

立法會

Legislative Council

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Panel on Public Service

**Minutes of meeting held on
Monday, 15 March 2021, at 10:45 am
in Conference Room 3 of the Legislative Council Complex**

- Members present** : Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP (Chairman)
Hon POON Siu-ping, BBS, MH (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, GBS, JP
Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS
Hon LEUNG Che-cheung, SBS, MH, JP
Hon Elizabeth QUAT, BBS, JP
Hon Martin LIAO Cheung-kong, GBS, JP
Dr Hon CHIANG Lai-wan, SBS, JP
Hon SHIU Ka-fai, JP
Dr Hon Pierre CHAN
Hon CHAN Chun-ying, JP
Hon LUK Chung-hung, JP
Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen, BBS, JP
- Member absent** : Hon Mrs Regina IP LAU Suk-ye, GBS, JP
- Public officers attending** : **Agenda item III**
Mr Patrick NIP, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mrs Ingrid YEUNG, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mrs Angelina CHEUNG, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 1

Miss Ann CHAN
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 2

Mr Gary POON, JP
Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service 3

Mr Hermes CHAN, JP
Director of General Grades
Civil Service Bureau

Public officers attending : **Agenda item IV**

Mr Patrick NIP, JP
Secretary for the Civil Service

Mrs Ingrid YEUNG, JP
Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service

Mr Hermes CHAN, JP
Director of General Grades
Civil Service Bureau

Clerk in attendance : Ms Wendy JAN
Chief Council Secretary (4)1

Staff in attendance : Ms Maggie CHUNG
Senior Council Secretary (4)1

Ms Carol WONG
Council Secretary (4)1

Mr Griffin FUNG
Legislative Assistant (4)9

Ms Karin TSOI
Clerical Assistant (4)1

I. Information paper issued since the last regular meeting on 17 February 2021

Members noted that no information paper had been issued since the last regular meeting of the Panel on Public Service ("the Panel") on 17 February 2021.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion
[LC Paper Nos. CB(4)605/20-21(01) and (02)]

2. Members agreed that the next regular Panel meeting would be held on 19 April 2021 to discuss the following items proposed by the Administration:

- (a) Mainland and local education allowance for civil servants; and
- (b) Update on implementation of the requirement for civil servants to take oath or sign declaration.

III. Civil service-related matters featured in the 2021-2022 Budget
[LC Paper No. CB(4)605/20-21(03)]

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, Secretary for the Civil Service ("SCS") briefed members on the civil service-related matters featured in the 2021-2022 Budget, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(4) 605/20-21(03)).

Civil service establishment

4. Mr SHIU Ka-fai supported the Administration's decision to impose a freeze on the growth in the civil service in 2021-2022. The Deputy Chairman called on the Administration to take measures to reduce the workload of civil servants and at the same time maintain the quality of public services. Mr Tony TSE enquired about the measures to boost civil service morale and motivate civil servants to deliver quality services.

5. SCS pointed out that the civil service establishment had increased by around 11% from 2017-2018 to 2020-2021. With a view to maintaining the sustainability of public finance amidst the current economic situation, the Administration had decided to have a zero growth in the civil service establishment in 2021-2022. In this connection, Bureaux/Departments

("B/Ds") were encouraged to enhance effectiveness through re-prioritization, internal redeployment and streamlining of work processes to cope with the workload.

6. Permanent Secretary for the Civil Service ("PSCS") supplemented that various commendation schemes, such as the Honours and Awards System of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ("HKSAR"), the Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Award Scheme and the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme, were implemented to motivate civil servants to sustain their exemplary performance.

7. Mr Tony TSE was concerned whether, in tandem with the initiative of allowing civil servants who joined the Government between 1 June 2000 and 31 May 2015 ("eligible civil servants") to choose to retire at 65 (for civilian grades) or 60 (for disciplined services grades), the imposition of a freeze on the growth in the civil service might lead to the problem of an ageing workforce.

