written to the staff sides of the central consultative councils as well as all civil servants on 22 September 2005, seeking their views on the revised package of change proposals arising from the review of fringe-benefit type of allowances. The initial feedback from staff and the community was that they considered the proposals acceptable. The staff consultation period would end on 21 November 2005.
- (c) On containing the size of the civil service, steady progress had been made in this regard. As at end August 2005, the civil service establishment was around 164 400, representing a reduction of about 17% from the peak of 198 000 in early 2000. It was expected that the civil service establishment would be further reduced to 163 000 by end of 2005-06. It remained the Administration's goal to reduce the civil service establishment to around 160 000 posts by end of 2006-07.
- (d) On training for civil servants, a variety of training and development opportunities were provided to civil servants at different ranks. To widen civil servants' exposure to the latest developments on the Mainland, familiarization/theme based visits and national studies programmes at Mainland universities were arranged. The Civil Service

Exchange Programme with the Mainland had been expanded to cover Guangdong, on top of Shanghai, Beijing and Hangzhou. To facilitate the pursuit of continuous learning amongst civil servants, the Cyber Learning Centre Plus web site was enhanced in April 2005 with added e-learning resources in a more user-friendly manner.

- (e) On staff commendation schemes, the Administration continued to make use of various schemes to maintain and enhance the morale of the civil service. The annual award ceremony for the “Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme” would be held on 2 December 2005. The Radio Television Hong Kong would produce a series of television programme for the scheme as well as a television series showcasing the work of various departments and frontline staff in serving the community.
- (f) On management of under-performance, the Administration had formulated proposals to further streamline the procedures for removing persistent sub-standard performers from the service. The Administration had consulted the Public Service Commission and the staff sides. It would promulgate the revised procedures shortly and would brief the Panel in due course.
- (g) On the review of the policy on post-service employment of directorate civil servants, the Administration had presented a package of proposals to the Panel in March 2005 and put it forth for staff consultation. The Administration had been refining the proposals in the light of comments received in the past few months and planned to promulgate the revised control measures within 2005.

2. SCS also drew members’ attention to the staffing implications arising from the various new policy initiatives in the Policy Address, such as the reorganization of the Chief Executive (CE)’s Office, setting up of a Food Safety, Inspection and Quarantine Department (FSIQD), the establishment of new offices in the Mainland and overseas etc. From the initial estimation that the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) gathered from the policy bureaux concerned, the additional manpower resources required for meeting the changed needs arising from the various new initiatives in the Policy Address in the 2005-06 session would amount to about 12 permanent directorate posts and 1 000 non-directorate posts. In accordance with the established procedures for financial proposals, the relevant policy bureau would consult the respective LegCo Panel on the specific staffing proposals before submitting the proposals to the Establishment Subcommittee (ESC) for consideration and seeking approval from the Finance Committee (FC). SCS assured members that notwithstanding the additional manpower requirements to meet the service demands arising from the new initiatives in the pipeline, departments/bureaux would continue with their efforts in reorganizing and reengineering their work procedures and mode of service delivery to enhance

efficiency and achieve staff savings. The Administration would continue to work within the overall establishment target of about 160 000 by end of 2006-07.

Staffing implications arising from the various new policy initiatives in the Policy Address

3. Referring to paragraph 24 of the paper provided by the Administration that the Administration needed to rationalize its manpower resources to meet the service demands arising from a number of new initiatives set out in the Policy Address, Ms LI Fung-ying pointed out that given the stringent manpower position and low staff morale following the implementation of the measures to reduce the size of the civil service in the recent years (for example the two rounds of Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS)), she was concerned whether the Administration could accomplish the rationalization without affecting the standard of public service and staff morale.

4. In response, SCS stressed that the Administration was committed to maintaining a lean and efficient civil service and would continue to work towards the target of reducing the civil service establishment to about 160 000 by end of 2006-07 through savings and enhanced efficiency. Nevertheless, SCS hoped that members would appreciate that flexibility should be allowed for slight variations in the number of posts given the considerable size of the civil service establishment. SCS pointed out that as at end August 2005, the strength of the civil service stood at 157 800 which was already below 160 000, while the establishment was anticipated to reduce further to about 163 000 by March 2006. Heads of Department (HoDs)/Directors of Bureau (DoBs) would examine their manpower requirements having regard to the service needs arising from the new initiatives in the Policy Address and the staff savings achieved through continuous efforts in enhancing efficiency. CSB and the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau would oversee and coordinate the staffing proposals from different policy bureaux to ensure that additional manpower would only be sought where the new demands could not be met by redeployment of existing staff. In other words, the total civil service establishment might not be increased as a result of the increased service demands arising from the new initiatives.

