

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE

Overview of Responsibilities and Objectives of the Civil Service Bureau

Purpose

This paper provides Members with an overview on the major responsibilities and policy objectives of the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) under the present Administration.

Main Responsibilities of CSB

2. CSB is responsible for fostering a dynamic, visionary and knowledge-based Government's workforce for the delivery of quality services to the community. The main responsibilities of CSB include the following –

- (a) overall management of human resources within the Government (including civil servants and non-civil service contract staff but excluding judges, judicial officers and political appointees); development and communication of the overall policies regarding the management of human resources; and advising bureaux and departments (B/Ds) on the implementation of these policies;
- (b) formulation of training policies and provision of generalist training for the Government's workforce, and rendering of support to B/Ds in training matters; and
- (c) support of the Government's official languages policy¹.

¹ In accordance with Article 9 of the Basic Law, in addition to the Chinese language, English may also be used as an official language by the executive authorities, legislature and judiciary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Major Policy Objectives

3. In discharging responsibilities set out in paragraph 2 above, CSB's work is guided by seven major policy objectives in the following paragraphs.

(A) Defining and safeguarding the core values of the civil service

4. The Civil Service is the backbone of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. It supports the Chief Executive and the Government of the day in formulating, explaining and implementing policies, conducting administrative affairs, delivering public services and undertaking law enforcement and regulatory functions. While political appointees have to assume political responsibilities for various policy decisions, civil servants have the administrative responsibilities to tender impartial and objective advice and carry through decisions made. Civil servants are required to uphold the following core values as stipulated in the Civil Service Code promulgated in September 2009 –

- (a) commitment to the rule of law;
- (b) honesty and integrity;
- (c) objectivity and impartiality;
- (d) political neutrality;
- (e) accountability for decisions and actions; and
- (f) dedication, professionalism and diligence.

5. In safeguarding the core values and defining the standards of conduct of the Civil Service, CSB has issued and put under regular review service-wide regulations, rules and guidelines governing, among other subjects, avoidance of conflict of interest, acceptance of advantages and entertainment, declaration of private investments, and outside work during service and for a specified period after leaving service. Individual B/Ds may also, in the light of their specific operational circumstances, draw up additional guidelines for compliance by their staff.

6. The upholding of core values and compliance with the standards of conduct is supported by a well-established system whereby civil servants with exemplary service are duly recognised and rewarded, and those found culpable of misconduct or criminal offences are properly disciplined and punished. Currently, there are a number of commendation schemes for

civil servants. They include the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme which provides recognition on a department/team basis. The Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS)'s Commendation Award Scheme gives recognition to selected civil servants on a service-wide basis for their outstanding and exemplary performance. The Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme aims to reward long serving officers with very good performance. The Long and Meritorious Service Award Scheme awards civilian staff with long and meritorious service after they have completed 20 or 30 or 40 years of good service. The Commendation Letter Scheme provides recognition to staff through the issue of commendation letters by Heads of Bureau/Department for their staff's significant contribution or meritorious act warranting special recognition. On sanction, the Administration takes a serious view of offences and misconduct committed by its staff particularly those involving a breach of trust in the public office or misuse of power. The Administration is determined to take disciplinary action against the staff concerned to achieve a punitive, deterrent and rehabilitative effect. All disciplinary cases are processed expeditiously having regard to the requirements of fairness and due process.

(B) Recruiting a high calibre workforce for and ensuring smooth succession within the Civil Service

7. It is the Government's policy that appointments to the Civil Service are based on the principle of open and fair competition. Applicants who meet the basic entry requirements are required to go through a competitive selection process. Such process may feature written examinations or trade tests to certify candidates' competencies in relevant skills or attributes, or to prioritise them for shortlisting purposes, before the candidates are invited for selection interviews. Selection of candidates for appointment is based on ability, potential and performance as well as qualifications and experience prescribed for the rank under recruitment.

