

**For discussion on
15 December 2014**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE

Review on Conditioned Hours of Work for Model Scale 1 Grades

PURPOSE

This paper updates Members on the progress of the review on the conditioned hours of work for Model Scale 1 (MOD 1) Grades (“the review”).

BACKGROUND

2. 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. As the stipulated conditioned hours of work has been taken into account in determining the overall remuneration package offered to different civil service grades, a reduction in the conditioned hours of work of a particular grade without any corresponding change to its pay is an improvement to the pay and conditions of service of that grade.

3. Hence, as we explained to Members at the meeting on 17 March 2014, it is essential for the Administration to uphold its established policy that a proposal to reduce the conditioned hours of work of a particular civil service grade would only be considered if it complies with the three prerequisites of cost-neutrality, no additional manpower, and maintaining the same level of service to the public. For parity consideration and proper management of the civil service, the conditioned hours of work for all members of the same grade/rank should be the same.

THE REVIEW

4. In response to the call of the MOD 1 staff for the adoption of 44 or 45 gross conditioned hours of work per week, the Administration had embarked on a review in June 2013 to assess whether it would be feasible to reduce the conditioned hours of work of the MOD 1 grades to 45 hours gross per week. For the rationale explained earlier in this paper, the feasibility assessment was subject to the full compliance with the three prerequisites and the “same grade, same conditioned hours of work” principle which should also apply to all MOD 1 civil servants working in the Hospital Authority. The review had covered 11 MOD 1 grades, namely Barber, Car Park Attendant II, Explosives Depot Attendant, Ganger, Gardener, Property Attendant, Supplies Attendant, Ward Attendant, Workman I (WM I), Workman II (WM II) and Workshop Attendant, involving around 7 450 MOD 1 staff spreading over 63 Bureaux / Departments (B/Ds) as at 30 June 2013.

First stage of the review

5. Besides studying the returns of B/Ds, we had arranged meetings with individual B/Ds in late 2013 with a view to exploring reduction proposals for some MOD 1 grades with a smaller establishment, including Property Attendant, Ward Attendant, Car Park Attendant II and Workshop Attendant. Through in-depth discussions, we noted that there were operational difficulties for B/Ds to formulate reduction proposals without compromising the three prerequisites.

6. Members were briefed on the progress of the review at the meeting on 17 March 2014. As detailed in the discussion paper provided by the Administration (LC Paper No. CB(4)462/13-14(03)), amongst the some 7 450 MOD 1 staff, it was considered after the first stage of the review that the conditioned hours of work of around 1 500 of them could be reduced to 45 hours gross per week without compromising the three prerequisites in theory. However, to uphold the “same grade, same conditioned hours of work” principle, only four MOD 1 grades, namely Barber, Explosives Depot Attendant, Gardener and Supplies Attendant, involving a total of 40 staff were considered feasible to reduce their conditioned hours of work to 45 hours gross per week at that juncture. Taking a grade as the basis, the remaining seven grades involving around 7 410 staff, namely Car Park Attendant II, Ganger, Property Attendant, Ward Attendant, WM I, WM II and Workshop Attendant, could not yet reduce their conditioned hours of work. At Members’ request, the Administration provided a breakdown of the initial stage findings of the review vide LC Paper No. CB(4)1056/13-14(01) in September 2014, which listed out the number of staff and the departments involved in the seven grades.

Second stage of the review

7. While further improvement of the situation did not appear to be optimistic, we adopted a different approach in the second stage of the review in an attempt to make a breakthrough through the concerted efforts of parties concerned. In the second stage of the review, the Administration had set up tripartite meetings to provide a platform for the departmental management and the staff representatives of the Model Scale 1 Staff Consultative Council (MOD 1 Council) to exchange views directly on reduction proposals. Considering that the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) had respectively employed the largest number of staff of WM II and WM I, they were invited to participate in the tripartite meetings. Three rounds of tripartite meetings held with MOD 1 Council representatives and FEHD had taken place between May 2014 and October 2014, and similarly another three rounds of meetings with LCSD were held. Discussions were focused on around 2 500 staff working in the hawker control and cleansing work streams of FEHD and the leisure services offices of LCSD in the Yau Tsim Mong and Sha Tin Districts, all of whom belong to WM I, WM II and Ganger grades. In the process, MOD 1 Council representatives reflected their views and suggestions on reduction proposals from their hands-on experience as frontline staff. Taking into consideration those views, the departmental management had critically reviewed the situation for the some 2 500 staff, including their workload and work patterns.

8. According to FEHD and LCSD, the stringent manpower situation and the ever-growing public expectations of public services continue to be the major hurdles to reduce the conditioned hours of work of MOD 1 staff in the work streams and offices concerned without compromising the three prerequisites. Also, there is a need to uphold the “same grade, same conditioned hours of work” principle. Therefore, reduction of conditioned hours of work remains not feasible for the three MOD 1 grades concerned in those work streams and offices of the two departments.

9. While we have yet to attain significant achievements through the tripartite meetings, we find the tripartite platform a constructive communication channel between the Staff Side and the departmental management to enhance mutual understanding and to continue to exchange views on reduction proposals.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S VIEWS

10. Upon completion of two stages of the review, we have revisited our findings and concluded that our previous analysis on the main reasons leading to the limited number of MOD 1 staff being considered as feasible to reduce their conditioned hours of work as set out in LC Paper No. CB(4)462/13-14(03) remains valid. At the current moment, only a small number of MOD 1 staff could have their conditioned hours of work reduced to 45 hours gross per week under the established prerequisites and principle. To ensure prudent use of public funds and the upkeep of the level of service to the public, as well as proper management of the civil service on parity grounds, the Administration finds it imperative to scrupulously abide by the three prerequisites and the "same grade, same conditioned hours of work" principle. A general reduction to all MOD 1 grades would entail a significant amount of additional public resources, which would have to be fully justified in view of other pressing demands for such resources.

NEXT STEPS

11. Concerning the reduction proposals for the Barber, Explosives Depot Attendant, Gardener and Supplies Attendant grades¹, we have, in accordance with the established practice, liaised with the relevant departments on conducting a trial scheme to test the viability of the proposals before implementing the reduction on a permanent basis. As confirmed with all participating departments, they are ready to implement the one-year trial scheme commencing 1 January 2015. Subject to the review outcome of the trial scheme, the MOD 1 staff concerned may have their conditioned hours of work reduced in early 2016.

12. All along, we have kept the Staff Side updated on the progress of the review through the MOD 1 Council. We will continue to maintain dialogue with the Staff Side through this established channel. Separately, we will encourage the departmental management to continue monitoring the work patterns of MOD1 staff having regard to the changing operational circumstances, and exploring to improve their work arrangements wherever feasible. On the other hand, we encourage the MOD 1 staff to proactively discuss with their departmental management on any work improvement they consider viable from the perspective of their frontline experience.

¹ According to the updated information provided by the relevant departments, there will be two MOD 1 grades, namely Explosives Depot Attendant and Supplies Attendant, to conduct the trial as the Barber under the Department of Health and the Gardener under the Fire Services Department had already retired in November 2013 and July 2014 respectively. The number of MOD 1 staff involved in the trial will reduce to 39 as a result of filling the existing vacancies in individual departments offset by deletion of posts upon retirement of incumbent staff.

13. Members are invited to note the update of the review as set out in this paper.

Civil Service Bureau
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