5. SCS also drew members' attention that while both directorate and non-directorate posts would be needed for implementation of the new initiatives set out in the Policy Address, as the number of permanent directorate establishment had been significantly decreased from 1 558 in 2002 to 1 495 in 2005, there was little room for further reduction in the establishment and redeployment of existing directorate officers to absorb the new service demands. Moreover, as explained in paragraph 25 of the paper provided by the Administration, the Administration would examine the feasibility of relaxing the recruitment freeze on certain grades which had been included in the Second VRS if there were exceptional justifications, such as the Health Inspector grade and the Labour Officer grade. The Administration would consult Members again when concrete proposal was available.

6. Given the Administration's target to reduce the civil service establishment to around 160 000 posts by end of 2006-07, Ms LI Fung-ying was concerned that the limitation in further reducing the number of directorate posts and the creation of at least 12 permanent directorate posts might have impact on the number of non-directorate posts. In reply, SCS advised that not all directorate officers were management staff. In fact, the majority of the 1 495 directorate posts belonged to professional grades, including doctors, engineers, police, officers in the Independent Commission Against Corruption and Judicial Officers. Both executive and professional staff were required to play a leading role in new initiatives and there was little room for further reducing the number of directorate establishment. He added that in addition to the need to create 12 directorate posts, it would also be necessary to create hundreds of non-directorate posts for frontline staff to support such major initiatives as food safety. Detailed staffing requirements arising from these new initiatives had yet to be worked out by relevant HoDs/DoBs.

Level of directorate establishment

7. Referring to paragraph 24 of the paper provided by the Administration. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong noted that the Administration expected a small increase in the number of directorate posts arising from the various new initiatives in the Policy Address which in total would still represent less than 1% of the total establishment. Mr CHEUNG queried whether it implied that there was a general principle under which the number of directorate posts might be increased up to 1% of the total establishment. Mr CHEUNG pointed out that LegCo Members had never agreed with any such principle which had in effect set an upper limit on the number of directorate posts at 1578 which was 1% of the strength of 157 800 as at end August 2005.

8. In reply, SCS clarified that the Administration was simply presenting a fact in its paper that the number of directorate posts was very small compared with the total civil service establishment. The fact was that the existing directorate establishment represented only less than 1% of the total establishment and the Administration was committed to keeping the number of directorate posts within this small percentage even though a small number of directorate posts would have to be created for implementing the new initiatives in the Policy Address. SCS assured members that all directorate staffing proposals would be put forward for LegCo Members' consideration in accordance with the established procedures, i.e. consultation with the relevant Panels, consideration by ESC and approval by FC. The Administration would uphold the general rule of putting forward staffing proposals on the basis of operational need and there would not be any general principle governing the percentage of directorate posts among the total establishment.

9. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong was not convinced and requested SCS to delete the relevant sentence in paragraph 24 of the paper. In response, SCS stressed that the sentence was only a factual statement of the level of directorate establishment and was not meant to be a general principle. The Chairman said that as the minutes of meeting would record Mr CHEUNG's views and the response made by SCS, whether or not the

sentence in paragraph 24 of the paper would be deleted could be left to the Administration to decide.

Impact of the general civil service recruitment freeze on disciplined services departments

10. Noting that as at end August 2005, the civil service establishment was around 164 400 while the strength was only 157 800, Mr KWONG Chi-kin queried the reason for the significant difference between the establishment and strength. He also doubted whether the establishment level had any real meaning in providing an indication of the manpower situation of the civil service if the actual strength was far below that level. Moreover, Mr KWONG said that he was given to know that government departments, in particular disciplined services departments, had encountered difficulties in conducting timely recruitment to fill up vacancies arising from natural wastage during the general recruitment freeze. He considered that disciplined services departments, such as the Fire Services Department (FSD), should be granted exemption to recruit for filling up vacancies arising from natural wastage so that recruitments could be conducted timely without going through the process of application for exceptional approval. Mr KWONG said that he had made a written request jointly with Ms LI Fung-ying and Mr WONG Kwok-hing to the Chairman of the Panel for discussion of the impact of the general recruitment freeze on the disciplined services departments at a future meeting of the Panel.

