

立法會

Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)792/07-08

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/PS/1

Panel on Public Service

**Minutes of meeting held on
Monday, 21 January 2008, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

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

Public officers attending : **Agenda item IV**

Miss Denise YUE, GBS, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Andrew H Y WONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr K S SO, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 2

Agenda item V

Miss Denise YUE, GBS, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Andrew H Y WONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Ms Mimi LEE
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 3

Clerk in attendance : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Council Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Mr Noel SUNG
Senior Council Secretary (1)4

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant (1)5

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I Confirmation of minutes of meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(1)565/07-08 -- Minutes of meeting on 17
December 2007)

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2007 were confirmed.

II Information papers issued since last meeting

(LC Papers Nos. — Police Force Council Staff
CB(1)531/07-08(01) and (02) Associations' letter to the
Secretary for the Civil Service
(SCS), regarding the provision
of medical and dental care for
police officers and SCS's reply

LC Paper No. CB(1)531/07-08(03) — Standing Committee on
Disciplined Services Salaries
and Conditions of Service's
reply to The Staff Side of the
Police Force Council, regarding
the Grade Structure Reviews)

2. Members noted the information papers issued since last meeting.

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III Items for discussion at the next meeting scheduled for 18 February 2008

(LC Paper No. CB(1)567/07-08(01) -- List of outstanding items for discussion

LC Paper No. CB(1)567/07-08(02) -- List of follow-up actions

LC Paper No. CB(1)620/07-08(01) — A letter from Hon LEE Cheuk-yan dated 16 January 2008, requesting the Panel to discuss the issues about the amendment of Civil Service guidelines to allow civil servants on pre-retirement leave to participate in the National People's Congress Deputies election)

3. Members noted the letter from Mr LEE Cheuk-yan expressing concern about the revision of relevant civil service guidelines to allow civil servants who were in the Directorate, Administrative Officer, Information Officer and Police Force disciplined officer grades and on final leave participating in the National People's Congress (NPC) Deputies election. Members agreed that the following item should be discussed at the next meeting on 18 February 2008:

"Civil servants standing for elections and participating in electioneering activities."

4. The Chairman suggested and members agreed that the Administration should be invited to propose whether one or both of the following items should be discussed at the next meeting scheduled for 18 February 2008:

(a) Update on national studies and Basic Law training; and

(b) Integrity enhancement initiatives for civil servants.

(Post-meeting note: as proposed by the Administration and with the concurrence of the Chairman, all the three items listed in paragraphs 3 and 4 would be discussed at the next Panel meeting scheduled for 18 February 2008.)

5. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan enquired as to the timing for discussion of the civil service pay adjustment for 2008-2009. The Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS) responded that the Administration's proposal was to discuss the item in the second quarter of 2008 as set out in the List of Outstanding Items for Discussion by the Panel.

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IV Update on Grade Structure Reviews

(LC Paper No. CB(1)567/07-08(03) — Administration's paper on Grade Structure Reviews for Non-Directorate Civilian Grades

LC Paper No. CB(1)375/07-08 — Minutes of meeting on 19 November 2007)

Briefing by the Administration

6. SCS briefed members on the selection of non-directorate civilian grades for the grade structure review (GSR), by highlighting the salient points in the paper.

Discussion

7. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan was concerned whether, other than the Government Counsel (GC) and Veterinary Officer (VO) grades, there were other civil service grades which also faced recruitment and/or retention difficulties. He asked which civil service grade, apart from GC and VO grades, had the highest unnatural wastage rate.

8. SCS responded that in the consideration of which grades should be included in the GSR, heads of departments and heads of grades were requested to review the recruitment and retention situation of non-directorate civilian grades and identify those grades which had encountered particular recruitment and retention problems, using the overall service-wide unnatural wastage rate as benchmark. Based on the heads of departments/grades' assessments, the GC and VO grades were identified to have faced such difficulties. Civil Service Bureau (CSB) did not have detailed information on the unnatural wastage rates of various civil service grades.

9. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan was concerned whether the high wastage rates of the GC and VO grades were the result of the "3+3 arrangement" (i.e. three-year probation and three-year agreement terms for new appointees before they could be confirmed to the permanent establishment of the civil service) for new recruits to the civil service. He asked whether many officers in the GC and VO grades had left the civil service before completion of the "3+3" period, and whether the Government had an intention to review the "3+3 arrangement", which, in his opinion, was a bit harsh to the new appointees.

10. SCS responded that speaking from memory, the "3+3 arrangement" was introduced in 2000. In the same year, the Administration had imposed a general open recruitment freeze on all civil service grades, and only under very exceptional circumstances and with the approval of a panel co-chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Financial Secretary would open recruitment be conducted for particular civil service grades. Based on the open recruitment exercises carried out since 2000 for a limited number of grades, the "3+3 arrangement" did not seem to have caused any retention problems for the relevant civil service grades. SCS remarked that the Administration would keep the "3+3 arrangement" under review following the

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lifting of the open recruitment freeze on voluntary retirement grades in March 2008 when open recruitment for nearly all civil service grades would resume. SCS supplemented that in the selection of non-directorate civilian grades for GSR, the Administration had taken into consideration the wastage situation of the grades concerned not only in the entry rank, but also the non-directorate promotional ranks. For instance, the unnatural wastage rate of Senior GCs, a promotional rank for GCs who had completed their “3+3” service period for some years and were under the permanent establishment of the civil service, was much higher than the average civil service wastage rate, and hence a GSR was proposed.

