

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)375/07-08

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/PS/1

Panel on Public Service

**Minutes of meeting held on
Monday, 19 November 2007, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Members present : Hon Howard YOUNG, SBS, JP (Chairman)
Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon Margaret NG
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, GBS, JP
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH
Hon KWONG Chi-kin

Member absent : Hon James TO Kun-sun

Public officers attending : Miss Denise YUE, GBS, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Andrew H Y WONG, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr K S SO, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 2

Clerk in attendance : Mr Andy LAU
Chief Council Secretary (1)2

Staff in attendance : Mr Noel SUNG
Senior Council Secretary (1)4

Miss Winnie CHENG
Legislative Assistant (1)5

Action

I Confirmation of minutes of meeting

(LC Paper No. CB(1)114/07-08 -- Minutes of meeting on 11 October 2007; and
LC Paper No. CB(1)212/07-08 -- Minutes of meeting on 15 October 2007)

The minutes of the meetings held on 11 and 15 October 2007 were confirmed.

II Information papers issued since the meeting on 25 June 2007

(LC Paper No. CB(1)2554/06-07(01) and LC Paper No. CB(1)2297/06-07(01) -- Administration's papers on declaration of interests and investments for the civil service;

LC Papers Nos. CB(1)2407/06-07(01) and (02) -- Submission on the morale of the civil service from Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions Public Services Committee and the Administration's response; and

LC Paper No. CB(1)2452/06-07(01) -- The Eighteenth Report on the Work of the Advisory Committee on Post-service Employment of Civil Servants)

2. Members noted the information papers issued since the meeting on 25 June 2007.

III Items for discussion at the next meeting scheduled for 17 December 2007

(LC Paper No. CB(1)206/07-08(01) -- List of outstanding items for discussion; and
LC Paper No. CB(1)206/07-08(02) -- List of follow-up actions)

3. Members agreed that the following items proposed by the Administration should be discussed at the next meeting scheduled for 17 December 2007 –

Action

- (a) Employment of non-civil service contract staff; and
- (b) Update on resumption of open recruitment for selected grades included in the Second Voluntary Retirement Scheme.

IV Grade structure reviews

(LC Paper No. CB(1)206/07-08(03) -- Information paper provided by the Administration)

Briefing by the Administration

- 4. The Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS) briefed the meeting on the proposed grade structure reviews by highlighting the salient points in the paper.

Discussion

5. Ms Margaret NG was concerned about the criteria for selection of non-directorate civilian grades for review. She opined that recruitment and retention difficulties should not be the only criteria for assessing the need for a review of a particular grade as the requirements of the civil service posts were different to those of similar jobs in the private sector, and in the past few years the remuneration for particular posts was led by the market. She asked whether the Government had conducted any review of the job requirements of the civil service posts in the past years in order to keep abreast of changing needs and situations.

6. SCS responded that the Administration's plan was to conduct grade structure reviews mainly on those non-directorate civilian grades which had encountered serious recruitment and retention difficulties in the past few years. Heads of grades and departments (HoDs) had been requested to provide relevant information and the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service (Standing Commission) would be invited to consider reviews on such grades. SCS pointed out that the grade structure reviews for such grades were necessary in order to review the job requirements of the grades concerned and the market situation. The civil service pay policy was to offer sufficient remuneration and promotion opportunities to attract, retain and motivate staff of a suitable calibre to provide the public with an efficient and effective service. Whether the terms and conditions of employment for particular civil service posts could attract appointees of the right calibre would be reflected in the recruitment and retention situation. SCS said that Civil Service Bureau (CSB) had introduced a number of reforms since 1999 resulting in improvements to the management of the civil service. She undertook to provide the relevant information to the Panel.

Action

7. The Deputy Chairman was concerned that if HoDs were given the discretion to recommend grades for review, the objectivity in selection of grades for review might be compromised. She pointed out that staff of some civil service grades were concerned that since similar jobs could not be found in the private sector for comparison with their grades during the 2006 Pay Level Survey (PLS), and the HoDs might not recommend their grades for the grade structure review, the structure of their grades might not reflect the up-to-date situation.

