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**The Reports of the Director of Audit on
the Results of Value for Money Audits (Report No. 64)
Chapter 2 – Operation of the Government Flying Service
Public Hearing on 9 May 2015
Opening remarks of the Secretary for Security**

Chairman,

My colleagues of the Government Flying Service (GFS) and I would like to thank the Audit Commission for conducting a comprehensive audit and making many useful observations and recommendations on the work of the GFS. The Government generally agrees with the Report's recommendations and will actively follow them up.

2. Regarding the provision of flying services, the department will strive to enhance the rates in meeting the targets in the Controlling Officer's Report and consider ways to improve the recording, compilation and disclosure of its operation data in order to make it easier for the public to understand and assess the actual performance of the department.

3. In terms of management of aircrew, the GFS will explore ways to better arrange and deploy its manpower with a view to satisfying the continuous increase in service demand more effectively within the constraint of limited resources.

4. As for the maintenance of aircraft, to ensure safety, the GFS will continue to inspect and maintain its aircraft in strict accordance with the requirements of the civil aviation legislation and professional standards. It will also review its maintenance procedures from time to time in order to maintain high availability of its fleet.

5. As regards the procurement of aircraft and spare parts, the department has already strengthened training and management, and reminded staff members to be more cautious when handling matters concerning procurement. It will also continue to closely monitor the progress of the procurement of the fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters.

6. I would also like to take this opportunity to make two observations on the Report and the work of the department:

7. Firstly, the Report mentioned a number of cases where certain services were unable to meet the target and there were insufficient members of aircrew for some shifts. These are in fact attributable to the manpower issues of the GFS.

8. The GFS is one of the departments in the Government with the least number of staff. The current civil servant establishment has 229 persons, but the actual working strength has 214 persons only. Due to manpower wastage, the current working strength of the Pilot Grade is about 16% below the establishment level of 44 persons, but they are still required to operate 11 aircraft on daily basis for providing 24-hours emergency rescue services for Hong Kong and South China waters. In the past 5 years, the flying hours of GFS's emergency call-outs have increased by 25% and the overall flying hours have increased by 18%. Coupled with the wastage of some experienced pilots, the department's operation and training capacity has been significantly constrained. To relieve the pressure of manpower shortage, the department has implemented a number of measures such as accelerating the recruitment procedures to fill up the vacancies as early as possible, etc. In future, the Security Bureau (SB) and the GFS will draw reference from the opinions of the Audit Report in making the best manpower arrangements under the existing resources and bidding additional manpower in accordance to the established mechanism, with a view to meeting the service needs and ensuring flying safety of its staff members.

9. Secondly, safety is always the most important consideration in flying services. The aircraft of the GFS must be safe, otherwise it will be extremely dangerous for its staff members who frequently carry out rescue missions over steep mountain ridges and under harsh weather conditions. It is therefore necessary for each operation of the GFS to be executed by adequately trained aircrew and properly inspected aircraft. Sometimes, these scheduled or unscheduled inspection and maintenance indeed affected the number of usable aircraft. But these tasks are necessary. Of course, pointed out in the Report, it is possible to carry out maintenance works more efficiently by strengthening the review on the maintenance plans and procedures. The department will continue to work towards this direction.

10. The GFS is a rather unique government department. It is also the only entity in the world which offers flying services covering search and rescue, law enforcement and casualty evacuation, etc. The aircrews are required to possess different techniques and maintain round-the-clock services throughout the year. The aircraft of the GFS are often required to be fitted with different equipment and are constrained by local weather situations as well as the busy traffic of the airport. For GFS, it is not easy to do its various duties well. In spite of the challenges and at times dangers, members of the GFS have always been doing their best effort in serving the public, whether it is to fly over the mountain ridges to search and rescue casualties during heavily misted days, or to pick up shipmen

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from sinking boats in stormy and wavy sea during the nights under typhoon attacks. GFS saves thousands of lives every year. The long standing contributions of the GFS should be recognised.

11. The SB and GFS very much appreciates the Report of the Audit Commission, as it provides some good opinions which could enable the department to further enhance its service and management quality, as well as provide better services to the public. The GFS will continue to follow up on the various recommendations of the Audit Report seriously and professionally.

12. My colleagues and I will now gladly listen to the opinions of and take questions from Members. Thank you, Chairman.