

立法會
Legislative Council

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Panel on Public Service
Meeting on 20 November 2006

Background Brief
on implementation of five-day week in the civil service

Purpose

This paper sets out the background information on the implementation of five-day week in the civil service and summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by members previously on the subject.

Background

2. The Chief Executive announced on 12 January 2006 the formation of a Working Group to examine the proposal and implementation details of introducing a five-day week in the Government with effect from 1 July 2006. In taking forward the proposal, the Administration's primary consideration is to maintain the overall level and efficiency of government services, and to adhere to the following basic principles –

- (a) no additional staffing resources;
- (b) no reduction in the conditional hours of service of individual staff;
- (c) no reduction in emergency services; and
- (d) continued provision of some essential counter services on Saturdays.

Phased implementation

3. In May 2006, the Administration announced that a phased implementation approach would be adopted.

Phase one: 1 July 2006

4. In phase one, i.e. starting from 1 July 2006, the following two main areas of work (involving about 59 000 officers) in the Government migrated to a five-day week –

- (a) work with little or no direct public interface: offices which provide primarily in-house administrative, technical and professional support services. This covers most offices in bureaux and departments (B/Ds); and
- (b) selected services with a direct public interface: public enquiries service, shroffs, customer service centres, counters for booking of public facilities and counters for various licence/permit application services.

5. The Administration maintains the level of service available to the public by fully compensating the opening hours lost on Saturdays (i.e. three hours in most cases) through extending the opening hours on weekdays.

6. B/Ds have taken measures to minimise the impact of the non-provision of those services described in paragraph 4(b) above on the public, including facilitating the greater use of electronic means for business transactions, provision of drop-in boxes, putting in place alternative payment channels, etc. B/Ds closely monitor the reaction of their customers and the public to the implementation of a five-day week, with a view to fine-tuning the new arrangement.

Phases two and three: 1 January 2007 and 1 July 2007

7. Subject to further examination by B/Ds and consultation with staff and major stakeholders in the private sector, the Administration estimates that some more services may be provided on the five-day week basis in the second phase on 1 January 2007 and the last phase on 1 July 2007. Examples of such services include search and registration services of lands/companies records, shroffs at public housing property management units for rent payment, etc.

Emergency and essential services

8. Emergency and essential services, most notably those involving the maintenance of law and order, administration of penal institutions, provision of rescue services, etc., will continue to be provided round-the-clock.

Staff Consultation

9. The Administration has consulted the staff sides of the central consultative councils (staff sides) on the phased implementation approach and the proposal to maintain the existing leave administration arrangements. The staff sides support the initiative in principle and appeal to the management to extend the five-day week to as many staff as possible. They generally agree that maintaining service quality and efficiency is of primary importance and accept that some staff may not be able to switch to the five-day week on operational

ground. B/Ds have consulted staff through the appropriate departmental consultative channels, and civil servants in general welcome the initiative.

Impact on the private sector

10. The Administration has indicated that it would not attempt to legislate a five-day week for workers outside the civil service.

Views and concerns of Legislative Council Members

11. When the Panel on Public Service was briefed on 15 May 2006 on the implementation of five-day week in the Government, Members generally indicated their support for the phased implementation approach. Their major views and concerns are summarized as follows –

- (a) The Administration should observe the following three principles in implementing five-day week in the civil service:
 - no additional government expenditure should be involved;
 - no reduction in government services; and
 - emergency services should be maintained.
- (b) Given that most members of the public need to work from Mondays to Fridays, they would only be available to approach government departments on Saturdays for submitting applications or seeking assistance, such as in matters relating to labour relations and employees' rights and benefits. The Administration should therefore consider minimizing the impact of the non-provision of certain services on Saturdays on the public, in particular counter services relating to licensing, labour relations and conciliations, and social welfare. The Administration should provide alternative channels for access to the services on Saturdays and formulate contingency plans to cater for unforeseeable circumstances.
- (c) The Administration should closely monitor the implementation of five-day week and review the arrangement (e.g. three months after the implementation of phase one on 1 July 2006), in particular the following aspects:
 - impact on service quality;
 - impact on the public;
 - impact on civil servants, including their ability to cope with longer working hours during weekdays and how far they have benefited from the arrangement; and
 - the need for fine-tuning the new arrangement, or restoring the previous arrangement for five and a half day week.