11. With reference to paragraph 9 of the paper, Mr James TO asked whether the Government had proposed to conduct a GSR for the Legal Aid Counsel (LAC) grade and the Solicitor grade because these grades were envisaged to face recruitment and retention problems similar to those of the GC grade. Referring to paragraph 8 of the paper, Mr TO asked for further details regarding the recruitment and retention situation of the GC, LAC and Solicitor grades.

12. SCS responded that as far as GCs were concerned, in the 2001 recruitment exercises, only 18 selected candidates accepted appointment when the Department of Justice (DOJ) needed to fill 23 vacancies. In 2005, the DOJ needed to fill 26 vacancies. But only 22 candidates were selected for appointment offer, of whom four candidates turned down the offer. In 2006, the DOJ needed to fill 45 vacancies. But only 36 candidates were selected for offer of appointment of whom six declined the appointment. The unnatural wastage rates for the non-directorate GC grade in 2004-2005, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 were 1.72%, 2.2% and 3.59% respectively, compared with the average civil service unnatural wastage rates of 0.49%, 0.46% and 0.5% during the same periods. The unnatural wastages of the LAC grade in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 involved one and two officers respectively. No officer left the LAC grade in 2006-2007. With regard to the Solicitor grade, one officer each (in the Intellectual Property Department) in 2004-2005 and 2006-2007 resigned from the grade, and two officers (in the Official Receiver's Office) in the Senior Solicitor rank left the grade in 2005-2006. In view of the fact that the GC grade had identical rank structure with the LAC and Solicitor grades, and that the job nature, level of responsibilities and qualification requirements of the three grades were similar, the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service (Standing Commission), at the Administration's invitation, had agreed to include all the three grades in the GSR. SCS added that in view of the great demand for veterinary services by the Government in recent years, the public's concern over food safety as well as the demand for vets in the market place, and the significant recruitment and retention difficulties of VOs, a GSR was proposed for the VO grade.

13. Mr James TO was concerned that, in view of the great demand for veterinarians in the market, there would be significant changes to the structure of the VO grade. Mr TO further commented that the working environment for the GC, LAC and Solicitor grades might be different and hence any proposed changes of the grade structure for a particular grade should not be automatically applied to another grade(s). On the other

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hand, a change in the grade structure of one of the three grades (i.e. GC, LAC and Solicitor grades) but not the other two might result in drainage of officers from the other two grades to the grade with an improved grade structure.

14. SCS responded that the GSR would be conducted by the independent Standing Commission and the results were envisaged to be available in around September/October 2008. Until then, it would be premature to speculate on the outcome.

15. Noting from footnote 2 of the paper that unnatural wastage comprised resignation from the civil service and quitting from the civil service through non-renewal of contract upon expiry despite the departmental management's offer to renew it, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong was concerned whether the unnatural wastage rates had covered officers still on probation and agreement terms so as to accurately reflect the actual unnatural wastage rate of the civil service grades concerned. Mr CHEUNG opined that it would be inappropriate to propose a GSR purely based on the unnatural wastage rate of a civil service grade. Citing the VO grade as an example, Mr CHEUNG pointed out that since the VO grade had only 15 officers, the departure of one officer would result in a very high wastage rate.

16. SCS replied that in calculating the unnatural wastage rates, civil servants including those on probation and agreement terms were covered. She added that in proposing a GSR for a civil service grade, the Government had taken into consideration not only the unnatural wastage rate, but also the recruitment situation. Quoting the VO grade as an example, the Government had successfully recruited two and five VOs in 2002 and 2005 respectively. However, against 16 vacancies in the VO grade in 2007, the Administration could only successfully recruit five officers in the year. In view of the lack of local tertiary education programmes for the training of VO and the growing demand for veterinary services, the Administration considered it necessary to conduct a GSR for the VO grade.

17. Mr KWONG Chi-kin enquired whether the Government had analyzed the causes of the high unnatural wastage rate of the GC and VO grades. Apart from the terms and conditions of employment, the management style and staff morale of the relevant departments might also lead to staff leaving the civil service. Citing the Clinical Psychologist grade as an example, Mr KWONG said that despite his endeavours, the relevant policy bureaux had turned down requests from the grade to discuss the transfer arrangements for officers previously on NCSC terms to civil servants. Mr KWONG asked whether the Government would consider conducting exit polls in order to assess, in a quantified manner, the reasons for officers leaving the civil service.

