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**Panel on Public Service**

**Meeting on 22 December 2017**

**Updated background brief on the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award  
and other commendation schemes for civil servants**

**Purpose**

This paper provides background information on the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme ("CSOSAS") and other commendation schemes for civil servants, and summarizes the major views and concerns on the subject expressed by members of the Panel on Public Service ("the Panel") during previous discussions.

**Background**

2. According to the Administration, there are several commendation schemes applicable to civil servants, including:

- (a) CSOSAS;
- (b) Honours and Awards System of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ("HKSAR");
- (c) Commendation Letter Scheme;
- (d) Secretary for the Civil Service ("SCS")'s Commendation Award Scheme; and
- (e) Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme ("the LMSTA Scheme").

Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme

3. The Civil Service Bureau ("CSB") has been organizing CSOSAS

on a biennial basis since 1999.<sup>1</sup> The objectives of CSOSAS are to recognize the efforts of bureaux/departments ("B/Ds") and teams which provide excellent service, to promote a customer-focused culture in the civil service, to share experience with B/Ds and teams for continuous improvement and innovation in the delivery of public services. Awards under CSOSAS are presented at three levels, namely:

- the Inter-departmental Partnership Award for B/Ds that have succeeded in achieving notable service enhancement through collaboration;
- the Departmental Awards, comprising the Departmental Service Enhancement Award (further divided into Large Department and Small Department categories) and the Best Public Image Award; and
- the Team Awards, comprising the Specialized Service Award, the Internal Service Award, the General Public Service Award, the Regulatory/Enforcement Service Award and the Crisis/Incident Support Service Award.

4. There were Gold, Silver and Bronze prizes, and Meritorious Awards for each award category (except the Best Public Image Award which only had Gold, Silver and Bronze prizes).

5. In addition, each team award had a Special Citation for Innovation and Special Citation for Responsiveness to Customer Needs (the latter was newly introduced for the 2015 Scheme). A Special Citation for Integrity Management was also given out under the General Public Service Award and the Regulatory/Enforcement Service Award to recognize the best integrity management practices in the two team awards.

6. According to CSB, a two-stage adjudication process was adopted in the awarding of the inter-departmental Partnership Award, the Departmental Service Enhancement Award and the team awards. The boards of examiners in the first stage comprised private sector practitioners and experts from the relevant fields. Legislative Council ("LegCo") Members and District Councils ("DCs") members, representatives from professional organizations, staff side members of the Central Consultative Councils and senior directorate officers from CSB served on the final adjudication panels. For the Best Public Image Award, a sample of randomly selected members of the public and all members

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<sup>1</sup> CSB has invited the Hong Kong Management Association to co-organize CSOSAS since 2007 to enhance the interaction between the public and private sectors.

of LegCo and DCs were invited to vote in an anonymous survey<sup>2</sup> to select three departments with the best public image.

7. To give recognition to the winning B/Ds and teams and to inform the public of these achievements, a prize presentation ceremony was held. A TV documentary programme was produced and broadcasted in local TV stations, and the event as well as the award winning services were publicized in the media. A video series capturing the lesser-known, behind-the-scene efforts and commitment of civil servants in serving the public was also produced for broadcasting in government venues, non-government organizations of community groups, government web portals and social media channels such as YouTube. A School Promotion Programme covering school talks or visits to government facilities for students to understand more about the services provided by the Government had also been launched by CSB.

8. To inspire other B/Ds and civil servants to emulate good practices of award-winners, seminars were held for the winners to share with colleagues their experience in providing quality services to the public. In addition, the factors contributing to the success of the winners were developed into training and self-learning materials for the Civil Service Training and Development Institute and uploaded onto the Cyber Learning Centre Plus.

9. The Administration conducted regular reviews on CSOSAS to enhance the scheme. The Administration received suggestion in 2009 to record the awards in the personal files of the awardees of the relevant departments/teams as an encouragement, and the new measure was implemented in 2011 after review. In 2015, a survey by questionnaire to all participating B/Ds was conducted as part of a review exercise. According to CSB, the respondents generally considered that CSOSAS had helped raise staff morale, enhanced team spirit, gained public recognition for their achievements and encouraged improvements in the delivery of public services.

#### Honours and Awards System of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

10. The Honours and Awards System of HKSAR is a community-wide honours recognition system and is not limited to civil servants only. Each year, members of the public and public officers are nominated for various honours or awards having regard to their contribution to Hong Kong and their public and community service. Nominations for the selection of awardees of honours and awards for civil servants were usually made by B/Ds. The recipients of the different types of awards are decided by the Chief Executive on the recommendation of an Honours Committee comprising government officials and eminent community leaders. There was no ceiling on the number of awards

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<sup>2</sup> The survey was administered by Consumer Search Hong Kong Limited.

to be given out under this system, but the nominees' performance must reach a high standard in order to be qualified for the awards. In 2016, 131 civil servants received awards under this system while 45 of them received the Chief Executive's Commendation for Government/Public Service and 50 of them received various Disciplined Services Awards.