8. Interested non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff may apply for civil service jobs through open recruitment. Since relevant working experience is one of the factors taken into account in the recruitment of civil servants, we consider NCSC staff who meet the basic entry requirements of specific civil service ranks should generally enjoy a competitive edge over other applicants because of their working experience in the Government. Indeed, our statistics revealed that NCSC staff did fare much better than other candidates in open recruitment exercises.

9. We have resumed general open recruitment since 2007 so as to inject new talents into the civil service and to forestall succession problem in the longer term. Moreover, SCS personally meets with Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Department to examine the succession situation in individual departments and grades, with a view to early identification of any succession problems so that timely remedial actions can be taken.

10. To support B/Ds in grooming promising officers for succession, the Civil Service Training and Development Institute (CSTDI) of CSB offers various management training programmes. Targeted at directorate officers is the Advanced Leadership Enhancement Programme, followed by the Leadership In Action Programme for senior professionals and Innovative Managers Programme for middle managers. We also provide sponsorship for high potential officers to attend executive programmes at renowned overseas institutions, such as Harvard University, Columbia Business School and London Business School. Career postings and secondment of promising departmental officers to work at policy bureaux are arranged to help broaden their exposure and perspectives.

(C) Ensuring reasonable terms and conditions of service for the Government's workforce

11. The Government's civil service pay policy is to offer remuneration sufficient to attract, retain and motivate staff of a suitable calibre, and such remuneration is to be regarded as fair by both civil servants and the public they serve by maintaining broad comparability between civil service and private sector pay. Civil service pay is compared with private sector pay on a regular basis through three types of market surveys, namely –

- (a) an annual pay trend survey (“PTS”) to ascertain year-on-year pay adjustment in the private sector. Each year, the net Pay Trend Indicators derived from the PTS, together with other relevant factors², will be taken into account by the Chief Executive-in-Council in considering the annual civil service pay adjustment;
- (b) a triennial starting salaries survey (“SSS”) to compare the starting salaries of civil service civilian grades with the entry pay of jobs in the private sector requiring similar qualifications; and

² Other relevant factors include the state of the economy, changes in the cost of living, the Government's fiscal position, the pay claims of the staff sides and civil service morale.

- (c) a six-yearly pay level survey (“PLS”) to ascertain whether civil service pay is broadly comparable with private sector pay.

12. As we have informed this Panel at the meeting held on 20 February 2012, the SSS and PLS are both due to be conducted in 2012. The Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service³ is conducting both surveys at the invitation of the Administration. It is well aware of the importance of staff engagement and has undertaken to fully consult the staff sides during the process. The 2012 SSS is expected to be completed around end 2012. As for the more complicated PLS, it will take more time for consultation with the staff sides and for the field works to be completed. We will consult Members on the applications of the findings of the two surveys when we receive advice from the Standing Commission in due course.

13. For other terms and conditions of service for civil servants, it is the Government’s policy that they should be generally on par or better than what the relevant labour laws provide for. Civil servants enjoy a range of fringe benefits depending on their rank, length of service, terms of appointment and other relevant rules. Civil servants in general are provided with retirement benefits either under the pension legislation or the Civil Service Provident Fund Scheme. Civil servants, pensioners and their eligible dependants are also entitled to medical and dental treatment and services that are provided by the Department of Health (DH) or the Hospital Authority (HA) free of charge⁴, as well as reimbursement of medical expenses for items that are prescribed in accordance with medical necessity and are chargeable by HA or not available in HA and DH. We have allocated additional resources and implemented a series of measures to improve civil service medical and dental benefits in recent years and will continue to provide regular updates to Members on our progress in this regard.

14. For NCSC staff, their employing B/Ds may determine the employment package having regard to the market situation and other relevant considerations provided the terms offered are overall speaking no

³ The Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service is an independent advisory body made up of members (including its Chairman) from different professional background (including business/professional, human resources, academic, etc) responsible for advising and recommending the Chief Executive on matters relating to the pay and conditions of service of non-directorate civil service (with the exception of judicial officers and disciplined services staff).