8. SCS responded that the Standing Commission, being an independent body, could on its own volition conduct a review on the structure of any civil service grade. In fact the recommendations arising from the 2006 PLS and the Starting Salaries Survey (SSS) were submitted to the Standing Commission for advice before implementation. In view of the fact the disciplined services grades and the directorate grades were not covered in the 2006 PLS because of the lack of market comparators for the former, and the need to adopt a different survey methodology for the latter, the Administration had agreed to conduct grade structure reviews for the disciplined services grades and the directorate grades after the PLS. As regards the few non-directorate civilian grades which had not been covered in the last PLS, the Standing Commission and the Consultative Group on Civil Service Pay Adjustment Mechanism, which consisted of representatives of the staff sides, had agreed that the results of the 2006 PLS should be applied to these grades using the existing set of internal relativity.

9. Mr KWONG Chi-kin pointed out that some civil servants were concerned about the implications of the grade structure reviews as they feared that the reviews might result in deletion of certain grades, or certain ranks in a grade affecting the promotion opportunities of the officers concerned. As a result of Government's outsourcing policy, the supervisory responsibilities of some middle management grades had been removed, and the officers concerned were worried that the grade structure review might lead to deletion of their grades or ranks. Mr KWONG opined that the grade structure review should be conducted with full consultation with the staff concerned, and taking into consideration staff morale and the stability of the civil service.

10. SCS responded that the grade structure review would not cover those non-directorate civilian grades which did not encounter any recruitment or retention difficulty. The relevant advisory committees would be invited to conduct the grade structure reviews, and the relevant staff associations would be consulted. It was undesirable and inappropriate to pre-empt the outcome of the grade structure reviews. In fact, the review on the disciplined services grades was being conducted with the support of the staff sides as the 2006 PLS had not covered the relevant disciplined services grades.

11. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan asked, with reference to the factors for consideration listed in paragraph 7 of the paper, whether the 1988 review for disciplined services grades was also conducted based on similar considerations. Referring to paragraph 9 of the paper, Mr LEE queried whether the review was planned for an upward pay adjustment for

Action

directorate officers. Mr LEE requested that the Administration should provide information regarding the non-directorate civilian grades selected for review and the justifications for such selections.

12. SCS confirmed that the considerations mentioned in paragraph 7 of the paper had been used in the 1988 review for disciplined services grades. She pointed out that during the 2006 PLS, the need for a review of the grade structure for directorate officers had been identified and this was spelt out in the public consultation paper on the PLS in 2004. The main reason was that the survey methodology used in the 2006 PLS, which emphasized on "broad comparability" rather than specific responsibilities of the jobs, was not suitable for application to the directorate grades. While the 2006 PLS had not covered the directorate grades, it had also not covered the disciplined services grades as comparable jobs could not be found in the private sector. To ensure the independence and credibility of the grade structure reviews, the relevant civil service advisory committees had been invited to conduct the reviews. With regard to the selection of non-directorate civilian grades for review, HoDs were invited to provide information on those grades which had encountered recruitment and retention difficulties in the past few years. In response to members' request, SCS said that a paper on the details of the non-directorate civilian grades selected for review and the reasons for the selection would be provided to the Panel in January 2008.

Admin

13. Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong opined that as the directorate grades posts were mainly filled by internal promotions, and currently there were no recruitment and retention difficulties, it appeared that the existing arrangements had operated well and a grade structure review for the directorate grades was not necessary. Furthermore, it might not be feasible to compare the civil service directorate grades with job positions in the private sector. Since the situation of the directorate grades had been stable, the public would doubt the purpose of the proposed grade structure review as to whether its aim was to justify an upward pay adjustment for directorate officers whose terms and conditions of employment were, in the eyes of the public, already not bad. Mr CHEUNG was of the view that given the existing stable situation of the directorate grades, the Administration needed to put forward stronger justifications to support its view that a review of the directorate grades structure was required.