11. In response, SCS said that a difference between establishment and strength of the civil service would exist at any one time as vacancies arising from natural wastage might not be filled immediately, for example, in circumstances where suitability of a potential candidate for promotion had to be further tested. To achieve the target of reducing civil service establishment while at the same time ensuring that no civil servant would have to leave the service due to forced redundancy, HoDs/DoBs would critically examine the operational requirements for a post when a vacancy arose. SCS pointed out that despite the general recruitment freeze, flexibility had been allowed for exemption subject to the approval by the high-level panel co-chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Financial Secretary, and with himself as member. Since the commencement of the general recruitment freeze in April 2003, approval had been granted by the high-level panel for a number of departments/bureaux, including disciplined services departments, to conduct open recruitment. As approval for recruitment was generally granted for meeting service demands in the coming year, SCS believed that the departments concerned should have adequate time to complete the recruitment process for filling up vacancies in a timely manner. In response to Mr KWONG Chi-kin's request, SCS undertook to provide information on the approval granted for recruitment to fill the posts of the disciplined grades since April 2003. SCS also indicated that he would be pleased to discuss the subject with members at a future meeting of the Panel, if members so desired.

12. Mr KWONG Chi-kin was astonished to note SCS's reply that the HoDs/DoBs would consider the operational requirements of a post whenever a vacancy arose. Such an arrangement appeared to him as if there was no forward planning in the manpower requirements of the civil service. In his view, civil service establishment should be worked out in a more scientific and professional manner having regard to the requirements for meeting service demands. He urged the Administration to address the problem of serious shortage of manpower in some disciplined grades, for example, the Ambulanceman grade in FSD, and to ensure timely recruitment to fill up vacancies in these grades.

13. SCS responded that HoDs/DoBs were required to submit annual manpower plans to CSB for consolidation. Forecast of future manpower position, such as the estimated civil service establishment by the end March 2006, was compiled on the basis of these returns. He reiterated that flexibility was allowed for recruitment provided that HoDs/DoBs had adequate justifications for the manpower requirements.

Recruitment freeze on civil service grades included in the Second VRS

14. Noting that the Administration would examine the feasibility of relaxing the recruitment freeze for selected grades included in the Second VRS, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong cautioned that this should be considered in greater detail having regard to the implications of such relaxation on the cost-effectiveness of the Second VRS. Mr CHEUNG recalled that LegCo Members had previously expressed concern about the cost-effectiveness of the First VRS as some departments had retained the posts vacated by VR-takers for promotion and deleted other posts at the lower ranks. Hence, in giving the funding support to the Second VRS, Members had expressed the view that cost-effectiveness of the scheme should be ensured through the five year recruitment freeze on VR grades. Mr CHEUNG was therefore concerned that the relaxation of the recruitment freeze for selected VR grades might undermine the cost-effectiveness of the Second VRS.

15. In response, the Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service (PSCS) explained that the Administration had strictly adhered to the five year recruitment freeze for grades included in the Second VRS since the implementation of the scheme in 2003. She advised that apart from the recruitment freeze, other features had been designed in the Second VRS to safeguard the achievement of staff savings, for example, tightening up the post deletion arrangement so that a VR taker's post or a post of the same rank of the VR taker had to be deleted upon the departure of a VR taker. PSCS explained that in examining the feasibility of relaxing the recruitment freeze, the Administration would only give consideration to selected grades which had experienced significant changes in service demands, for instance, the Health Inspector grade in the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) (say, for undertaking the new duties of cross-boundary food safety inspection), so that additional manpower could be provided to cope with new demands arising from unforeseeable changes in circumstances since the implementation of the Second VRS. She assured members that relaxation would only be considered for a limited number of VR grades and the

Administration would provide the LegCo with full justifications for any proposal to be submitted in due course.

16. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that proposals for relaxing the recruitment freeze would only be acceptable on grounds that there were unforeseeable new service demands requiring additional staff of the VR grades arising from new policy initiatives. In other words, additional staff required as a result of inaccurate estimation of the departments/bureaux concerned during the launching of the Second VRS should not be considered.

Training and development opportunities for civil servants

17. Referring to paragraphs 12 and 13 of the paper provided by the Administration, Mr Howard YOUNG noted that various programmes on national studies had been rolled out to fortify civil servants' understanding of the latest developments in the Mainland. While appreciating the importance of national studies programmes, Mr YOUNG opined that adequate resources should also be allocated to overseas training programmes for developing the international perspective of senior executives in the civil service. In this connection, Mr YOUNG sought information on the overseas training courses provided to senior government officials, including training courses for Administrative Officers (AOs) at renowned universities such as the Oxford University and security related training programmes for police officers in the United Kingdom (UK).