8. SCS responded that despite zero growth in the civil service establishment in 2021-2022, there would still be new recruits to the Government to fill new civil service posts to take forward new initiatives as announced in the past few years and to fill vacancies arising from retirement. PSCS added that as most of the eligible civil servants were not close to their retirement age, allowing them to choose to retire later would not have material impact on the age profile of the civil service.

Recruitment and promotion system of the civil service

9. Mr Steven HO asked whether the Civil Service Bureau ("CSB") had fully grasped the succession and manpower planning of B/Ds, in particular for the professional grade and technical grade. SCS advised that he met with Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Department regularly to discuss the succession situation in individual departments and grades and make advance planning. B/Ds would also identify civil servants with potential for higher responsibilities and provide them with training and development opportunities to enhance their all-round capabilities.

10. Mr Steven HO further sought information on the promotion system and the composition of promotion boards of the civil service. He was concerned whether the Administration would give a heavy weighting to civil servants' seniority when selecting officers for filling vacancies in higher ranks. Ms Elizabeth QUAT considered that the Administration should enhance the transparency of the promotion system in the civil service.

11. SCS said that B/Ds were reminded that they should make use of available vacancies to promote potential and suitable officers at the earliest opportunity. PSCS advised that a promotion board comprising at least three officers of appropriate seniority would be convened to select the most suitable candidate to fill a vacant post in a promotional rank. For instance, for the promotion of Administrative Officers to take up the posts of Permanent Secretaries or to the rank of Directorate Grade 6, the promotion boards would be chaired by SCS. SCS added that advice of the independent Public Service Commission would be sought for appointment or promotion of officers to middle and senior ranking posts.

12. In response to Mr Steven HO's question on whether the Administration had analysed the appraisal ratings given to civil servants by their appraising officers, SCS replied in the negative and stressed that to ensure consistency in assessment standards and fairness in appraisal ratings within a rank, the Administration would review civil servants' appraisal system and seek advice from the Public Service Commission where necessary.

13. Pointing out that civil service was an integral part of the Government, Ms Elizabeth QUAT suggested that the Administration should review the entry requirements for civil servants, in particular that for the officers in Administrative Officer grade, to ensure that they would uphold the Basic Law ("BL"), bear allegiance to HKSAR, be dedicated to their duties and be responsible to the HKSAR Government.

14. SCS advised that in civil service recruitment exercises, the Administration would assess candidates having regard to the stipulated entry requirements of the grade concerned and on the basis of the candidates' ability, performance, character, understanding of the Mainland and HKSAR, etc. He stressed that the Administration attached great importance to the national studies training provided to middle and senior-level officers. The Administration would provide them with training in national studies at various stages of their career to keep them abreast of the national policies and development.

Training and development for civil servants

15. Noting from the Estimates for the year ending 31 March 2022 that the Administration proposed to allocate \$170.7 million for the provision of civil service training and development in 2021-2022, the Chairman expressed concern as to whether the Administration had reserved funding for provision of training on BL and national studies for civil servants. Ms Elizabeth QUAT sought information on the national studies training

programmes provided to civil servants at various levels. She suggested that apart from arranging national studies training programmes in the Mainland for civil servants, the Administration should also invite Mainland expert scholars to provide relevant training to civil servants in Hong Kong.

16. PSCS advised that the Government attached great importance to national studies training programmes for civil servants, which covered topics including the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, BL and national security, and would earmark adequate provision for such programmes. SCS added that the Administration had in recent years enhanced substantially the national studies training for all levels of civil servants. For example, new recruits were required to receive BL foundation training. Officers at middle, senior and directorate levels were arranged to participate in the national studies programmes jointly organized with nine Mainland institutions in the Mainland and, with such efforts, about 75% of the total number of directorate officers had already attended such training programmes. The Administration would further enhance the contents of national studies training programmes and further increase the training places for the programmes in the Mainland.

17. Ms Elizabeth QUAT commented that the training on creativity and design thinking, innovation and technology ("I&T") applications, new technological trends, etc. for civil servants was insufficient. With a view to facilitating the development of smart city and improving public services, she called on the Administration to formulate training plans, timetable and target to equip all civil servants with relevant knowledge and skills.

