

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(4)133/12-13(08)

Ref: CB4/PL/PS

Panel on Public Service
Meeting on 19 November 2012

Background brief on conditioned hours of work of the operational staff in the Fire Stream of the Fire Services Department

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the conditioned hours of work of the operational staff in the Fire Stream of the Fire Services Department ("FSD"), and summarizes the major concerns expressed by members of the Panel on Public Service and Panel of Security on the subject at previous meetings.

Background

Policy on conditioned hours of work of civil service

2. According to the Administration, "conditioned hours of work" means the hours of duty which salary is calculated to cover and the hours which must be worked before overtime work is counted. There is no uniform conditioned hours of work in the civil service. Specific conditioned hours of work are laid down for different grades of civil servants (including civilian and disciplined services staff) according to operational requirements and other relevant considerations. The stipulated conditioned hours of work are taken into account when the Administration determines the pay of different civil service grades.

3. The Administration is of the view that as the conditioned hours of work have been taken into account in determining the overall remuneration package offered to civil servants, a reduction in the stipulated conditioned hours of work of a civil service grade without any change to its pay scale will be an improvement to the pay and conditions of service of the specific grade. The Administration will consider any

proposal to reduce the conditioned hours of work of a particular grade against the three pre-requisites of cost-neutrality, no additional manpower, and maintaining the same level of service to the public, along with other relevant factors.

Conditioned hours of work of operational staff in the Fire Stream of FSD

4. There are three streams of disciplined services staff in FSD. The Fire Stream is responsible for fire-fighting and rescue, enforcement of fire protection laws and fire safety legislation, advising the public on fire protection measures and enhancing public awareness in fire safety. The Ambulance Stream takes charge of operations of the ambulance service. The Mobilising and Communications Stream, also known as the Control Stream, is responsible for the overall control and communications in respect of the mobilisation of fire-fighting and ambulance resources for fire and emergency services. The conditioned hours of work of the disciplined services staff in FSD are as follows –

Grade	Conditioned hours
Fireman / Station Officer grades (Fire Stream)	54 hours gross
Fireman / Station Officer grades (Control Stream)	48 hours gross
Ambulanceman grade (Ambulance Stream)	48 hours gross
Ambulance Officer grade (Ambulance Stream)	44 hours gross

5. The conditioned hours of work of the operational staff in the Fire Stream in FSD ("operational firemen") has evolved over time from 84 working hours per week prior to 1965, to 54 working hours per week since 1990. Different shift patterns have been implemented to complement the changes in conditioned hours of work. A summary showing the changes in the conditioned hours of work and shift patterns of operational firemen is set out at **Appendix I**.

6. Under the current shift system of "24 hours on, 48 hours off", operational firemen have to respond to emergency call-outs any time during their 24-hour shift. Generally speaking, apart from being on standby, each 24-hour shift comprises 11 hours of arranged duties

(including drills for fire fighting and rescue, district visits, fire safety inspections and station routines etc.) and 13 hours of physical training, meal breaks, standby and rest time. Under the existing shift arrangement, operational firemen perform 9.75 shifts of 24-hours duty per month (or working for around 10 whole days a month or 120 days a year).

7. The Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service ("SCDS") is responsible for advising and making recommendations to the Chief Executive on matters concerning the pay and conditions of service of the disciplined services. In its latest report on grade structure review of the disciplined services published in November 2008, SCDS noted that the 54 working hours of operational firemen involved standby and rest time; and the unique shift pattern of "24 hours on, 48 hours off" also offered the incidental benefits of incurring less travelling time and cost and reducing the total number of working days. SCDS advised that any reduction in the existing conditioned hours of work for this group of staff should be considered against the three pre-requisites mentioned in paragraph 3 above.

Deliberations of the Panels

Panel on Public Service

8. At the Panel meeting on 16 January 2012, members received a briefing by the Administration on the policy governing the conditioned hours of work of the civil service, and met with 35 staff unions/associations. The Panel held another meeting on 21 May 2012 to further follow up the issues. The major views and concerns expressed by members that were related to the conditioned hours of work of operational firemen, and the Administration's responses are summarized in paragraphs 9 to 15 below.

Introduction of uniform conditioned hours of work for the civil service

9. Members generally supported the deputations' views that uniform conditioned hours of work should be introduced across the board for all civil servants. They considered that the results of the reviews on the conditioned hours of work conducted years ago were outdated and no

longer reflected the prevailing manpower situation of the civil service. The Administration should increase its manpower to cope with the greater demand for quality public services, so that civil servants could have a better balance between work and leisure.

10. The Administration stated that it had no plan to introduce uniform conditioned hours of work in the civil service. The Administration considered it more appropriate that the conditioned hours of work of different civil service grades should be determined in relation to the work nature and operational requirements of the respective grades. Since the stipulated conditioned hours of work had been taken into account when the Administration determined the respective pay of different civil service grades, the salaries and conditions of service of the concerned grades might need to be reviewed in the event of a change in their conditioned hours of work.

Relaxation of the three pre-requisites

11. Some Members opined that since any proposal to reduce conditioned hours of work would necessarily entail additional manpower and costs, the Administration should relax the three pre-requisites and consider any proposal to reduce conditioned hours of work on its own merits.

12. The Administration stated that it was open to any proposal to reduce the conditioned hours of work of a grade if reasonable grounds and justifications were provided. As recommended by SCDS and the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service, the fulfilment of the three pre-requisites was required for a reduction in the conditioned hours of work of civil servants.

Reduction of the conditioned hours of work of operational firemen

13. Members were generally supportive of the proposal of the relevant deputations for reducing the conditioned hours of work of operational firemen from 54 hours to 48 hours per week. Members pointed out that operational firemen should be provided with sufficient rest time to ensure that they were physically fit to perform duties of a dangerous nature, and it was unfair that operational firemen were subject to longer working hours when compared with their counterparts of other

disciplined services.

