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Panel on Security

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 7 June 2011**

Manpower situation of the Immigration Department

Purpose

This paper provides background information relating to the manpower situation of the Immigration Department ("ImmD") and summarizes the discussions of the Panel on Security ("the Panel") on the subject.

Background

2. According to the homepage of ImmD, the overall passenger traffic at immigration control points increased from 208.9 million in 2005-2006 to 238.3 million in 2007-2008 and 241.2 million in 2009-2010. As at 31 March 2010, ImmD had an establishment of 6 605 posts, comprising 12 directorate posts, 1 696 posts in the officer grade, 3 435 posts in the rank and file grade and 1 462 posts in the general and common grades.

Deliberations of the Panel

3. The Panel has been very concerned about the manpower situation of ImmD. It received the views of immigration staff unions and discussed the subject at its meetings on 8 May, 3 July and 17 October 2007. The main concerns of the Panel are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Problems arising from increased passenger volume at immigration control points

4. According to immigration staff unions, the increase in immigration manpower in the past few years was far from matching the increase in passenger volume at various control points. Many visitors had become impatient when there was a long queue of visitors at a control point and the air conditioning at the Lo Wu Control Point was inadequate. Some of the visitors yelled noisily or insulted immigration counter staff with foul language. Members considered it necessary for the Administration to take prompt actions to address the problems raised by the immigration staff unions. They considered that immigration manpower should be appropriately increased to cope with the increased passenger flow at various control points. Adequate air conditioning should also be provided at immigration control points.

5. According to the Administration, improvement works would shortly be carried out to the air conditioning system of the passenger arrival hall at the Lo Wu Control Point. Improvement works were also being made to some offices and rest rooms. Various works had been carried out in the past few years to improve the environment of control points. For example, improvement works had been made to install an air conditioning system at the Lo Wu Cross Boundary Footbridge.

6. The Administration assured members that it was aware of the heavy work pressure experienced by frontline immigration staff. It was also aware of the increase in passenger volume and was seeking to relieve the pressure at control points through the opening of new control points. Although the civil service had been subject to a general recruitment freeze since 2003, exceptional approval had been given for ImmD to recruit 607 uniformed staff and about 500 additional uniformed staff in 2007-2008, making a total increase in staff strength of about 25%. ImmD's uniformed staff increased by 10.3% from 4 137 in 2002 to 4 565 in 2006. During the same period, the civil service as a whole was reduced from some 181 000 to some 162 000.

7. Members were concerned that, with the opening of two new control points, namely, the Shenzhen Bay Control Point and the Lok Ma Chau Spur Line Control Point, the recruitment of 500 additional immigration staff might still be inadequate, as experience indicated that the opening of more control points tended to attract more passengers.

8. The Administration advised that in addition to an increase of about 18% in uniformed establishment from 2002 to 2007, ImmD had adopted a basket of measures to cope with its manpower needs. The installation of e-Channels, streamlined immigration processes and flexible control point operations had helped relieve the pressure on immigration staff.

9. Members considered that ImmD should discuss with immigration staff unions the projection of future workload and future manpower requirement. They were concerned whether ImmD would adopt the suggestion of immigration staff unions to use projected passenger volume in its future estimation of manpower requirements.

10. According to the Administration, close communication was maintained between ImmD and immigration staff unions. It would take into account all foreseeable developments in manpower planning. As for any unforeseeable developments, such as an upsurge in the number of torture claimants, ImmD would address the immediate manpower needs through redeployment of staff and re-prioritization of tasks, as in the case of other government departments.

11. Members were informed that it was not the Administration's general practice to plan for manpower requirements on the basis of peak volume of work, as it would lead to over-staffing during non-peak periods. Government departments coped with peak demands through overtime work and temporary deployment of staff from less time-critical areas of work. Along this line, ImmD had coped with peaks in demand through measures such as adjusting shift pattern of staff, overtime work and reinforcing control points by headquarters' staff.

Accumulated leave of immigration staff

12. Members noted with concern that according to immigration staff unions, some immigration staff suffered from psychiatric problems as a result of heavy work pressure and difficulty encountered in taking leave. Members were concerned whether a high percentage of frontline immigration staff had a leave balance close to their respective leave limits.

13. The Administration advised that ImmD was always concerned about the accumulation of leave and health of immigration staff. As at September 2006, 45.5% to 46.5% of rank and file staff and 63.6% to 64.2% of staff of the immigration officer grade had a leave balance close to their respective leave limits. As at September 2006, the average number of accumulated leave of all immigration staff at the rank of chief immigration officer and below was 116

days. The average number of accumulated leave of officers with longer years of service, including chief immigration officers, senior immigration officers, chief immigration assistants and senior immigration assistants, was about 129 days. No rank and file staff had forfeited their leave. A few staff members might have chosen to forfeit some of their accumulated leave in order to maintain their eligibility for acting allowance.

14. Members noted that ImmD staff were entitled to leave, which varied between 14 and 40.5 days per year depending on their terms of appointment and length of service. To provide at least one continuous rest period during a year, staff were given annual roster leave of one to four weeks. Those who had vacation leave balance approaching the maximum accumulation limit would have their leave granted much more liberally. Immigration staff with leave accumulation close to their limits were notified of such a fact by electronic mail. Applications for vacation leave, apart from those made with a very short notice, were all granted to immigration staff.

15. Members sought information on how the leave accumulation situation of immigration staff compared to those of the staff of other disciplined forces.

16. The Administration advised that although ImmD had the highest number of staff with accumulated leave reaching 90% to 99% of their respective limits, there would be more opportunities for immigration staff to reduce their accumulated leave after the addition of some 500 staff in 2007-2008.

Design of immigration counters

17. According to immigration staff unions, many immigration counter staff suffered from strain disorders of their arms and shoulders. Members called on the Administration to improve the design of immigration counters and arrange immigration counter staff to sit at different directions on a rotation basis to minimize strain disorders of their arms and shoulders.

18. According to the Administration, ImmD was committed to maintaining a healthy workforce, and has been promoting a healthy lifestyle to staff, such as disseminating health-related information and organizing sports, leisure and social activities. Counter staff at control points were normally given a 10 to 15 minutes break for every two hours of work. Immigration counters at control points were being replaced/upgraded for greater occupational safety and comfort. ImmD had also been maintaining regular dialogues with immigration staff unions over various matters, including the working environment. The replacement of immigration counters of older design was an ongoing exercise.

ImmD planned to complete replacement or modification of all such counters within two years. Consideration would be given to arranging the immigration staff inside the kiosks at the Shenzhen Bay Control Point to swap their seats regularly to minimize strain disorders of arms and shoulders.

Relevant papers

19. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
31 May 2011

**Relevant papers on
Manpower situation of the Immigration Department**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	17.1.2001	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 15)
Legislative Council	17.4.2002	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 6)
Panel on Security	8.5.2007 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	27.6.2007	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 20)
Panel on Security	3.7.2007 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Security	17.10.2007 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes

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