18. SCS advised that in 2019-2020, the Administration had organized I&T training programmes for about 62 000 civil servants at various levels. He added that the Administration had set up a working group under the Civil Service Training Advisory Board to examine and map out the way forward for enhancing training on I&T applications for the civil service.

Job Creation Scheme

19. The Chairman, Mr Tony TSE and Mr SHIU Ka-fai expressed support for the Administration to earmark \$6.6 billion in the 2021-2022 Budget to create an additional 30 000 time-limited jobs under the Job Creation Scheme ("the Scheme") to alleviate the worsening unemployment situation. Ms Elizabeth QUAT, Dr CHIANG Lai-wan and Mr CHAN Chun-ying sought information, including the duration, the work types and salary ranges, of the time-limited jobs created under the Scheme in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 respectively. The Deputy Chairman asked

whether the Administration would accord higher priority to create job positions in B/Ds under the Scheme to meet their operational needs.

20. SCS replied that jobs were created in both the public and private sectors for people of different skill sets and academic qualifications. For the jobs created under the Scheme in 2020-2021, around 60% of the jobs required tertiary education or above and the remaining jobs required secondary education or below. The monthly pay of around 60% and 40% of jobs ranged from \$10,000 to \$20,000 and at \$20,000 or above respectively. Each job placement normally lasted from 6 to 12 months while extension of duration beyond 12 months would be considered based on the merits of individual cases. As regards the jobs to be created under the Scheme in 2021-2022, apart from creating jobs in B/Ds to meet their own operational and service needs, B/Ds would liaise with the non-governmental organizations or relevant associations under their purview to formulate the details in due course.

21. In response to Mr CHAN Chun-ying's concern as to whether the number of jobs created under the Scheme for the grassroots was adequate, SCS advised that more than 40% of the positions created under the Scheme were for the grassroots, including cleansing and relevant supporting staff, workers for carrying out anti-mosquito measures and staff for performing anti-epidemic related duties. Mr SHIU Ka-fai and Ms Elizabeth QUAT called on the Administration to work with various industries to create more jobs under the Scheme.

22. Mr Martin LIAO sought information on the 10 000 jobs specifically created for fresh graduates and young people under the Scheme. He commented that providing young people with jobs for general administrative and clerical work would not be conducive to their long-term career development.

23. SCS advised that apart from Executive Service Assistant/Executive Assistant/Administrative Assistant positions, other positions such as Arts Administration/Museum/Stage Management positions were created in the Government for young people under the Scheme. The Development Bureau also subsidized employers to employ graduates from the fields of engineering, architecture, surveying, town planning and landscape architecture. Director of General Grades added that jobs with training elements were created under the Scheme to facilitate the long-term career development of young people. For example, a training-cum-job placement subsidy scheme was implemented in collaboration with the Hong Kong Jockey Club for first-time job seekers.

24. Noting that as at end February 2021, 13 000 jobs created under the Scheme in 2020-2021 were yet to be filled, the Chairman asked whether the Administration had encountered any difficulties in the recruitment process and the measures to be taken by the Administration to fill up the job positions in a timely manner. The Deputy Chairman enquired about the recruitment timetable for the jobs created under the Scheme in 2020-2021 and 2021-2022. Mr Tony TSE believed that the Administration would draw on the experience gained from the recruitment of the jobs created in 2020-2021 to improve the recruitment process of the additional jobs to be created next year.

25. SCS said that the recruitment exercises for the 13 000 jobs created under the Scheme in 2020-2021 was in progress or would commence shortly. The Administration aimed to complete the exercises in 2021. With a view to facilitating the recruitment process of the jobs created in the Government, CSB had coordinated the central recruitment exercises of Executive Service Assistants and Support Service Assistants in the Government and deployed successful applicants to various B/Ds. As regards the jobs created in other public and private sectors, CSB would coordinate with relevant B/Ds so as to expedite the recruitment process.