18. SCS responded that there were different reasons for officers leaving the civil service, e.g. dissatisfaction with civil service terms and conditions of service, personal reasons, and/or better job offers in the market. Where possible, Government departments would conduct exit interviews and reasons given by the officers concerned

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for leaving the civil service varied. Examples included the pursuit of further studies, the lack of challenges in the civil service, and commitment to undertake preaching work. SCS supplemented that CSB had not laid down any procedures for exit assessments, and heads of departments/grades would determine the best way to assess the reasons for officers leaving the civil service, including exit interviews or polls.

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19. Ms Margaret NG requested the Administration to provide detailed information on the recruitment statistics (i.e. number of vacancies, number of offers of appointments and number of acceptance/declination of appointments) in the past three rounds of recruitment exercises and the unnatural wastage rates in the past three years in respect of the GC, LAC, Solicitor and VO grades. Ms NG asked whether the Administration had conducted detailed analysis on the unnatural wastage rates of the GC grade, e.g. the wastage rates in different divisions of the DoJ. Ms NG opined that the information would help ascertain the reasons for officers leaving the DoJ, e.g. the general promotion opportunities in the grade, workload and management style in a particular section.

20. SCS responded that DoJ would normally mount a general open recruitment exercise for GC without specifying in which division of the Department successful candidates would work. As such, the Administration would not be able to attribute any recruitment difficulty of the grade to any particular stream of work in the Department. As far as unnatural wastage was concerned, more detailed assessment could be made regarding which division of DoJ had a relatively high wastage rate, but the results would need to be carefully interpreted, given that GCs in DoJ were usually subject to inter-divisional postings. SCS pointed out that the promotion opportunities for officers in the basic rank of a grade were affected mainly by two factors: namely the average age of serving officers in the promotional ranks of the grade, and whether there was a growing demand for the work performed by the relevant civil service grade. If serving officers in the promotional ranks were at a young age, the natural wastage rate in the promotional ranks would likely be low resulting in less promotion opportunities for officers in lower ranks of the grade. On the other hand, if there was an increased demand for the services of a particular civil service grade, new posts might be created in the promotional ranks of the grade which would in turn improve the promotion opportunities of the grade, e.g. the need to implement enhanced food safety measures might lead to creation of additional posts in the entry and promotion ranks of the VO grade resulting in better promotion opportunities for VOs in the entry rank. Speaking from memory, SCS recalled that based on the situation in recent years, on average a GC who met the promotion criteria would be promoted to the Senior GC rank in about seven to 10 years. She stressed that posts would not be created in a promotional rank purely for the sake of improving the promotion opportunities of a particular grade.

21. The Chairman asked whether the Government would take into consideration the impact of the market situation on a particular civil service grade in deciding whether a GSR should be conducted for the grade.

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22. SCS responded that the market situation of a particular type of job would be reflected in the recruitment and retention situation of the relevant civil service grade(s).

V Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme 2007

(LC Paper No. CB(1)567/07-08(04) — Administration's paper on Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme 2007)

Briefing by the Administration

23. SCS apprised the meeting on the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme (hereafter referred to as the Scheme) by highlighting the salient points in the paper.

Discussion

24. Having noted that some departments had repeatedly received awards from the Scheme, the Chairman asked whether CSB would consider ways to encourage more departments, especially the smaller and/or non-disciplined service departments, to participate in the Scheme.

25. SCS responded that compared with previous years, the number of participating departments and entries in the 2007 Scheme had increased. CSB had all along been considering ways to further improve the Scheme with a view to encouraging more departments and teams to join the Scheme.

26. Mrs Sophie LEUNG remarked that service award schemes should be revamped every two to three rounds so as to stimulate interest and encourage participation. The design of the Scheme should not only aim to recognize creativity among civil servants but also devotion in the provision of quality services to the public, so that the awards would not be repeatedly given to the same departments and more departments would be eligible for the awards.

27. SCS responded that Mrs LEUNG's views would be taken into consideration in organizing future civil service award schemes.

28. Whilst supporting the Scheme, Mr LEE Cheuk-yan was concerned that some departments or civil service grades, because of the very nature of their duties, e.g. hawkers control teams and traffic wardens, would not receive compliments from the public and hence had little chance of winning the awards.

29. SCS responded that the Scheme was only one of the commendation schemes applicable to civil servants, and organizations like the Office of The Ombudsman also gave awards to Government departments regarding their performance of duties. CSB

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would further discuss with the heads of departments on ways to further improve the Scheme, taking into account members' views and comments.

30. Mrs Sophie LEUNG remarked that in some countries, a member of a Government operation team would play the role of an assessment officer to assess the way and result of an operation upon its completion and collect feedback from persons affected by the operation. She opined that Government departments could consider adopting a similar system in order to further improve their modus operandi.

31. SCS responded that in the training courses for operation staff, some departments had included a "role play" and/or a case study session to enhance the operation staff's understanding of the procedures and facilitate assessment of the effectiveness of the operations. Some departments also conducted "post-mortem" of specific operations afterwards.

32. Mr WONG Kwok-hing was concerned whether the non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff were given any awards for their outstanding service.

33. SCS responded that the Scheme offered awards on a departmental and team basis, and the award recipients could include civil servants or NCSC staff, or a mixture of both types of staff.

VI Any other business

34. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:05 pm.