

立法會
Legislative Council

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Establishment Subcommittee of the Finance Committee

Minutes of the 3rd meeting
held in Conference Room 1 of Legislative Council Complex
on Monday, 28 November 2011, at 8:30 am

Members present:

Dr Hon Margaret NG (Chairman)
Dr Hon PAN Pey-chyou (Deputy Chairman)
Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po, GBM, GBS, JP
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP
Hon LAU Kong-wah, JP
Hon LI Fung-ying, SBS, JP
Hon WONG Ting-kwong, BBS, JP
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP
Hon IP Wai-ming, MH
Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-yee, GBS, JP

Members absent:

Ir Dr Hon Raymond HO Chung-tai, SBS, S.B.St.J., JP
Hon WONG Sing-chi

Public Officers attending:

Ms Alice LAU, JP	Deputy Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury (Treasury)1
Mrs Ingrid YEUNG, JP	Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service (1)
Mr D W PESCOD, JP	Permanent Secretary for Transport and Housing (Housing)
Ms Annette LEE, JP	Deputy Secretary for Transport and Housing (Housing)
Mr Eugene FUNG	Principal Assistant Secretary for Transport and Housing (Housing) (Private Housing)
Miss Janet WONG, JP	Commissioner for Innovation and Technology
Mr John HUNG	Secretary-General (Testing and Certification), Innovation and Technology Commission

Clerk in attendance:

Ms Annette LAM	Chief Council Secretary (1)7
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Staff in attendance:

Mrs Constance LI	Assistant Secretary General 1
Ms Emily CHAN	Council Secretary (1)8
Ms Alice CHEUNG	Senior Legislative Assistant (1)1
Ms Clara LO	Legislative Assistant (1)10

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The Chairman drew members' attention to the information paper (ECI(2011-12)8) provided by the Administration which set out the latest changes in the directorate establishment approved since 2002.

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2. Mrs Regina IP requested the Administration to provide more detailed information, such as the department/bureau/policy area, post title and rank of the 55 directorate posts deleted since 2002.

EC(2011-12)9 Proposed creation of two supernumerary posts of one Administrative Officer Staff Grade B (D3) and one Administrative Officer Staff Grade C (D2) in the Housing Department from 16 December 2011 to 30 June 2013 to take forward the regulation of the sale of first-hand residential properties by legislation

3. The Chairman advised that the Administration's proposal was to create two supernumerary posts of one Administrative Officer Staff Grade B (AOSGB) and one Administrative Officer Staff Grade C (AOSGC) in the Housing Department from 16 December 2011 to 30 June 2013 to head a dedicated unit in taking forward the regulation by legislation of the sale of all types of first-hand residential properties. The Chairman informed members that the Panel on Housing had been consulted on the proposal on 7 November 2011, and Panel members supported the proposal so that the relevant legislation could be enacted within 2012.

4. Prof Patrick LAU declared that he was a member of the Steering Committee on the Regulation of Sale of First-hand Residential Properties by Legislation (the Steering Committee). He said that it was no easy task to identify suitable candidates for the proposed posts who should be knowledgeable about and have the expertise in the sale of first-hand residential properties, and should also be able to lead a dedicated unit to complete the legislative process within a tight timeframe. He was keen to see early enactment of the legislation and said that two posts should be filled soonest possible.

5. Permanent Secretary for Transport and Housing (Housing) (PS(H)) said that the key task at this stage was to work towards the enactment of the legislation within a very tight timeframe. The task included completing the public consultation exercise in the form of a White Bill, ensuring timely completion of the drafting of the Blue Bill, and working closely with the Bills Committee which would likely be formed to study the Bill. The officers filling the posts would have to be able to deliver these tasks. Also, an enforcement agency and an online Property Market Information Platform (PMIP) would be set up within one year after the enactment of the legislation. The proposed enforcement agency would require a team with multi-disciplinary skills. Should there be a need to create directorate posts for running the proposed enforcement agency, the Administration would seek approval in due course.

6. Noting the tight legislative timetable for this complicated and controversial piece of legislation, the Chairman asked whether the Administration had confidence in completing the legislative process on time.

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7. PS(H) said that the Steering Committee had discussed issues relating to the regulation of the sale of first-hand residential properties in detail in the past 12 months. Key stakeholders, such as the Real Estate Developers Association of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Institute of Architects, the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors, the Estate Agents Authority, and the Law Society of Hong Kong were represented in the Steering Committee. To expedite the legislative process, public consultation in the form of a White Bill would be launched in November 2011. Following the public consultation exercise, the Administration planned to introduce the Blue Bill to the Legislative Council in March 2012 with a view to enacting the legislation within 2012. PS(H) said that while the timetable was challenging, he was optimistic that it could be achieved. He sought members' support for the staffing proposal so that the required work could be completed in time for submitting the Blue Bill to the Legislative Council for consideration in March 2012. He added that he was confident that the right persons for the two posts would be identified and the posts would be readily filled.

8. Mrs Regina IP asked whether the Administration would consider filling the posts by departmental staff, such as from the Lands Department, given the shortage of Administrative Officer (AO) grade staff. PS(H) responded that, having regard to the policy responsibilities, the two directorate posts would be filled by AOs. The Administration had already identified a number of AOs as potential candidates for the posts.