26. In reply to Ms Elizabeth QUAT's question, SCS advised that in addition to bearing the salary of the jobs created in B/Ds, the Administration would subsidize part of the cost of the jobs created in the non-government sector.

Financial provisions for work related to civil service management

Medical and dental services for serving civil servants, pensioners and other eligible persons

27. The Deputy Chairman sought explanation on the increase in the provision under Head 37 for the payment and reimbursement of medical fees and hospital charges in the 2021-2022 financial year. PSCS explained that the expenditure for reimbursement of medical expenses was demand-driven. The Administration had made additional provision for 2021-2022 to meet the anticipated increase in applications for reimbursement of medical expenses from eligible persons.

Housing allowances, education allowances, passages, the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme

28. Referring to paragraph 8 of the Administration's paper, Mr CHAN Chun-ying enquired about the reasons for the projected increase in

the expenditure on housing allowances, the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme and passage.

29. SCS explained that the increase over the revised estimate for 2020-2021 for the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme was due to the low level of utilization of travel awards in 2020-2021 as a result of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 ("COVID-19") and the increased provision required in 2021-2022 to meet the demand so carried forward from the previous year. PSCS advised that the estimated expenditure on housing allowances was increased due to the anticipated increase in the average number of recipients.

Pension payments to eligible retired public officers

30. In response to the Deputy Chairman's enquiry on whether extension of service of civil servants had resulted in the increase in the financial provision for pension payments to eligible retired public officers in 2021-2022, SCS replied in the negative and explained that the increase was due to an estimated increase in the number of retirees in 2021-2022 and the full-year effect of pension payments to those retiring in 2020-2021.

Departmental expenses

31. Dr CHIANG Lai-wan sought explanation on the increase in the provision to \$822.5 million for CSB under Head 143. PSCS explained that the increase was due to the Administration's plan to resume the training which had been deferred or cancelled in 2020-2021 under the COVID-19 epidemic, as well as the increased provision for salaries, personnel related expenses (e.g. Mandatory Provident Fund and Civil Service Provident Fund contribution) and contingency fund.

Other concerns

Oath-taking arrangements for civil servants

32. Mr SHIU Ka-fai asked whether the Administration would terminate the service of the civil servants who refused to take the oath/sign the declaration to uphold BL, bear allegiance to HKSAR and be responsible to the HKSAR Government. He also enquired about the measures in place to ascertain that serving civil servants would genuinely uphold BL and bear allegiance to HKSAR.

33. SCS advised that in January 2021, CSB had issued the circular on the oath-taking/declaration requirement for civil servants who joined the HKSAR Government before 1 July 2020. The signed declarations were

received by the end of February 2021, and B/Ds had requested explanations from civil servants who had refused to take the oath/make the declaration. The Administration would, with regard to the specific circumstances of each case, decide whether to initiate action in accordance with the mechanisms under the Public Service (Administration) Order or the relevant disciplined services legislation as appropriate to terminate the service of the civil servants concerned. Advice from the Public Service Commission would be obtained for cases under its purview. The Administration would update the Panel on the implementation of the oath-taking/declaration requirement in the next regular meeting.

Grade structure review for the disciplined services grades

34. Mr Martin LIAO was concerned about the mounting workloads and recruitment difficulties faced by disciplined services departments. He enquired about the progress and estimated completion time of the grade structure review for the disciplined services grades.

35. SCS advised that the grade structure review was delayed due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service and the Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service were analysing the views and proposals received from the management and staff side of disciplined services departments and would exchange views with them before finalizing the report. The two Committees aimed at submitting the report to the Chief Executive by mid 2021. Upon receipt of the report, the Administration would consult relevant stakeholders and submit recommendations on the way forward to the Chief Executive-in-Council for a decision.

COVID-19 vaccination arrangements for civil servants

36. Mr SHIU Ka-fai and Dr CHIANG Lai-wan asked whether the Administration would include civil servants in the priority groups under the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. SCS advised that personnel maintaining critical public services were accorded priority and arranged group reservations to receive the vaccine.