⁴ Save for the charges applicable to hospital maintenance, dentures and dental appliances as provided for in the Civil Service Regulations.

more favourable than those applicable to civil servants in comparable civil service ranks or with comparable levels of responsibilities where they exist.

(D) Maintaining a lean and efficient workforce for the Government

15. The size of the Government's workforce is kept under control and closely monitored in line with our policy of financial prudence. At the same time, we will ensure that B/Ds have the necessary manpower to deliver new and improved public services. We will support creation of new civil service posts when the operational need is fully justified, when the work involved cannot be undertaken by re-deployment of existing staff and alternative modes of service delivery have been critically examined and considered not appropriate. To facilitate the delivery of new policy initiatives and improved services to the public, we have allowed the civil service to grow by about 1% annually since 2007-08. The projected establishment as at 31 March 2013 as shown in the 2012-13 Estimate is 169 560, whereas the actual establishment of the civil service as at end August 2012 was 168 210.

16. NCSC staff and agency workers (i.e. manpower supplied by employment agencies under a service contract to work under the supervision of B/Ds) are used to supplement the civil service where appropriate. NCSC staff are engaged when the service needs are time-limited, seasonal, or may be subject to market fluctuations, or where staff are required to work less than the conditioned hours, or where we need to tap the latest expertise in a particular area, etc. Agency workers are, on the other hand, for meeting urgent, unforeseen and very short-term service needs. The number of full-time NCSC staff stood at 14 818 as at 30 June 2011 while the number of agency workers was 1 687 as at 30 September 2011.

(E) Maintaining and enhancing communication with and supporting civil servants to build partnership

17. It has always been the objective of CSB to foster a close working relationship between management and staff with mutual trust and respect, sharing the same goal of providing better public services. There are well-established channels within the civil service to facilitate effective communication and support the building up of partnership between management and staff. At the central level, there are four Central Staff Consultative Councils to foster better understanding and co-operation between the Government and staff on service-wide issues such as pay adjustments and allowances, housing benefits, and medical and dental facilities, etc. Civil service-wide staff unions are also consulted on service-wide issues from time to time. At the departmental level, some 90

Departmental Consultative Committees have been set up in B/Ds which aim to achieve better understanding and co-operation between management and staff through regular discussions on matters affecting the well-being of staff in their departments. At the individual level, staff may write to their departments to express their views.

(F) Promoting a culture of continuous learning within the Government's workforce

18. The Administration is committed to providing Government employees, particularly civil servants, with learning opportunities that would equip them with the skills, knowledge and mindset necessary for providing quality service to the public. While B/Ds provide vocational training to meet job-specific needs, CSB, through CSTDI, focuses mainly on training programmes which are best provided by a central training agency such as leadership and management, language and communication, national studies and the Basic Law. To keep pace with the development of closer ties between Hong Kong and the Mainland, we will maintain and strengthen national studies training for civil servants at various ranks. In addition, CSTDI provides consultancy services to B/Ds on human resource management, and promotes a culture of continuous learning and innovative thinking in the civil service.

(G) Facilitating the effective use of official languages in the Civil Service

19. We set guidelines and standards for the use of official languages in the Civil Service. We also provide B/Ds with a wide range of language-related support including translation, interpretation and draft-vetting services, operating language advice hotlines, as well as compiling glossaries and writing aids for reference. Language training courses and learning programmes are organised to enhance the proficiency of the Government's workforce in the use of official languages.

CONCLUSION

20. The Civil Service plays a pivotal role in maintaining effective governance as well as the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. As the new term Government sets out to move, civil servants will be facing new challenges and new missions. CSB will continue to ensure that the Civil Service is well-managed and motivated in delivering quality public services.

ADVICE SOUGHT

21. Members are invited to note and advise on the work of CSB.

Civil Service Bureau
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