18. In response, SCS said that the Administration was committed to providing civil servants at different ranks with a variety of training and development opportunities and the resources allocated for such purposes had been on the increase. PSCS also assured members that the provision of national studies programmes would not affect the resources available for other training programmes. She explained that training and development plans were formulated and updated annually at the departmental level for achievement of departmental corporate goals. Programmes designed for enhancing the leadership abilities of senior civil servants and grooming promising officers in line with the succession plan were provided at the departmental level. In addition, CSB coordinated training for general grade officers, such as AOs and Executive Officers. For example, overseas training courses were arranged for junior AOs at renowned universities in the United States and UK and more short-term courses arranged by renowned overseas universities were offered to senior AOs at directorate level. The Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (3) (DSCS3) added that robust training opportunities were also available for officers at middle and lower ranks. He advised that the annual number of participants in classroom training amounted to 30 000 and the number of registered participants of web learning programmes also amounted to around 33 000 annually.

19. In response to Mr Howard YOUNG's further enquiry on whether tailor-made overseas courses were provided for meeting the training and development needs of civil servants, PSCS advised that majority of the overseas training programmes

currently provided to civil servants were designed and offered by renowned universities for applicants from different jurisdictions. Apart from arranging in collaboration with the Harvard University annual short courses in Hong Kong, the Government was exploring with overseas institutions e.g. London University regarding the feasibility of arranging tailor-made courses for Hong Kong civil servants.

20. Noting that the Civil Service Exchange Programme with the Mainland had been expanded to cover Guangdong, on top of Shanghai, Beijing and Hangzhou, the Chairman sought information on the details of the programme, such as the nature of work involved and the effects achieved. In response, DSCS3 said that participants of the Civil Service Exchange Programme mainly came from different professional fields, including town planning, transport and environmental conservation. He advised that the programme had gained favourable response from participants both from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government and the Mainland municipal governments. Through the exchange and attachment experience, civil servants could establish rapport with their Mainland counterparts, exchange knowledge and views on issues relating to their professional fields, and strengthen networking between HKSAR Government and the Mainland authorities.

Employment of non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff

21. Mr WONG Kwok-hing was gravely concerned about the terms and conditions of employment of NCSC staff working in various government departments. Quoting the example of 156 NCSC staff working in FEHD, he pointed out that these staff had long years of service ranging from seven to nine years under consecutive short-term contracts and had suffered from repeated pay reductions in the past years during renewal of their employment contracts. In this connection, Mr WONG queried whether government departments had administered the NCSC Staff Scheme properly so that the terms and conditions of employment, including the pay and duration of contracts offered, were reasonable and fair to the staff concerned.

22. In reply, SCS explained that the NCSC Staff Scheme was introduced to enable HoDs to employ staff on fixed term contracts outside the civil service establishment to meet service needs that were short-term, that required staff on a part-time basis and where the modes of delivery of service were under review or likely to be changed. The Scheme allowed flexibility for HoDs to employ staff on contract terms for up to three years subject to the operational needs of the departments concerned. CSB had issued detailed guidelines on the scope, terms of employment, remuneration package, recruitment procedures etc. for HoDs to follow in the employment of NCSC staff. As to the concern about the pay levels of NCSC staff, SCS pointed out that the pay levels of NCSC staff were determined by the prevailing market circumstances during the offer of the employment contracts. As far as he knew, pay increase had been offered to some NCSC staff, for instance, contract lifeguards employed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) during contract renewal having regard to the recent economic condition. Nevertheless, CSB could look into specific cases of

repeated pay reductions upon provision of relevant information on such cases by Members.

23. The Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (1) supplemented that following the discussion of employment of NCSC staff at the Panel meeting in April 2005, CSB had conducted a review on the existing guidelines and subsequently issued further advice to HoDs on strengthening the administrative and management arrangements for employment of NCSC staff, including the need to determine the contract period according to service needs and to avoid offering short contracts of, say, 3 to 6 months where the needs justified employment of a longer duration. As far as she knew, FEHD was examining the arrangements for employment of NCSC staff having regard to resources availability and operational needs.

Impact of outsourcing of government services on civil servants

24. Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed concern about the impact of the further outsourcing plans of LCSD on the staff concerned and sought information on the outsourcing plans. In reply, SCS advised that as far as he knew, LCSD did not have any further major outsourcing plans but he did not have the detailed information in hand. He undertook to liaise with LCSD and provide the Panel with information on the outsourcing plans of the department, if any. SCS assured members that while HoDs could consider outsourcing of government services as an alternative mode of service delivery, they had to observe the guiding principle that the outsourcing arrangement should not have any adverse impact on the employment of existing civil servants.