14. SCS responded that the grade structure reviews would not be carried out simply for the sake of review, and stability was not the only consideration for conducting the grade structure reviews. In fact, the Government's policy had been to review regularly the grade structure and the terms and conditions of employment of the civil service. As part of this policy, a PLS for the civil service would be conducted every six years to compare the salaries of a wide range of civil service jobs with those in the private sector. In the past, PLS had not been conducted on a regular basis. This was highly undesirable. In addition to PLS, the Government would also conduct a Starting Salaries Survey at three-yearly intervals, and a Pay Trend Survey (PTS) on a yearly basis. As all the three surveys did not cover the directorate grades, the grade structure and the terms and conditions of service for directorate officers might fail to keep abreast of the market situation, and any sudden and massive adjustments concerning the employment terms of

Action

directorate officers might not be in the best interest of the civil service and the community as a whole. To ensure the stability of the civil service and in view of the fact that the last comprehensive grade structure review for the directorate grades was conducted in 1989, it was considered necessary to conduct another grade structure review for the directorate grades. In fact, the review had been mentioned in the PLS public consultation paper in 2004 as the PLS would not cover the directorate and disciplined services grades. SCS reiterated that the grade structure review would be undertaken by the relevant civil service advisory committees, and the outcome of the reviews could not be predicted.

15. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan opined that it was doubtful whether it was appropriate to compare the civil service directorate posts with the supervisory or managerial posts in the private sector as it would be a case of comparing an apple and an orange. Officers joining the civil service were able to pursue their career in a relatively stable environment which could not be found in the private sector as employees in private companies, even if they occupied a high position and earned a relatively high remuneration, might be replaced at any time. He was of the view that the directorate grade structure review would invariably lead to an upward pay adjustment for directorate officers as currently private companies were offering high remuneration for their senior officers. Mr LEE pointed out that the senior employees in the private sector would suffer a drastic drop in salaries if there was a downturn in the economic situation whereas senior officers in the civil service would not face such a risk. In view of the relatively stable situation of the civil service directorate grades, he therefore doubted the need for a grade structure review.

16. SCS responded that a grade structure review for the directorate grades had previously been conducted in 1989, and a comparison between pay levels in the civil service and the private sector had proved to be feasible in the 2006 PLS when all the factors mentioned by Mr LEE had been taken into consideration. SCS pointed out that the methodology of the proposed grade structure review would be decided by the relevant independent civil service advisory committees and such a review would not necessarily lead to an upward pay adjustment, e.g. after the 2006 PLS, the civil service pay structure remained unchanged in light of the PLS results which showed that there was a less than 5% deviation in the salaries of the non-directorate civilian grades with the market pay of comparable work in the private sector.

17. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan asked whether there was any difference regarding the basic principles and factors for consideration between the review in 1989 for directorate grades and the current exercise.

18. SCS responded that the basic principles and considerations for the 1989 and current reviews remained more or less the same, namely the comparison of accountability and job responsibilities of the civil service and private sector posts. The relevant independent civil service advisory committees which would conduct the reviews would certainly take into account factors like the stability of the civil service and staff morale in the reviews.

Action

19. The Chairman shared members' view that the grade structure reviews should not be carried out only for the sake of review, and should not be seen as a means to make way for upward pay adjustments. He pointed out that the responsibilities of senior officers in the private sector covered the generation of profits for the company concerned whereas senior officers in the civil service were not tasked with such a responsibility. He opined that such a factor should be taken into consideration in the grade structure reviews.

V Implementation of five-day week in the Government

(LC Paper No. CB(1)206/07-08(04) -- Information paper provided by the Administration; and

LC Paper No. CB(1)216/07-08 -- Paper on implementation of five-day week in the civil service prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (Background Brief))

(The Chairman left at this point and the Deputy Chairman took over the chair at 11:35 am.)