- (d) The local economy may not benefit if civil servants and their families choose to spend their weekends in the Mainland more frequently.

12. At the Council meetings on 15 and 22 February 2006, and 7 June 2006, some Members raised concerns regarding the implementation of five-day week in the civil service, as follows –

- (a) Members questioned about the inconvenience caused to the public as a result of cessation of some counter services on Saturdays. The Administration responded that in implementation of the five-day week, the basic principles mentioned in paragraph 2 above would be upheld. For non-emergency or non-essential services that would cease operation on Saturdays, the working hours on weekdays would be extended. The Government's assessment was that non-provision of the selected services on Saturdays would have no significant impact on the general public. Steps would also be taken to improve the delivery of services to the public, including, for example, a wider use of Internet service.
- (b) Members expressed concern as to whether the implementation of five-day week would involve additional manpower and resources, and the impact of the scheme on the performance pledges of government bureaux and departments, and on the private organizations. The Administration advised that the basic principles for implementation of the five-day week in the civil service were that no additional manpower or resources would be required, and the level and efficiency of the government services would be maintained, having regard to the service needs of the private sector. Heads of bureaux and departments would review, and adjust as appropriate, their performance pledges to take into account cessation of services on Saturdays.
- (c) Members were concerned whether the five-day week scheme would be extended to public and subvented organizations. The Administration advised that public and subvented organizations might determine whether they would introduce the scheme in their organizations, subject to the overriding principles that the overall service level and efficiency were maintained and that emergency services were not affected.

13. At the Council meeting on 1 November 2006, Members raised the following questions:

- (a) Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan questioned on the impact of five-day week on the canteens operating in government buildings. The Administration's response was that the five-day week would

not have a significant impact on the business of the government canteens as most of the canteens were operating in buildings where the relevant departments had to continue to provide services on Saturdays.

- (b) Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee questioned about the effects of implementing five-day week on civil servants, on the quality of service and on the civil service overtime situation. He asked for information regarding the number of private organizations and workers working on five-day week. He asked whether the Government would introduce policy and measures to encourage the adoption of five-day week in public and private organizations, and whether, in case of a festive day falling on a Saturday, another day would be appointed as a general holiday. In response, the Administration advised that the Government's preliminary assessment of the implementation of five-day week showed that the quality of services had been maintained and that the public had generally accepted the arrangement. Staff feedback had been positive. The general overtime situation in the civil service had not changed as a result of the five-day week. Based on the Census and Statistics Department's information, there were about 496 300 workers working on five-day week in Hong Kong although the number of private organizations practising the five-day week arrangement was unknown. The Government's policy was not to mandate a five-day week in Hong Kong. The implementation of five-day week in the civil service had no impact on the designation of general or statutory holidays.

14. A list of relevant papers is in **Appendix I**.

Appendix I

Implementation of five-day week in the civil service

List of relevant papers (Position as at 14 November 2006)

Paper	LC Paper No.
Hansard of the Council meeting on 15 February 2006 (Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan raised a question on the implementation of five-day week)	
Hansard of the Council meeting on 22 February 2006 (Hon LEUNG Yiu-chung raised a question on the implementation of five-day week)	
Paper provided by the Administration on "Implementation of five-day week in the Government"	CB(1)1440/05-06(03) <i>(discussed at the Panel on Public Service meeting held on 15 May 2006)</i>
Minutes of Panel on Public Service meeting held on 15 May 2006	CB(1)2146/05-06 <i>(Agenda Item IV)</i>
Hansard of the Council meeting on 7 June 2006 (Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming raised a question on the implementation of five-day week)	
Hansard of the Council meeting on 1 November 2006 (Hon Tommy CHEUNG Yu-yan and Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee each raised a question on the implementation of five-day week)	