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10 May 2017

Ms Joanne Mak
Clerk to Panel on Constitutional Affairs
Legislative Council Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Ms Mak,

Letter from Hon Jeremy TAM Man-ho

I refer to your letter dated 26 April 2017 attaching the letter of 20 April 2017 from Hon Jeremy TAM Man-ho to the Chairman of the Panel on Constitutional Affairs.

The policy for civil servants to claim and how to use the flight awards arising from duty visits is under the purview of the Civil Service Bureau. As far as officials appointed under the accountability system are concerned, as stated in the reply by the Secretary for Civil Service to the Legislative Council of 13 January 2010, they are subject to similar requirement as applicable to civil servants for matters related to claiming of flight awards arising from duty travel (if claimed) and how such awards should be used. The mileage of politically appointed officials arising from duty visits outside Hong Kong will be dealt with in strict accordance with the established government rules. Enclosed please find the aforementioned reply for reference.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Phyllis Chan'.

(Phyllis Chan)

for Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs

Press Releases

LCQ10: Disposal of flight awards arising from duty travels

Following is a question by the Hon Paul Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Miss Denise Yue, in the Legislative Council today (January 13):

Question:

At present, government officials, Executive Council Members, Legislative Council Members, District Council members, as well as employees of public organisations and quasi-government organisations may normally earn mileage when buying air tickets for overseas official visits, and such mileage can be used for the purpose of redeeming air tickets in the future. Regarding the disposal of mileage earned through buying air tickets with public money, will the Government inform this Council whether:

(a) it has any mechanism in place at present to standardise the disposal of mileage earned through buying air tickets with public money; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(b) it has assessed if such mileage should be treated as public property; if the assessment result is in the negative, of the reasons and justifications; and

(c) it has compiled statistics on the total mileage earned through buying air tickets with public money in each of the past five years, as well as the value of such mileage?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the three parts of the question are given below:

(a) Government officials include officials appointed under the accountability system and civil servants. For civil servants, air passages in connection with duty visits outside Hong Kong are arranged by the bureau or department concerned in accordance with relevant Government regulations. Under existing policy, the Administration does not oblige civil servants on duty travel to claim flight awards. If however such awards are claimed, they will be credited to the civil servant's personal mileage account and it is incumbent on the civil servant concerned to report this to his department to facilitate the use of the flight awards for subsequent duty travel. Some years ago, the Government had proposed to the airlines for setting up a government mileage account for the central administration of flight awards claimed by all civil servants undertaking duty visits. The proposal was however not accepted by the airlines due to their respective commercial considerations.

Flight awards may normally be used only within specified time frame. As most civil servants are not required to undertake duty visits outside Hong Kong on a frequent basis and the restrictions usually imposed on air tickets redeemed under flight awards scheme may not fit in with the itinerary of the relevant civil servant's subsequent duty visit, it may not be always possible for the accumulated mileage to be utilised for duty

travel before expiry. Where individual civil servant's flight awards are not expected to be used for duty travel before their expiry, the departmental management may at its discretion permit the officer concerned to use such awards for private purposes.

Officials appointed under the accountability system are subject to similar requirement as applicable to civil servants for matters related to claiming of flight awards arising from duty travel (if claimed) and how such awards should be used.

Non-official Members of the Executive Council travel at their own expenses in undertaking duty visits outside Hong Kong, without involving the use of government funds.

The arrangements of duty visits for Legislative Council Members outside Hong Kong and the claim of flight awards fall within the Legislative Council's internal administration, and hence are regulated and handled by the Council on its own.

As regards District Councils, currently the Government does not fund the purchase of air tickets for District Council Members to conduct duty visits outside Hong Kong in general. In other words, District Council Members travel at their own expenses when undertaking such visits and the flight awards so earned would be used by Members for their private purposes.

As regards employees of government-funded organisations undertaking duty visits outside Hong Kong, these organisations are independent of the Government and have the autonomy to manage their own affairs. Drawing up the relevant arrangements are matters of individual organisation's day-to-day operation. It is up to these organisations to determine their internal arrangements regarding the disposal of flight awards claimed by their employees.

(b) Duty passages for government officials are paid from government funds. Under the prevailing mechanism, flight awards so claimed must first be used for duty travel, on the notion that these awards are "public property". Taking into account the considerations that flight awards are credited to an individual's mileage account for use within a specified period, the Government would only permit individual official to utilise such awards for private purposes under the special circumstances where such awards cannot be used for duty travel. The above arrangement seeks to strike a reasonable balance between ensuring proper use of government funds and allowing civil servants to enjoy commercial offers normally available to non-government employees.

(c) As mentioned in my reply in part (a) above, the Administration does not oblige civil servants on duty travel to claim flight awards. The Civil Service Bureau does not centrally keep information on the claiming of flight awards by civil servants in various bureaux/departments arising from their duty visits.

Ends/Wednesday, January 13, 2010
Issued at HKT 15:16

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