Briefing by the Administration

20. SCS apprised the meeting on the review of the implementation of the final phase of five-day week in the civil service, by highlighting the salient points in the paper.

Discussion

21. Noting that about 47 500 civil servants still had to work on a non-five-day week duty pattern, Mr WONG Kwok-hing opined that HoDs should continue to closely liaise with the staff associations with a view to enabling more civil servants to work on a five-day week basis. Mr WONG enquired whether the number of civil servants pursuing further studies outside office hours had increased after the implementation of the five-day week. Mr WONG also requested that the services of the Integrated Call Centre (ICC) (i.e. the "1823" service) should further be enhanced so as to render assistance to members of the public on Saturdays and Sundays when necessary. He asked whether there was any performance pledge set by the ICC for responding to a call within a certain time limit.

22. SCS responded that HoDs had all along worked closely with the staff sides in drawing up departmental plans to implement five-day week. She said that CSB had not compiled any statistics on the number of civil servants pursuing further studies as a result of the five-day week initiative. She suggested that CSB would provide information on the number of applications and the expenditure involved for the two

Action

Admin

civil service training sponsorship schemes before and after the implementation of the five-day week. As far as the ICC was concerned, currently it only served as the hotline for some 18 departments, and many other government departments still operated their own service hotlines. Since the ICC was operated by the Efficiency Unit (EU) under the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office, the attention of EU would be drawn to Mr WONG's concern.

23. Mr LEE Cheuk-yan was concerned that it might be due to their longer conditioned working hours that the majority of the 47 500 civil servants could not migrate to five-day week, as these officers would have to work very long hours daily if they performed duties on a five-day week basis. Taking into consideration the need to ensure occupational health and fairness for all civil servants, Mr LEE opined that the Administration should review the conditioned hours of service for the grades of staff who had to perform 51 hours of work per week, with a view to reducing the working hours to 44 hours per week. He said that such an arrangement would also help to create more job opportunities. Mr LEE was also concerned that officers working on a "five-day work, two day off" pattern might have less time to stay with their families as they had to work on weekends when their family members were on holidays.

24. SCS responded that the five-day week initiative was implemented based on the principles that there would be no additional staffing resources, no reduction in the conditioned hours of service of individual staff, no reduction in emergency services and continued provision of some essential counter services on Saturdays. The conditioned hours of service was only one of the factors, and not the only factor, which made it impracticable to allow some 47 500 civil servants to work on a five-day week basis. Apart from the laid down conditioned working hours and operational requirements, some of these civil servants could not migrate to five-day week because of occupational health considerations. SCS pointed out that the pay and conditions of service of civil servants were set based on, amongst other things, their conditioned hours of service, and any change in the number of working hours would affect pay. The terms and conditions of service and the conditioned hours of service for different grades in the civil service had been reviewed in the 2006 PLS and CSB had no intention to conduct another review in this respect. SCS stressed that HoDs had consulted and worked closely with the staff sides in their respective departments prior to and throughout the implementation of five-day week, which had been operating smoothly. SCS remarked that it could not be ruled out that some staff might hold different views about the five-day week initiative but the mainstream view of civil servants was that they welcomed the five-day week work pattern. Where practicable, HoDs would consider entertaining requests from individual staff for transferring to non-five-day week duty pattern jobs.

25. The Deputy Chairman asked whether there were any statistics on the number of civil servants who had applied and had been allowed to revert to a non-five-day week duty pattern.

26. SCS responded that the statistics requested by the Deputy Chairman had not been compiled. However, based on the feedback from HoDs, the number of requests for

Action

reversion to the non-five-day week duty pattern had been very small, and where practicable, such requests had been entertained.

27. Mr WONG Kwok-hing was concerned that the opening hours of the post offices, which varied in different districts, might cause confusion and inconvenience to the public.

28. SCS responded that the opening hours of the post offices were set to meet the particular needs of the districts concerned, and had been uploaded onto the Post Office web site for general information.

VI Any other business

29. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:05 pm.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
11 December 2007