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Panel on Public Service
Meeting on 17 December 2007

Background Brief
on resumption of open recruitment for selected grades included in the
Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme

Purpose

This paper sets out the background to the implementation of the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme (the Second VR Scheme) and the resumption of open recruitment for selected grades included in the Second VR Scheme. It also summarizes the views and concerns expressed by members when the related matters were discussed by the Panel on Public Service (the PS Panel).

The First Voluntary Retirement Scheme (the First VR Scheme)

2. In 2000, the Administration launched the First VR Scheme which enabled 59 designated grades with identified or anticipated surplus staff to retire from the service voluntarily with immediate retirement benefits and VR compensation. Some 9 800 VR takers were approved under the First VR Scheme.

The Second VR Scheme

3. The Chief Executive announced in his Policy Address on 8 January 2003 that the Administration planned to set an overall target of cutting the civil service establishment by 10% by 2006-2007 through natural wastage and normal retirement, making the total number of civil servants to about 160 000. Apart from freezing civil service recruitment across the board, the Administration would also launch the second phase of the VR Scheme.

4. The Second VR Scheme covered a total of 229 grades. Some 5 300 applications were approved under the Scheme. To safeguard the integrity of the Scheme, a five-year open recruitment freeze (from March 2003 to March 2008)

was imposed on all the ranks in the VR grades.

General civil service open recruitment freeze

5. Separate from the Second VR Scheme, the Administration also imposed a general civil service open recruitment freeze since 1 April 2003 but allowed exemption from the freeze on a case-by-case basis subject to the approval of a Panel co-chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration and the Financial Secretary (the CS/FS Panel). This exemption arrangement however does not apply to VR grades.

Moderation of the five-year open recruitment freeze arrangement for VR grades

6. At the PS Panel meeting on 20 April 2006, the Administration advised members of a modified arrangement to the five-year recruitment freeze imposed on grades included in the Second VR Scheme. The modified arrangement allowed selected Second VR grades to resume open recruitment ahead of the expiry of the recruitment freeze in March 2008 in order to meet new essential service needs stemming from initiatives in the 2005-2006 Policy Address and to alleviate severe manpower shortage and planning problems in a few areas, subject to the approval of the CS/FS Panel.

7. To ensure only the most justified cases would be exempted from the recruitment freeze, the CS/FS Panel would consider applications from VR grades, taking into account the following parameters:

- (a) there have been material changes in circumstances which were unforeseeable when bureaux and departments drew up the lists of VR grades (e.g. new essential service needs or unexpected wastage after implementation of the Second VR Scheme);
- (b) in-service recruitment has failed to recruit sufficient number of staff, or in-service recruitment is unlikely to offer sufficient candidates with the required entry qualifications;
- (c) funding is available to cover the recurrent costs of the new intake following open recruitment;
- (d) the service needs and manpower shortfall must be met by civil servants and not by other alternatives; and
- (e) the Government's overall plan to reduce the civil service establishment will not be adversely affected by the new intake from open recruitment.

8. In July 2006, the Administration informed the Finance Committee that the CS/FS Panel had given approval for the conduct of open recruitment to fill 156 vacancies in 2006-2007 and five in 2007-2008 in six Second VR grades, namely Health Inspector, Chemist, Science Laboratory Technician, Air Crewman Officer, Auditor and Trade Officer.

9. In December 2006, the Administration informed the Panel that the CS/FS Panel had approved, since July 2006, the filling by open recruitment of an additional 61 vacancies in 2007-2008 in three Second VR grades, i.e. Health Inspector, Chemist and Science Laboratory Technician. The CS/FS Panel had also given approval for the conduct of open recruitment to fill another 346 and 60 vacancies in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 respectively in seven other Second VR grades. These grades were Assessor, Accounting Officer, Treasury Accountant, Executive Officer, Information Officer, Inspector (Graduate) and Education Officer (Administration). A table showing the overall position regarding the number of vacancies in specific Second VR grades that may be filled by open recruitment as at the end of November 2006 is in **Appendix I**.

10. Separately, there are 30 VR grades the entry ranks of which were not included in the VR II Scheme because they were not projected to face a surplus situation, but are subject to the 5-year open recruitment freeze for VR grades because one or more of the higher ranks in these grades were included in the Scheme. A list of these grades is in **Appendix II**. In April 2006, the Administration informed the Panel that as a matter of principle, these entry ranks should be excluded from the 5-year open recruitment freeze for VR grades. Instead, they should come under the general civil service open recruitment freeze and the concerned bureaux and departments should be allowed to seek exemption from the freeze on a case-by-case basis from the CS/FS Panel. Their applications will be subject to the normal criteria for exempting non-VR grades from the general recruitment freeze¹.

Major views and concerns expressed by members

11. When the Panel discussed the modified arrangements to the 5-year recruitment freeze imposed on grades included in the Second VR Scheme on 20 April and 18 December 2006, members expressed concerns about the proposed modified arrangements and the resultant impacts on the integrity and

¹ Exemption from the general civil service recruitment freeze will be granted under exceptional circumstances to non-VR grades, subject to the following general criteria and any other special considerations –

- (a) there are strong operational grounds to fill the vacancies failing which the provision of essential services to the public will be affected;
- (b) financial provision will be made available to meet the staff costs;
- (c) the service needs must be provided by permanent civil servants;
- (d) the vacancies cannot be filled in-house by re-deployment, promotion, or in-service appointment, etc; and
- (e) the proposed size of intake is the minimum required and will not compromise the overall plan to reduce the civil service establishment.

cost-effectiveness of the Scheme. Members were also concerned that some VR takers were allowed to join the civil service again as non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff. On the choice of specific VR grades which were exempted from the recruitment freeze, members had examined why only professional and executive grades were selected for the purpose but not other junior ranking grades. Views had also been expressed that some of the vacancies in the selected VR grades should be filled by NCSC staff by converting NCSC posts into permanent posts.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
11 December 2007

**Vacancies in specific VR II grades that may be filled by open recruitment
as at the end of November 2006**

VR II Grade	Number of vacancies to be filled through open recruitment		Total
	2006-07	2007-08	
Health Inspector	119	34	153
Chemist	2	9	11
Science Laboratory Technician	7	21	28
Air Crewman Officer	4	2	6
Auditor	2	-	2
Trade Officer	22	-	22
Assessor	48	-	48
Accounting Officer	13	1	14
Treasury Accountant	8	2	10
Executive Officer	190	50	240
Information Officer	32	1	33
Inspector (Graduate)	30	3	33
Education Officer (Administration)	25	3	28
Total:	502	126	628

Appendix II

VR grades the entry ranks of which were not included in the VR II Scheme

1. Agricultural Officer
2. Air Traffic Flight Services Officer
3. Amenities Assistant
4. Building Services Engineer
5. Building Surveyor
6. Cartographer
7. Electrical and Mechanical Engineer
8. Electrical Inspector
9. Engineer
10. Estate Surveyor
11. Fisheries Surveyor
12. Force Welfare Officer
13. Foreman
14. Geotechnical Engineer
15. Intellectual Property Examiner
16. Land Surveyor
17. Landscape Architect
18. Maintenance Surveyor
19. Occupational Hygienist
20. Occupational Therapist
21. Photographer
22. Physiotherapist
23. Planning Officer
24. Quantity Surveyor
25. Specialist (Education Services)
26. Structural Engineer
27. Telecommunications Engineer
28. Town Planner
29. Valuation Surveyor
30. Workshop Instructor