14. A member remarked that the Administration's refusal to reduce the conditioned hours of work of operational firemen rooted in its erroneous concept that operational firemen were not fully on duty during the 13 standby hours within the 24-hour shift. He considered that operational firemen should be regarded to be on duty during such hours as they were not allowed to leave fire stations.

15. The Administration responded that although there might be a difference in the work intensity during the 13 standby hours and the other 11 hours with arranged duties in the 24-hour shift, the Administration did take into account all the 24 hours in counting towards firemen's conditioned hours of 54 hours per week. The management of FSD would continue to explore with their staff feasible ways to gradually reduce the conditioned hours of work of operational firemen under the three pre-requisites.

Panel on Security

16. When the Panel on Security discussed the issues relating to procurement of fire services equipment and apparatus on 4 May 2010 and 6 July 2010, it received views from the staff associations of FSD. During the discussions, members generally shared the views of the deputations regarding the need to increase FSD's manpower. Some members considered that the conditioned hours of work of operational firemen should be reduced from 54 to 48 hours per week and the three pre-requisites for reducing the conditioned hours of work should be abolished.

17. Some members enquired about the number of additional firemen needed if their conditioned hours of work were to be reduced to 48 hours per week. The Administration advised that, as a rough estimate, about 800 firemen were needed if the conditioned hours of work of firemen were to be reduced to 48 hours per week.

Recent developments

18. According to the press release issued by FSD on 13 September 2012, FSD issued questionnaires to staff in the Fire Stream in August 2012 to gauge their views on the proposal for reducing their conditioned working hours to 51 hours per week. The survey showed that over 50% of the Fire Stream members were supportive of the new proposal. FSD will continue to listen to the views of the staff side and explore the possibilities for fine-tuning the new proposal, having regard to the three pre-requisites. A copy of the press release is in **Appendix II**.

19. The Panel on Public Service will meet with the Administration and relevant staff associations on 19 November 2012 to discuss the conditioned hours of work of the operational staff in the Fire Stream of FSD.

20. A list of relevant papers is in **Appendix III**.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
14 November 2012

**Changes in Conditioned Hours of Work and Shift Patterns of
Operational Firemen**

Year	Conditioned hours of work per week	Shift pattern
Before 1965	84 hours gross	Information not available
1965	72 hours gross	"24 hours on, 24 hours off"
1980	60 hours gross	"24 hours on, 24 hours off"
1990	54 hours gross	"12 hours on, 12 hours off" (from August 1990 to March 1992) "24 hours on, 48 hours off"

Appendix II

Meeting to discuss weekly conditioned working hours of Fire Stream members

The Security Bureau, the Civil Service Bureau, the Fire Services Department (FSD) and the Hong Kong Fire Services Department Staffs General Association (SGA) met today (September 13) to discuss the proposal on reduction of conditioned working hours of Fire Stream members.

The FSD issued questionnaires to 6,335 Fire Stream members in August this year to gauge their views on the proposal for reducing their conditioned working hours to 51 hours per week (the "new 51 Proposal"). The survey covered all the staff affected and recorded a response rate of about 91.4 per cent. The survey showed that over half of the Fire Stream members were supportive of the new proposal. The number of those supporting the proposal as compared to those not supportive was close to a 2-to-1 ratio.

The Administration reiterated at the meeting that the Government is open to proposals for reduction of conditioned hours of work that satisfy the three principles of "cost neutral", "no additional manpower" and "maintaining the same level of service to the public", provided that they are supported by reasonable grounds and justifications.

At the meeting, the FSD said that the department will continue to listen to the views of the staff side, including the SGA, and will continue to explore the possibilities for fine-tuning the "new 51 Proposal", having regard to the three principles. Upon consolidating views from various parties, the FSD will submit a detailed proposal to the policy bureaux and will discuss with the bureaux on the implementation timetable of the trial scheme and other details.

The Government spokesperson said the Administration adopts an open attitude and maintains communication with various staff unions, and hopes that positive progress can be made through discussions. The Administration also hopes that the SGA will stay calm and rational and ensure that any actions taken by the association would not affect the service to the public.

Ends/Thursday, September 13, 2012

Issued at HKT 20:14

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**Conditioned hours of work of the operational staff in the Fire Stream of
the Fire Services Department**

List of relevant papers

Date	Meeting/Event	Relevant Link
4 May 2010	Panel on Security	Minutes of the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)1946/09-10) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/se/minutes/se20100504.pdf
6 July 2010	Panel on Security	Minutes of the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)2252/09-10) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/se/minutes/se20100706.pdf
15 November 2010	Panel on Public Service	Minutes of the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(1)953/10-11) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ps/minutes/ps20101115.pdf
16 January 2012	Panel on Public Service	Administration's papers on conditioned hours of work of the civil service – disciplined services (LC Paper No. CB(1)2978/10-11(02)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ps/papers/ps1115cb1-2978-2-e.pdf Administration's papers on conditioned hours of work of the civil service (LC Paper No. CB(1)788/11-12(03)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/ps/papers/ps0116cb1-788-3-e.pdf Minutes of the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(1)1637/11-12) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/ps/minutes/ps20120116.pdf

Date	Meeting/Event	Relevant Link
21 May 2012	Panel on Public Service	<p>Administration's papers on conditioned hours of work of the civil service (LC Paper No. CB(1)1819/11-12(05)) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/ps/papers/ps0521cb1-1819-5-e.pdf</p> <p>Minutes of the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(1)2576/11-12) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr11-12/english/panels/ps/minutes/ps20120521.pdf</p>