37. In response to Dr CHIANG Lai-wan's question on whether any target vaccination coverage rates had been set, SCS advised that the Administration aimed to provide vaccines for half of the Hong Kong population within 2021.

IV. Participation of civil servants in the fight against the Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic
[LC Paper No. CB(4)605/20-21(04)]

38. At the invitation of the Chairman, SCS briefed members on the participation and effort of civil servants in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(4) 605/20-21(04)).

39. The Deputy Chairman, Mr Steven HO, Ms Elizabeth QUAT and Mr LUK Chung-hung thanked the civil servants and medical staff who had participated in the anti-epidemic work. The Deputy Chairman further asked whether the Administration would consider giving these civil servants commendation in acknowledgement of their contributions.

40. PSCS stressed that the Administration used different commendation schemes to recognize exemplary performance of civil servants. In fact, commendation awards were given out by the Chief Secretary for Administration to the civil servants who had provided support for implementing the Universal Community Testing Programme ("UCTP") in September 2020.

Manpower resources for implementing anti-epidemic measures

41. The Deputy Chairman enquired about the manpower arrangements of UCTP and the Community Vaccination Programme ("CVP"). Mr Steven HO asked whether any manpower deployment mechanism was in place to facilitate the implementation of anti-epidemic measures.

42. SCS advised that as extensive manpower was required for introducing various anti-epidemic measures, B/Ds had, apart from implementing measures under their respective purview, mobilized their staff to support the anti-epidemic work during different stages of the epidemic. While some government staff had taken part in anti-epidemic operations on a voluntary basis, other government staff who were required to work beyond their conditioned hours would be compensated by time-off in lieu or overtime allowance where appropriate. The Administration would, depending on the development of the epidemic situation and actual needs, continue to flexibly deploy manpower to support the anti-epidemic efforts.

43. Mr Steven HO asked why the Administration paid serving government staff honorarium to provide services under UCTP in September 2020. SCS explained that CSB engaged serving government staff and retired civil servants to provide services under UCTP so as to ensure

maximum participation within an extremely short period of time, and an honorarium calculated at hourly rate were payable to government staff who provided the services.

44. In response to the question raised by the Deputy Chairman on whether any civil servants had refused to participate in anti-epidemic work, SCS replied in the negative and stressed that colleagues in the civil service had been proactively taking forward the Administration's anti-epidemic measures. For example, around 12 000 man-time of civil servants from 40 B/Ds had participated in the compulsory testing declarations and associated enforcement operations in specified "restricted areas".

45. With a view to relieving the workload of government staff in anti-epidemic work and supporting the unemployed or under-employed persons under the current economic situation, Mr LUK Chung-hung suggested that the Administration should engage members of the public in implementing anti-epidemic programmes, such as recruiting those who used to work in the service sector to perform ushering duties in Community Testing Centres.

46. SCS pointed out that Community Testing Centres and mobile specimen collection stations were currently operated by contractors, who had offered job openings for members of the public. The Chairman suggested that the Administration should disseminate the recruitment information of such job openings to members of the public. SCS assured members that the Administration would endeavor to come up with measures to create more employment opportunities for those in need in the community.

Special work arrangements for government staff during the COVID-19 epidemic

47. Ms Elizabeth QUAT called on the Administration to arrange more government staff, in particular those who were asked to work from home under the special work arrangements, to support anti-epidemic work. Mr CHAN Chun-ying asked about the ratio of government staff who were arranged to work from home.

48. SCS clarified that while many government staff had to return to their workplace to provide emergency and essential services, other government staff were arranged to work from home under the special work arrangements during the epidemic. He stressed that the Administration would keep in view the development of the epidemic and allocate appropriate manpower resources for implementing anti-epidemic measures.

49. Mr CHAN Chun-ying commented that special work arrangements for government staff had affected the provision of public services and asked whether adequate equipment and information technology support had been provided to them under the special work arrangements.