Admin

Extension of temporary jobs in the public sector

25. Referring to paragraph 34 of the Policy Address, Mr WONG Kwok-hing expressed concern about the extension of some, but not all, temporary jobs in the public sector. In this connection, Mr WONG sought information on the number of temporary posts to be extended, the period of the extension and the government departments involved. In response, SCS advised that to enhance employment, the Government had set aside public funds for extension of temporary jobs in the public sector. While the implementation of such job-creation measures was not under the purview of CSB, SCS undertook to liaise with the relevant bureau for provision of the required information after the meeting.

Admin

Meeting arrangements for discussion of staffing proposals arising from the new initiatives in the Policy Address

26. The Chairman informed members that the Administration intended to consult the Panel on some staffing proposals arising from new initiatives in the Policy Address, such as the reorganization of the CE's Office. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong opined that staffing proposals from different departments/bureaux should be considered by the relevant Panels according to their policy purview and it seemed not appropriate for the

Panel on Public Service (PS Panel) to consider staffing proposals related to the CE's office.

27. SCS agreed with Mr CHEUNG that the Administration should consult relevant Panels on staffing proposals according to their policy purview. Nevertheless, for staffing proposals of certain government offices/units which did not have a corresponding Panel for consultation, for example, the CE's Office, SCS suggested that these proposals be discussed at meetings of the PS Panel.

28. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong considered that proposals for the CE's Office should be discussed by the Panel on Constitutional Affairs (CA Panel). In response to the Chairman, the Clerk provided information on the past practices on the arrangements for consultation of staffing proposals for the CE's Office, as follows:

- (a) According to existing record, no prior consultation with a Panel had been recorded before the proposal for creation of a Senior Special Assistant in the CE's Office was considered by ESC in 1997; and
- (b) The proposal for creation of an Information Coordinator post in the CE's Office had been discussed at a joint meeting of the PS Panel and the Panel on Home Affairs (HA Panel) before the proposal was considered by ESC in 1998.

29. Noting the precedents on the consultation arrangements for staffing proposals for the CE's Office and that the current proposals involved the creation of a Permanent Secretary post and an Information Coordinator post, the Chairman suggested and members agreed that arrangements could be made for consideration of the proposals relating to the reorganization of the CE's Office at a joint meeting of the PS Panel, the HA Panel and the CA Panel. The Chairman directed the Clerk to follow up accordingly.

(Post-meeting notes:

- (a) As the proposed creation of the Information Coordinator post did not involve any deletion of posts in the Information Services Department, the Chairman of the HA Panel considered it not necessary for the Panel to be involved in the joint meeting.
- (b) A joint meeting of the PS Panel and the CA Panel was scheduled for Monday, 21 November 2005 at 9:00 am to discuss the relevant staffing proposals.)

Policy initiatives associated with the delivery of the public service

Briefing by the Head, Efficiency Unit

30. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Head, Efficiency Unit (H/EU) briefed members on the initiatives associated with the delivery of the public service under the

chapter of “Effective Governance” of the 2005-06 Policy Agenda. H/EU highlighted the following plans for improving citizen’s satisfaction and achieving efficiencies of services through adopting a citizen-centric approach:

- (a) Delivery of government services based around the needs and expectations of citizens by segment
- To continue to conduct a series of surveys and focus groups to gauge citizens’ satisfaction on key service areas, identify the key drivers of satisfaction, and prioritize areas that citizens expected the Government to improve.
 - To develop an assessment tool to provide departments with a structured methodology to review and benchmark their operations and identify improvement opportunities.
 - To consider a pilot project to develop a joined-up system for delivery of a full range of government services via the web, hotline and physical centres.
 - To take forward the first phase of a Licensing Support Centre to provide one-stop, integrated licences processing service for the business community.
- (b) Strengthening the service provided by the Integrated Call Centre (ICC)
ICC currently provided round-the-clock one-stop enquiry service and complaint handling in respect of 13 government departments. More than 90% of the calls were satisfactorily resolved on first contact. There was scope for expanding the capacity of the ICC public enquiry and complaint handling services to cover more government departments.

Division of work between EU and other departments/bureaux

31. Noting that EU was working on pilot projects for the development of a joined-up system to provide youth-related services and a Licensing Support Centre, Mr WONG Kwok-hing was concerned about the manpower resources of EU involved in the provision of these new services, and whether there would be any overlapping in EU’s work relating to the provision of such services with that of other relevant departments/bureaux, such as FEHD, the Home Affairs Bureau and the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau (HWFB).

