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25 July 2014

Clerk to Panel on Public Service
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central
Hong Kong
(Attn: Ms Shirley CHAN)

Dear Ms CHAN,

At the Panel meeting on 20 January 2014, the Civil Service Bureau was requested to follow up the concerns raised by the Ambulance Stream staff with the Security Bureau (SB) and the Fire Services Department (FSD) and report to the Panel thereon. Having looked into the matters with the SB and FSD, we now set out the details in the ensuing paragraphs for Members' reference.

Meal Break Arrangements

The Hong Kong Fire Services Department Ambulancemen's Union ("HKFSDAU") has repeatedly raised concern about the meal break arrangements of the frontline staff. The Administration would like to reiterate that as in the cases of many other disciplined services staff, the meal breaks of frontline ambulancemen may be interrupted because of the need to discharge emergency duties. While the department has to ensure the provision of emergency ambulance services to the public, it also has to provide reasonable meal break arrangements for its frontline staff. To this end, the FSD has all long been taking measures to strike a balance between the two.

The FSD has been paying close attention to the meal break arrangements for frontline ambulancemen. According to the internal orders of the FSD, frontline day-shift ambulancemen in general may have lunches any time between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. or 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. With the implementation of a series of measures in recent years, there has been improvement in the meal break arrangements for frontline ambulancemen, such that the department can enable the great majority of the frontline ambulancemen to have a meal break of at least 30 minutes in every shift on the premise that services to the public are not affected.

As a whole, the percentage of day-shift ambulancemen having a continuous meal break of at least 30 minutes in the above-mentioned designated period (including those who had a continuous 30-minute meal break for their first meal and those who had their first meal interrupted but subsequently had another continuous 30-minute meal break¹) had increased from 76.3% in 2009 to 85.1% in 2013. The percentage of ambulancemen having a compensatory meal break after the designated period had correspondingly dropped from 19.7% in 2009 to 9.5% in 2013².

To further improve the meal break arrangements for the ambulancemen, the FSD has launched a six-month trial scheme commencing 1 July 2014 to increase the quota of compensatory meal breaks for day-shift ambulancemen and allow for a lower dispatch priority for those who are not allocated with a compensatory meal break quota. In addition, the FSD is using a new computer system to collect detailed data on the actual duration of meal breaks taken by individual ambulance crews in the designated period, with a view to achieving more effective deployment of manpower and further enhancing the meal break arrangements.

¹ As the FSD has been focusing more on examining the compensatory meal break mechanism and analysing the data for enhancing the relevant arrangements, it has not kept separate statistics on ambulancemen “who had a continuous 30-minute meal break for their first meal” and those “who had their first meal interrupted but subsequently had a continuous 30-minute meal break”. In 2013, the percentage of night-shift ambulancemen who had a continuous meal break of at least 30 minutes in the designated period was 95.4%, which was higher than that of their day-shift counterparts. The FSD does not keep information on the meal breaks taken by night-shift ambulancemen in 2009.

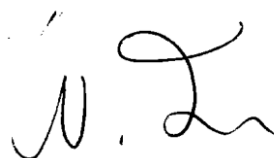
² A small number of ambulancemen who could not have a continuous 30-minute meal break voluntarily chose not to take a compensatory meal break. The relevant percentages for day-shift ambulancemen were 4.0% and 5.4% in 2009 and 2013 respectively.

Manpower Situation

The FSD has been closely monitoring the changes in the demand for emergency ambulance services and the manpower situation of the Ambulance Stream. From 2008 to 2013, 373 posts had been added to the establishment of the Ambulanceman grade, representing an increase of about 16%. The number of ambulance calls had increased by some 12% within these five years. The average number of ambulance calls handled by each ambulance had dropped from 2 490 in 2008 to 2 227 in 2013, representing a decrease of approximately 11%. The response time performance had also improved from 92.2% in 2008 to 94.4% in 2013. In 2014-15, the FSD will create 61 posts in the Ambulanceman grade.

To provide better support for frontline ambulancemen, the FSD established the Special Support Unit (SSU) in early April this year, with 24 ambulance staff members deployed at Kowloon East and New Territories South to enhance the efficiency and capability of the emergency ambulance services and to cope with the demand for ambulance service arising from festive occasions and major incidents. Its establishment also helps relieve the workload of other ambulance units. The FSD will review the operational efficiency and manpower requirement of the SSU at an appropriate time.

Yours sincerely,



(Miss Winnie TSE)

for Secretary for the Civil Service

c.c. Secretary for Security (Attn : Miss Bella MUI)
Director of Fire Services (Attn : Ms Carey YEUNG)