### Commendation Letter Scheme

11. The Commendation Letter Scheme is a civil service-specific recognition scheme administered at the bureau/departmental level. Under the Scheme, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments may issue commendation letters to civil servants who have provided consistently outstanding service for at least three consecutive years; or have made significant contribution towards enhancing the efficiency or the image of their B/Ds; or have performed a meritorious or brave act warranting special recognition. Nominations may be made all year round and they are considered by a commendation committee set up by individual B/Ds under the chairmanship of a directorate officer. In 2015, around 3 750 commendation letters were issued.

### Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Award Scheme

12. In 2004, the SCS's Commendation Award Scheme was introduced as a separate tier of award between the Honours and Awards System of HKSAR and the Commendation Letter Scheme. Through this scheme, SCS gives recognition to selected civil servants for consistently outstanding performance. An award recipient should be an exceptionally meritorious officer who has a track record of outstanding performance for at least five consecutive years. Each recipient is awarded a certificate and a gold pin, and granted a travel award if he/she has 20 years or more of service and has not received any Government travel award before. Nominations are made by Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments/Grades ("HoDs/HoGs"). The awardees are selected by SCS on the recommendation of an Award Committee, comprising representatives of CSB and other bureaux/grades. The target number of awards has been increased from about 80 to 100 annually starting from 2016-2017. In 2016, 100 civil servants from 38 B/Ds received awards under this scheme.

### Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme

13. The objective of the LMSTA Scheme is to recognize long and meritorious service of serving civil servants. All local non-directorate officers with a continuous service of 20 years or more, who have track records of consistently excellent performance and have not received any Government travel award before, are eligible for consideration for the grant of an award. Permanent Secretaries and HoDs/HoGs will appoint selection committees to

recommend officers for the awards. The awards are granted on a one-off basis and in the form of an accountable travel allowance. The rate of the travel allowance is revised on 1 April each year with reference to the rate of change in package tour charges in the Consumer Price Index (C) in the past 12-month period ending February. The number of awards is determined on the basis of one award for every 27 officers meeting the length of service requirement since 2014-2015. The total number of awards were about 2 500 in 2016-2017.

14. Key features of the Honours and Awards System of HKSAR, the SCS's Commendation Award Scheme, the Commendation Letter Scheme and the LMSTA Scheme are set out in **Appendix I**.

### **Past discussions by the Panel**

15. The Panel had discussed CSOSAS and other commendation schemes for civil servants since 2008. The major views and concerns expressed by Panel members and the Administration's responses are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme

16. In reply to members' concern over the decrease in the number of entries and participating B/Ds for CSOSAS from 2009 to 2013, the Administration explained that the number of participating B/Ds for a particular year depended on, among others, the number of departmental initiatives being rolled out in the respective year.

17. At the Panel meeting on 19 December 2016, a member enquired whether there was any department that had repeatedly received awards under CSOSAS. The Administration advised that some B/Ds might, due to the nature of their service or their number of staff, had more opportunities to interact with the public and hence received more compliments and were in a more advantageous position in competing for the awards under this Scheme. As the departments operated under the trading fund mode on self-financing basis needed to deliver exemplary service for market competition, they might also have a bigger chance to win the awards.

18. Some members were concerned that participation in CSOSAS would become a matter of formality for participating B/Ds. They suggested that new elements should be introduced to the scheme to stimulate interest and encourage participation.

19. The Administration pointed out that taking account of the comments made by the Panel and civil servants in the post-event reviews,

different categories of awards had been introduced over the years. The Administration would continue to improve CSOSAS, encourage more B/Ds to participate in the scheme and publicize the outstanding performance of awardees so as to inspire B/Ds and civil servants to emulate good practices of award winners. Due consideration would also be given to introducing new elements to the scheme having regard to the developments in the community.

20. Noting that most of the services and projects were initiated by the awardees, some members opined that consideration should be given to giving out awards to recognize service initiatives that responded to public demands. A member also suggested that consideration could be given to inviting a random sample of members of the public and all LegCo Members and DCs members to vote to select winning departments and teams for all awards under CSOSAS so as to promote the customer-focused culture in the civil service.