9. Dr PAN Pey-chyou enquired about the justifications for creating two supernumerary posts instead of one. PS(H) replied that the Administration had critically examined the feasibility of re-deploying serving directorate staff in the Housing Department to absorb the additional workload arising from the proposed legislation. However, as incumbent directorate officers were already fully stretched with their schedule of responsibilities, and given the tight legislative timetable, it was crucial to have a designated AOSGB to head the dedicated unit on a full time-basis to drive the legislative exercise, and to set up the proposed enforcement agency and the PMIP in tandem. Also, the AOSGB would need the support of an AOSGC in overseeing the progress and operational details of the required tasks.

10. The item was voted on. Members agreed to recommend the item to Finance Committee (FC) for approval.

EC(2011-12)8 Proposed retention of one supernumerary post of Administrative Officer Staff Grade C (D2) in the Government Secretariat: Innovation and Technology Commission from 16 March 2012 to 31 March 2014 to provide continued support to the Hong Kong Council for Testing and Certification

11. The Chairman advised that the Administration's proposal was to retain one supernumerary AOSGC (D2) post, designated as Secretary-General (Testing and Certification) (SG(CT)), in the Innovation Technology Commission (ITC) from 16 March 2012 to 31 March 2014 to provide continued support to the Hong Kong Council for Testing and Certification (HKCTC) in implementing its three-year market-oriented industry development plan and in formulating a new plan to further support the testing and certification industry.

12. Mr WONG Ting-kwong, Chairman of the Panel on Commerce and Industry, reported that the Panel had been consulted on the proposal on 15 November 2011. Panel members supported the proposal in principle. Some members considered that the Administration should step up its effort and provide more resources in promoting the testing and certification services, particularly for small and medium enterprises and in the food industry, and that the post should be retained on a permanent basis.

13. Mr WONG Ting-kwong said that it was important to promote the development of the testing and certification industry which was identified as one of the six industries that Hong Kong enjoyed clear advantages. He opined that the Administration should strengthen its support for the industry and seriously consider retaining the SG(CT) post on a permanent basis to provide sustained support for the industry in the long term.

14. Commissioner for Innovation and Technology (CIT) thanked the Panel for its support of the development of the testing and certification industry in Hong Kong. She said that the HKCTC had implemented a number of initiatives since its establishment in 2009 and had formulated a three-year market-oriented development plan for the industry in March 2010 which would end in March 2013. By that time, HKCTC would conduct a comprehensive review on the progress made, and on the basis of operational experience, formulate a plan to further support the industry, including the long-term role and functions of HKCTC. The Administration would review the need for retaining the SG(CT) post for a longer period of time or on a permanent basis upon the completion of HKCTC's comprehensive review.

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15. The Chairman asked CIT to give a brief account of the work and the progress made since the establishment of the HKCTC, as well as the justifications for extending the SG(CT) post.

16. CIT explained that a dedicated team in ITC headed by SG(TC) had been providing secretariat support to HKCTC, an advisory body with representatives from various sectors (such as laboratories, trades like Chinese medicines etc.) set up since September 2009 to spearhead the development of the testing and certification industry. Pursuant to the three-year development plan recommended by HKCTC, a two-pronged approach had been adopted, which was to improve the various factors of production that would enhance the industry's competitiveness in general, and also to assist the industry to explore business opportunities in specific trades that promised particular market potentials. On enhancing factors of production, efforts had been made to assist the industry to ensure adequate manpower supply, sufficient land resources, and better use of capital and technology. With regard to manpower, HKCTC had collaborated with universities and the Vocational Training Council to increase students' understanding of the industry through career talks and internship opportunities. Seminars and workshops, such as experience sharing on practices and procedures (e.g. on radiation measurement), had been organized to help practitioners enhance their technical expertise.

17. CIT further said that to tap market opportunities in selected trades, HKCTC had been supporting the industry to develop and promote testing and certification services for four trades, namely Chinese medicine, construction materials, food, and jewellery. Initiatives in these areas included supporting the industry to build up expertise in authentication of Chinese herbal medicines, promoting wider acceptance of product certification for construction materials to enhance safety and quality, introducing a food hygiene management certification system for the local catering industry, and the development for standard testing methods for two types of jade. Furthermore, HKCTC would also explore opportunities for new testing and certification services in the trades of environmental protection as well as information and communications technologies. On the Mainland market, under Supplement VII to the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement, testing laboratories in Hong Kong were allowed to cooperate with designated Mainland organisations in testing four types of products for the China Compulsory Certification System on a pilot basis. The Central Government had recently again agreed to expand the scope of the scheme to include more types of products processed in Hong Kong.

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18. Regarding the SG(TC) post, CIT said that SG(TC) would continue to follow up on the initiatives being taken forward by HKCTC, and to support HKCTC in conducting a comprehensive review on the progress made and in formulating a plan to further assist the industry. Taking into account the amount of work in implementing the three-year development plan, it was essential to further extend the SG(TC) post for another two years to provide continued support to HKCTC. She reiterated that the Administration would review the need for retaining the SG(TC) post for a longer period of time or on a permanent basis upon the completion of HKCTC's comprehensive review of its long-term role.

19. The item was voted on. Members agreed that the Subcommittee should recommend the item to FC for approval.

20. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 8:55 am.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
15 December 2011