50. SCS advised that during the implementation of the special work arrangements, B/Ds were reminded that they had to suitably deploy manpower to cope with their operational needs and provide essential services to the public. B/Ds had also procured additional equipment, computer software, etc. to facilitate staff working from home. Between January and end October 2020, the number of government staff provided with notebook computers for accessing departmental intranets and servers had increased by about 8 000. During the same period, the numbers of staff authorized for using virtual private networks and accessing classified information outside their offices through equipment provided by the government and secure communications channels had increased by around 10 000 and around 5 000 respectively, and the number of real-time concurrent users had increased by around 8 000.

Protection of government employees during the epidemic

51. The Deputy Chairman asked whether any civil servants had contracted COVID-19 in the course of work. PSCS replied that the Administration had provided civil servants with sufficient personal protective equipment and arranged COVID-19 testing on a regular basis for staff of high-risk groups, high-exposure groups and critical infrastructure services.

52. Concerning that many civil servants needed to have close contact with members of the public, Mr LUK Chung-hung enquired about the measures in place to encourage civil servants to get vaccinated to protect their health and safety as well as that of the public. He also suggested that the Administration should arrange vaccination for frontline staff before they were assigned to perform high-risk or anti-epidemic related duties.

53. SCS advised that the Administration had identified priority groups (e.g. disciplined services staff, personnel participating in anti-epidemic related work and personnel maintaining critical public services) for vaccination and arranged group reservations for these staff to receive vaccines. As a facilitative measure, CSB had also invited B/Ds to release their staff to get vaccinated during duty hours and allow them to apply for leave to recuperate after vaccination.

Making use of I&T to facilitate the implementation of the Community Vaccination Programme

54. Mr Martin LIAO was of the view that the Administration should make use of the Electronic Health Record Sharing System ("eHealth") to enable medical staff at Community Vaccination Centres ("CVCs") to assess whether the health situation of members of the public was suitable for vaccination. SCS clarified that CVCs were not clinics and therefore not connected with eHealth. That said, medical staff stationed at CVCs would recommend persons with chronic illnesses to first consult their family doctors about their suitability of receiving the COVID-19 vaccines.

55. In reply to Mr Martin LIAO's suggestion on enhancing the publicity of eHealth so as to encourage members of the public to register with the system, SCS advised that staff at CVCs would enquire whether the recipients of the COVID-19 vaccines were willing to register with eHealth.

56. Mr CHAN Chun-ying called on the Administration to step up publicity on the use of "iAM Smart", a mobile application which provided one-stop personalized digital public services platform and allowed the users to download their electronic vaccination records. SCS advised that with the rolling out of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer had deployed staff to support the registration for "iAM Smart" at CVCs. He assured members that the Administration would further enhance the publicity of eHealth and "iAM Smart".

Dissemination of epidemic-related information

57. Mr Martin LIAO asked whether the Information Services Department was responsible for monitoring the spread of misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccines. Both Mr LIAO and Ms Elizabeth QUAT raised concern about the situation and urged the Administration to deploy more manpower resources to address the problem. Mr LIAO and Mr CHAN Chun-ying opined that the Administration should publish epidemic-related information to the public in a timely manner. Ms QUAT was of the view that the Administration should enhance the manpower resources for manning the anti-epidemic related hotline services to answer public enquiries.

58. SCS advised that the Administration had made use of various channels, such as thematic websites and other social media, to disseminate to the public updated information on vaccination programmes, views of medical experts, etc. The Administration would step up monitoring of

misinformation on the COVID-19 vaccines and made clarifications when deemed necessary. Regarding the provision of anti-epidemic related hotline services, he said that while 1823 managed by the Efficiency Office could provide relevant services, staff were deployed from the General Grades Office to provide hotline services for people under compulsory testing. The Administration would continue to flexibly deploy manpower to support anti-epidemic work as and when necessary.

V. Any other business

59. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:43 pm.

Council Business Division 4
Legislative Council Secretariat
29 June 2021