21. The Administration said that the Special Citation for Responsiveness to Customer Needs was added in 2015 to give due recognition to those B/Ds which had positively responded to public demands in improving their services. As some members of the public were dissatisfied with the lack of collaboration and innovation among B/Ds, the Administration particularly rolled out the Inter-departmental Partnership Award, the Service Enhancement Award and Special Citation for Innovation to encourage B/Ds to improve their services and strengthen their co-operation. The Administration advised that enhancement in public service provision was one of the major factors the adjudication panels would consider in determining awardees under the scheme. However, adjudication purely from the angle of serving public demands would render some B/Ds, particularly those not directly involved in the delivery of public service, less advantageous in competing for the awards.

22. On some members' suggestion that the Administration should step up publicity to let the public know more about the exemplary performance of the winning departments and teams through, say, television announcements in the public interest or micro-movies or TV drama, the Administration advised that it would continue to commission Radio Television Hong Kong to produce a one-hour TV programme for broadcast on television during prime time and continue to arrange talks and visits to schools and different community groups to introduce exemplary government services in view of the positive responses. At the Panel meeting on 19 December 2016, the Administration said that promotion efforts in the new media would be stepped up and relevant campaigns would be rolled out.

#### Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme

23. Some members asked whether the eligibility requirement on the service length could be lowered, so that the officers with a continuous service of

less than 20 years and consistently excellent performance could also benefit from the Scheme.

24. The Administration advised that it had been improving the quota ratio under the LMSTA Scheme. The quota ratio was increased from one award for every 33 officers meeting the service requirement (1:33) to 1:30 in 1997-1998 and further improved to 1:27 from 2014-2015. The number of awards issued each year was calculated based on the quota ratio and there was no limit on the number of awards issued. As there was an upsurge in the number of staff eligible for the LMSTA Scheme due to the expansion and aging profile of the civil service, the Administration would accord priority to retiring staff when considering the grant of the awards. The Administration further clarified that the travel allowance under the LMSTA Scheme was not a condition of service, and hence not all eligible civil servants would be granted the travel allowance.

25. Regarding some members' suggestions on extending the travel allowance under the LMSTA Scheme to cover same-sex spouses of the award winners and allow unmarried award-winners to bring friends or family members as travel companions, the Administration explained that given an increasing number of eligible staff and limited resources for the LMSTA Scheme, it had to consider the pros and cons of any suggestions of improving the quota ratio or providing travel allowance to companions of awardees, and make a balance between various factors of consideration.

### The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Honours and Awards System

26. At the Panel meeting on 19 December 2016, a member sought clarification of the public's perception that Bureau Secretaries would be conferred with awards under the Honours and Awards System of HKSAR upon completion of service, and asked whether CSB was responsible for the nomination. The Administration stressed that the nomination criteria and vetting procedures for the Honours and Awards System of HKSAR were rigorous and independent, CSB would only be involved in the nomination of civil servants for awards. The Administration further stated that from 2012 to 2016, civil servants made up 33% to 42% of total awardees.

### Commendation Letter Scheme

27. Members noted that only some 1% of civil servants received commendation letters every year. With a view to sustaining civil servants' morale, a member asked whether consideration could be given to introducing more levels of commendation to enable more civil servants to be commended.

28. The Administration responded that it might not be desirable to issue commendation letters of lower grades lest civil servants who received such

letters might be unhappy. The Administration also clarified that there was no ceiling set on the number of commendation letters that could be issued. As long as a civil servant's performance warranted special recognition, HoDs/HoGs could issue him/her a commendation letter. The Administration undertook to remind HoDs/HoGs to issue commendation letters as appropriate without regard to the number, and to encourage them to nominate more staff from the junior ranks for commendation under the SCS's Commendation Scheme.

#### Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Award Scheme

29. In response to members' enquiries at the Panel meetings on 16 November 2015 and 19 December 2016 about the increase in the target number of awards under the SCS's Commendation Award Scheme commencing from 2016-2017, the Administration explained that as expenditure was involved in granting travel awards to eligible recipients of SCS's Commendation Award, a target on the number of awards to be given out must be set for the expenditure estimates.

#### Awards and commendation letters for non-civil service contract staff, subvented sector staff and Government's service agency workers

30. Some members were of the view that to ensure fairness, contributions of non-civil service contract ("NCSC") staff, subvented sector staff and Government's service agency workers to the work of the Government should also be recognized under the commendation schemes for civil servants.

