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Panel on Public Service
Meeting on 19 January 2009

Updated background brief on
implementation of five-day week in the civil service

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the implementation of the five-day week initiative in the Government and summarizes the major concerns expressed by members at previous meetings of the Panel on Public Service (the Panel).

Background

2. The Chief Executive announced on 12 January 2006 the setting up of a working group to examine the proposal and implementation details of a five-day week in the Government with effect from 1 July 2006.

3. At the Panel meeting on 15 May 2006, the Administration briefed members on the phased approach for the implementation of the five-day week initiative in the Government under the four basic principles of: no additional staffing resources, no reduction in the conditioned hours of service of individual staff, no reduction in emergency services, and continued provision of some essential counter services on Saturdays. The Administration also briefed members on the selected government units that would move to a five-day week in phase one starting 1 July 2006.

4. At the Panel meetings on 20 November 2006 and 21 May 2007, the Administration briefed members on government units covered in phase two and the final phase respectively, as well as the outcome of the reviews of the implementation in phase one and phase two. The reviews covered the following aspects -

- public sentiment;
- monitoring and contingency measures;

- impact on service utilization and operational efficiency;
- impact on performance pledge compliance; and
- staff reaction.

5. The major findings of the reviews included the following -

- (a) The general public had largely accepted the five-day week initiative. Some of the views received expressed disappointment that the Government did not mandate the five-day work pattern in the private sector.
- (b) Upon the implementation of the final phase of a five-day week, departments offering direct services to the public had provided a drop-in box or leave-a-message service at the closed counters/offices to render assistance to members of the public.
- (c) With regard to those public services that ceased operation on Saturdays from 1 July 2007, the utilization of those services during weekdays remained largely steady. There was no evidence suggestive of an increase or decrease in overall service utilization following the implementation of a five-day week.
- (d) The implementation of the five-day week initiative did not have any adverse impact on departments' capability in meeting the performance pledges.
- (e) Most staff welcomed the new arrangement while frontline staff not yet working on a five-day week continued to express their wish to migrate to the new work pattern.

6. The Administration informed the Panel that it was satisfied that the implementation of the five-day week initiative in the Government had been generally smooth.

7. In November 2007, after three phases of implementation, a total of some 94 300 (around 65%) government staff were working on a five-day week work mode (including some 27 500 staff on a "five-day-work, two-day-off" duty pattern). According to the Administration, all suitable units for five-day operation were on the new work pattern, except for a few government services that operated in tandem with services provided by other organizations (e.g. the Judiciary and the Hospital Authority).

Views expressed by the Panel at previous meetings

8. Members in general expressed support for the five-day week initiative. When the Panel last discussed the subject at its meeting on 19 November 2007, members noted that about 47 500 civil servants still could not join the five-day week arrangement. Some members considered that the majority of the 47 500 civil servants could not migrate to five-day week probably because of their long conditioned working hours and, if they performed duties on a five-day week basis, they would work very long hours daily. These members suggested that the Administration should review the conditioned hours of service for those grades of staff who had to perform 51 hours of work per week, with a view to reducing the working hours to 44 hours per week. These members were also concerned about the inconvenience caused to the family life of those working on a "five-day work, two day off" pattern.

9. The Administration pointed out that the five-day week initiative was implemented based on four principles as explained in paragraph 2 above. As the pay and conditions of service of civil servants were set based on, amongst other things, their conditioned hours of service, any change in the number of working hours would also affect pay. The terms and conditions of service as well as the conditioned hours of service for different grades in the civil service had been reviewed in the 2006 Pay Level Survey. The Civil Service Bureau had no intention to conduct another review. The Administration also pointed out that Heads of grades and departments (HoDs) had been in close consultation with the staff sides in their respective departments prior to and throughout the implementation of five-day week to ensure smooth operation.

10. The Administration reported that most staff welcomed the five-day week work pattern. Where practicable, HoDs would consider entertaining requests from individual staff for transferring to non-five-day week jobs.

Relevant papers

11. A list of relevant papers is in **Appendix**.

Appendix

Implementation of five-day week in the civil service

List of relevant papers

Date of meeting	Committee	Minutes/ Paper	LC Paper No.
15.5.2006	Panel on Public Service (PS Panel)	Administration's paper on "Implementation of five-day week in the Government"	CB(1)1440/05-06(03) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/ps/papers/ps0515cb1-1440-3e.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(1)2146/05-06 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/ps/minutes/ps060515.pdf
20.11.2006	PS Panel	Administration's paper on "Implementation of five-day week in the Government"	CB(1)248/06-07(03) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ps/papers/ps1120cb1-248-3-e.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(1)481/06-07 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ps/minutes/ps061120.pdf
21.5.2007	PS Panel	Administration's paper on "Implementation of five-day week in the Government (final phase)"	CB(1)1600/06-07(03) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ps/papers/ps0521cb1-1600-3-e.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(1)1916/06-07 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ps/minutes/ps070521.pdf

Date of meeting	Committee	Minutes/ Paper	LC Paper No.
19.11.2007	PS Panel	Administration's paper on "Implementation of five-day week in the Government"	CB(1)206/07-08(04) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/papers/ps/papers/ps1119cb1-206-4-e.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(1)375/07-08 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/english/papers/ps/minutes/ps071119.pdf