

**Subcommittee to Study the Proposed Legislative Amendments  
Relating to the Re-organisation of the Government Secretariat**

**Improving the Political Appointment System**

**Introduction**

This note sets out the initial thinking of the Chief Executive-elect (“CE-elect”) on short term improvements to the Political Appointment System (“PAS”) and a mid term review to respond to the views of the community and Members of the Legislative Council on the PAS.

**Background**

2. In response to public aspirations, the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region introduced the PAS in 2002 to recruit people from different sectors of the community to take up the positions of Secretaries of Departments (“SoDs”) and Directors of Bureau (“DoBs”). This widened the pool of candidates for appointment as SoDs and DoBs on the one hand, and introduced the requirement for shouldering political responsibility on the other. In 2008, the political team was expanded with the creation of the positions of Under Secretaries and Political Assistants. One of the aims of introducing the PAS is to delineate the roles of politically appointed officials (“PAOs”) and civil servants, so that PAOs can focus on political work and that a professional, permanent and politically neutral civil service system can be maintained.

3. The PAOs are responsible for reaching out to the community, listening to the views of the public, and formulating timely policies having regard to the needs of the society, while civil servants should be fully engaged in analysing problems, putting forth policy proposals and implementing policies. When the Government has made policy decisions, the PAOs have to explain the policies to the community and canvass support from members of the legislature and political parties. Civil servants should render support without compromising political neutrality.

4. The PAS has been implemented for nearly 10 years, which is not a long period in Hong Kong’s constitutional development. Its effect in improving effective governance has not been entirely satisfactory. There is a need to take stock of the operational experience gained and seek improvement in a pragmatic manner.

## **Improvement Proposals**

### **(1) Facing the public**

5. In his election manifesto, Mr. C.Y. Leung has focused on “Fostering Social Cohesion, Upholding Core Values and Enhancing Legitimacy”, and put forward proposals on further developing the PAS, enhancing the legitimacy of the Government, fostering a co-operative relationship between the executive and legislature, enhancing administrative efficiency, establishing a partnership relationship with the citizens of Hong Kong and encouraging greater public participation<sup>1</sup>. Mr. Leung respects community wisdom and attaches great importance to communicating with the citizens. During the election campaign, Mr. Leung invited experts to help draft his manifesto. After being elected, he maintains frequent contacts with different strata and sectors of the community as well as local personalities, putting in practice his vision of governance, which espouses openness and respect for public opinion and sentiments.

6. He has explicitly asked all SoDs and DoBs to reach out to the community for gauging public sentiments and collecting public opinions, as well as to communicate with political parties and members of the legislature for fostering mutual trust and enhancing legitimacy of the Government. Mr. Leung has undertaken to conduct visits to 18 districts at least once every year. He has also asked all SoDs and DoBs to follow suit so as to draw the Government closer to the general public not only psychologically and geographically, but also in terms of policy distance.

7. Mr. Leung attaches great importance to the political nature of the duties of the PAOs. The vision and work of the PAOs should be disseminated through the mass media to the public. They should accept public monitoring and respond to public views and suggestions in a timely and appropriate manner.

### **(2) Appointment by merit**

8. Mr. C.Y. Leung takes the selection of PAOs seriously, specifying vision, commitment, ability and political capability as the basic selection criteria. To cast the net wide in enlisting the service of competent people, he has met with a large number of potential candidates for the positions of SoDs and DoBs, and is

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<sup>1</sup> Page 73 of the Manifesto for the Chief Executive Election (“One Heart, One Vision”) of Mr C.Y. Leung.

inviting talents openly to come forth for appointment as Under Secretaries and Political Assistants. He insists on making appointments on the basis of merits of candidates and would rather leave the posts unfilled if there are no suitable candidates. To avoid mismatch, and to ensure members of the political teams of various bureaux share a common agenda and complement one another in terms of background and ability, DoBs will be involved in the selection of their Under Secretaries and Political Assistants, and they have to be answerable for the performance of their team members. Mr. Leung has also engaged community leaders and human resources experts in the selection process to ensure that the process is open and fair, thus removing doubts of offering political reward.

### **(3) Encourage participation and nurture talents**

9. Expanding the pool of talents is a prerequisite for the implementation of the PAS. The new term Government will encourage capable people to participate in politics and will establish echelons, with a view to building a reserve of talents for Hong Kong.

### **(4) Enhance support**

10. The Government will provide systematic support for new PAOs to familiarise them the soonest possible with the operations of the Government, the PAO Code and the work of their bureau or department. The new team will also be given training to broaden their vision and enrich their knowledge and understanding of public governance to give full play to the intended purposes of the PAS; to establish a closer relationship between the officials and the public so as to enhance the legitimacy of the new term Government, increase administrative effectiveness and efficiency and nurture political talents. The Director of Chief Executive's Office will maintain regular contacts with the Under Secretaries and Political Assistants to have a good grasp of their work and to provide them with assistance and guidance.

### **(5) Management by objectives**

11. The new term Government will set overall and specific objectives so that both the political team and individual officials will know exactly what are expected and required of them in terms of the implementation of policy commitments.

12. The CE-elect will, upon announcement of the members of his team, discuss the above arrangements with all PAOs to foster a consensus for effective implementation.

13. The above-mentioned are measures for improving the PAS in the short term.

### **Interim Review**

14. In addition, Mr. Leung undertakes to conduct an interim review of the PAS, after gaining operational experience, to:

- (1) consolidate the experience in implementing the PAS in the past years;
- (2) study the gap between the performance of the PAS and the public's expectations;
- (3) with reference to the practice and experience of other countries and regions, set out the requirements and standards regarding the accountability of PAOs, and put in place a reward and penalty system with relevant policies and measures; and
- (4) put forward proposals to further improve the PAS, such as the pay adjustment mechanism, process of appointment, post-service employment arrangements and a "revolving door" mechanism.

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