32. In reply, H/EU said that EU operated with a small office of only 60 officers, using their expertise to examine issues relating to the delivery of public services across government departments with a view to providing advice for improvements in service delivery. On the division of work, H/EU advised that departments/bureaux were responsible for service delivery while EU provided advice on ways to improve efficiency and quality of the services. For example, while HWFB was responsible for working out the systems for monitoring food safety and public health, EU provided support to facilitate access and collection of relevant information, such as information on infectious diseases or best international practices in food safety control.

Services provided by the Integrated Call Centre (ICC)

33. Noting that more than 90% of the calls received by ICC were satisfactorily resolved on first contact, Mr WONG Kwok-hing sought information on ICC's performance pledge in this regard. In response, H/EU said that at present, 90% of the some 250 000 calls received by ICC in a month were satisfactorily resolved on first contact. Enquiries/complaints which were not resolved on the first contact would be referred to the relevant departments for follow-up and ICC would undertake progress tracking of resolution of problems. ICC also monitored responses from the departments concerned to ensure that callers would be updated within the periods pledged, which varied from 7 to 30 days depending on the nature of the enquiries. In response to Mr WONG's request, H/EU undertook to provide the Panel with performance pledges in respect of the completion of necessary follow-up actions in answering enquiries and handling complaints received by ICC, as well as a breakdown of the enquiries/complaints received by ICC by the nature of the cases and departments involved in the cases.

Admin

34. In response to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's further enquiry on the staffing support for the operation of ICC, H/EU said that there were currently 180 call agents in ICC. Some of these agents were re-deployed from government departments and some of them were appointed through open recruitment. He undertook to provide the Panel with further information in respect of the number of staff who had been re-deployed from relevant government departments as a result of the transfer of enquiry service and complaint handling to ICC.

Admin

35. Referring to complaints received from the public about the long waiting time when making calls outside normal office hours, Ms LI Fung-ying sought information on the waiting time for ICC callers and efforts made by EU to minimize the waiting time.

36. In reply, H/EU agreed that there was scope for improvement in the efficiency of answering calls. He advised that at present, 70% of the calls were answered within 12 seconds and ICC had pledged to improve the level to 80%. To improve its services, ICC also worked towards the target of reducing the average waiting time for callers to below 20 seconds from the present level of eight to 44 seconds. H/EU informed members that the service standards for answering calls and handling enquiries/complaints were specified in the service level agreements between EU and participating departments. To minimize the waiting time for callers, EU had put in place a call monitoring system to monitor the number of calls on a second-by-second basis. During peak periods when there were large number of calls, additional staff would be deployed from back office functions to call answering.

37. The Chairman opined that the Administration should step up publicity for the number of the ICC hotline "1823" so that members of the public would become familiar with the number and use the service of ICC more frequently. He enquired

about EU's publicity programmes and plans in this respect. H/EU responded that publicity programmes, such as an open day for the media, had been arranged to promote public awareness of the service of ICC. EU would continue its efforts in stepping up publicity through every possible channel.

38. Mr WONG Kwok-hing pointed out that the number of complaints against individual government departments might shed some light on the efficiency of the departments concerned. In this connection, Mr WONG enquired about the advice and suggestions EU provided to the departments concerned for enhancing their efficiency.

39. In reply, H/EU said that while it was not appropriate for him to comment on the efficiency of government departments in a public forum, he appreciated Mr WONG's concern about the importance of improving efficiency of service delivery to meet the expectations of the community. He explained that EU was working in this direction through conducting surveys to gauge citizens' satisfaction on key service areas and identifying areas that citizens expected the Government to improve. He assured members that EU would continue its efforts in this regard.

40. Mr WONG Kwok-hing asked whether EU would provide regular updates to the Panel on its work and the efficiency of service delivery by government departments. In response, H/EU said that while statistics on the number of enquiries and complaints received by ICC in respect of various departments could be provided, it would not be practicable for EU to report on the efficiency of government departments as the issue of defining efficiency had to be resolved first. Given that government departments had set performance levels in respect of different services in their performance pledges, which varied according to the nature of the services, their performance would be considered as acceptable as long as they had achieved the levels in their pledges. The work of EU was to examine whether the set performance levels could be improved and the possible means through which departments could provide better value-for-money services to the public, such as better deployment of resources and increased use of technology.

II. Any other business

41. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:40 pm.