31. The Administration advised that as NCSC staff were employed on a time-limited basis, they were not covered by the SCS's Commendation Award Scheme which was only applicable to civil servants and the award recipients had on average more than 20 years of service. NCSC staff with outstanding performance might qualify for awards under CSOSAS and the Honours and Awards System of HKSAR and receive commendation letters under the Commendation Letter Scheme. In 2015, 13 out of 170 awardees of CSOSAS were NCSC staff. Heads of B/Ds could decide the most appropriate means to give recognition to deserving NCSC staff. B/Ds might also explore the possibility of organizing joint programmes with subvented organizations to give recognition to subvented sector staff. As regards Government's service agency workers, the Administration could neither commend nor discipline its agency workers because they were not staff of the Government.

32. Regarding member's concern on whether NCSC staff who could meet the criterion on length of continuous service were excluded from the SCS's Commendation Award Scheme and the LMSTA Scheme, the Administration agreed to look into how individual B/Ds could give recognition to NCSC staff with long continuous service.



Other support measures to boost morale/alleviate work pressure of civil servants

33. In view of the great pressure arising from heavy workload and high public expectations on the work quality of the civil service in recent years, members were concerned whether the Administration had implemented any measures to strengthen the support for and boost the morale of civil servants.

34. The Administration pointed out that it would provide support and training to civil servants to help them deliver their work. Additional manpower would be provided to B/Ds which experienced manpower shortage as appropriate. Despite the expenditure control measures, i.e. the 1% savings on their respective annual operating expenditure in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018, which aimed to encourage B/Ds to enhance productivity and effectiveness through greater efforts in re-engineering and re-prioritization in the light of their operational needs, B/Ds could still request for additional manpower via the annual Resources Allocation Exercise. For emotional counselling and support for civil servants, the Administration had engaged professionals to provide counselling and clinical psychology services to staff in need. At the meeting on 19 December 2016, the Administration advised that there was a rising demand for counselling on personal or family issues and would step up the level of support.

**Latest development**

35. The Administration will update the Panel on CSOSAS and other commendation schemes for civil servants at the meeting on 22 December 2017.

**Relevant papers**

36. A list of relevant papers is set out in **Appendix II**.

**Key features of the Honours and Awards System of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ("HKSAR"),  
the Secretary for the Civil Service ("SCS")'s Commendation Award Scheme,  
the Commendation Letter Scheme and the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme**

	<b>Honours and Awards System of HKSAR</b>	<b>SCS's Commendation Award Scheme</b>	<b>Commendation Letter Scheme</b>	<b>Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme</b>
<b>Target</b>	Members of the public and public officers (including civil servants)	Civil servants	Civil servants	Civil servants
<b>Purpose</b>	To recognize their contribution to Hong Kong and their public and community service	To recognize civil servants who have outstanding performance for at least <u>five</u> consecutive years	To recognize civil servants who - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ have provided consistently outstanding service for at least <u>three</u> consecutive years; or</li> <li>➤ have made significant contribution towards enhancing the efficiency or the image of their bureaux/departments; or</li> <li>➤ have performed a meritorious or brave act warranting special recognition.</li> </ul>	To recognize local non-directorate officers who have excellent performance with a continuous service of 20 years or more, and have not received any Government travel award before

	<b>Honours and Awards System of HKSAR</b>	<b>SCS's Commendation Award Scheme</b>	<b>Commendation Letter Scheme</b>	<b>Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme</b>
<b>Decided by</b>	Chief Executive	Secretary for the Civil Service	A commendation committee set up by individual bureaux/departments under the chairmanship of a directorate officer	Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Departments/Grades or their Deputies
<b>Awards</b>	Bauhinia Awards, Bravery Awards, Disciplined Services and Independent Commission Against Corruption Awards, Medal of Honour, Chief Executive's Commendation	Each award recipient receives a certificate of recognition and a gold pin.  For those award recipients who have 20 or more years of service and have not enjoyed government sponsored travel outside Hong Kong before, they will also receive a travel award.	Each recipient receives a commendation letter issued by the respective bureau/department.	Award is granted on a one-off basis and in the form of an accountable travel allowance subject to a standard rate.

**Civil Service Outstanding Service Award  
and other commendation schemes for civil servants**

**List of relevant papers**

Date	Meeting/Event	References
16 May 2011	Panel on Public Service	<u>Administration's paper</u>  <u>Minutes</u>  <u>Administration's follow-up response to issues raised at the Panel meeting</u>
19 March 2012		<u>Administration's paper</u>  <u>Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat</u>  <u>Minutes</u>
18 November 2013		<u>Administration's paper</u>  <u>Updated Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat</u>  <u>Minutes</u>
17 November 2014		<u>Administration's paper</u>  <u>Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat</u>  <u>Minutes</u>

Date	Meeting/Event	References
16 November 2015		<u>Administration's paper</u>  <u>Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat</u>  <u>Minutes</u>
19 December 2016		<u>Administration's paper</u>  <u>Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat</u>  <u>Minutes</u>

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