

For discussion
on 15 March 2021

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE

Participation of Civil Servants in the Fight against COVID-19 Pandemic

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the participation and concerted effort of civil servants in the fight against Coronavirus Disease - 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

BACKGROUND

2. The COVID-19 epidemic is wreaking havoc around the world and has brought unprecedented impacts both locally and internationally. On 25 January 2020, the Government raised the COVID-19 response level to Emergency Response Level. Under the direction of the Steering Committee cum Command Centre chaired by the Chief Executive, the Government has taken prompt and effective action in safeguarding public health by preventing the importation of cases on one hand and preventing the spreading of the virus in the community on the other. The Government has deployed stringent border control measures with a view to stopping the transmission of the virus at source. Strict enforcement of quarantine arrangements and closed-loop management for persons arriving in Hong Kong are in place for the prevention of imported cases. At the same time, the Government has been stepping up surveillance and testing efforts, enhancing contact tracing and implementing social distancing measures to prevent the spread of the virus in the community. All the anti-epidemic measures, programmes and operations could not be launched

successfully without the many proactive effort that the civil service has made and the many extra miles that the civil service has walked. With the commitment to serving the community, the civil service stands unitedly to tackle the challenges brought by the epidemic despite all the difficulties encountered.

3. During the past 13 months, bureaux and departments have demonstrated unprecedented collegiality and resilience in joining the anti-epidemic effort on different fronts. All staff participated in the anti-epidemic work, including serving civil servants, members from auxiliary services, other government employees and retirees, responded positively and were dedicated in combating the virus. Civil service colleagues are not only required to adopt flexible and innovative ways to respond to the needs of different service targets, they also have to shoulder additional responsibilities which are outside the purview of their departments. As many of the large-scale joint operations require the deployment of extensive manpower within an extremely short period of time, Civil Service Bureau (CSB) plays the key role in the planning, coordination and mobilisation of staff in taking forward the anti-epidemic measures.

Versatility: Implementation of Response Measures by Government Departments to Tackle the Impact of the Epidemic

4. The Food and Health Bureau (FHB) and the Department of Health (DH) are no doubt the major bureau and department in the fight against the pandemic. Nevertheless, as the pandemic has brought different levels of impacts to different sectors of the community, various bureaux and departments have to implement response measures to mitigate the effects which have brought to their service targets during the epidemic, or to take preventive measures against the virus under their areas of responsibilities. The following are a few examples:

(a) Education Bureau

During the epidemic, schools and students have experienced interruptions in their face-to-face classes. To achieve the goal of

“suspending classes without suspending learning”, the Education Bureau (EDB) has been working closely with schools to flexibly deploy various innovative methods to facilitate blended learning at home during class suspension. To enable needy public sector primary and secondary students to continue their learning at home, EDB has exercised flexibility in handling applications for purchasing mobile computer devices under the Community Care Fund Assistance Programme and provided additional funding for securing internet access facilities for these students who have no access to Internet due to their living environment to facilitate their learning at home. EDB also assisted the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA) in conducting the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination (HKDSE) in 2020, with supply of anti-epidemic equipment such as surgical masks and hand sanitiser for use by the candidates and examination personnel at the examination centres. With the concerted effort of EDB, HKEAA and schools in the implementation of enhanced precautionary measures for the examination, over 50 000 candidates attended the 2020 HKDSE smoothly and safely.

(b) Social Welfare Department

Many of the services provided to the elderly and disadvantaged have been affected during the pandemic. Since February 2020, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) provided three tranches of special allowance on manpower support to residential care homes and home-based care service units for arranging manpower to maintain daily operations for providing services to the elderly and the disadvantaged, in the event their staff members were put under compulsory quarantine or in need of medical treatment as confirmed cases of COVID-19.

In addition, to ensure timely payments to recipients of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme and to provide assistance to recipients with urgent and special needs, SWD would give consideration to disregard absence from Hong Kong by

applicants/recipients of the CSSA Scheme and the SSA Scheme¹ who fail to satisfy the residence requirement owing to the epidemic. Besides, applicants for the Guangdong Scheme and the Fujian Scheme may submit their applications by post, instead of doing so in person in Hong Kong.

(c) Water Supplies Department

As chlorine is effective in killing the COVID-19 virus, the Water Supplies Department has adopted a prudent measure since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic by raising the level of residual chlorine in treated water from 1.0 milligram (mg) per litre to 1.2 mg per litre to enhance drinking water safety. The raised level of residual chlorine is still well below the threshold of 5 mg per litre stipulated in the Hong Kong Drinking Water Standards.

(d) Centre for Food Safety of Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Noting the earlier cases in the Mainland that the COVID-19 virus was detected on imported frozen foods or their packaging, the Centre for Food Safety of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has been sampling imported frozen foods and food packaging from different countries/regions at the import level for virus testing since mid-2020. As at mid-February 2021, about 4 000 food and food packaging samples have been taken for testing.

(e) Government Logistics Department

The spread of COVID-19 worldwide has led to a significant increase in the demand for all types of personal protective equipment (PPE), notably surgical masks in Hong Kong. To address the shortage of PPE, the Government Logistics Department (GLD) has liaised with the suppliers from different countries and arranged for the procurement of PPE, including

¹ Including Old Age Allowance, Old Age Living Allowance and Disability Allowance.

masks, for distribution to bureaux and departments within very short period of time, in particular during the early stage of the outbreak of the epidemic. The overseas Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices and Invest Hong Kong also leveraged their networks to assist in the procurement drive by referring overseas suppliers to GLD or by assisting in securing orders for PPE. GLD has also arranged procurement and delivery of anti-epidemic items in support of bureaux and departments' operations, such as the Universal Community Testing Programme (UCTP), the Community Vaccination Programme (CVP) and compulsory testing, etc. GLD has also been providing round-the-clock land transport services to support all quarantine-related operations since late January 2020.

(f) Various Bureaux and Departments

Apart from introducing measures to enhance Hong Kong's overall capability in combating the pandemic, the Government introduced over 90 measures under the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) to provide suitable relief to businesses and individuals hard hit by the pandemic or more seriously affected by the anti-epidemic measures. Ten bureaux and around 20 government departments and offices involved in the implementation of these measures, most of which falling outside the regular charter of the colleagues involved. Civil servants involved demonstrated commitment, dedication and creativity in the process with a view to achieving the mission of disbursing timely relief to the eligible parties. As at 29 January 2021, over \$140 billion were deployed/dispensed under all AEF measures, benefitting over 6.5 million individuals and 800 000 applications from enterprises/businesses.

5. Although for a certain period of time departments have arranged colleagues to work from home, or in staggered work and lunch hours so as to reduce the risk of infection, departments have widely adopted the use of information technology and provided appropriate equipment to colleagues. This has facilitated effective communication among colleagues so that the discharge of anti-epidemic work would not be affected.

Additional Commitment: Shouldering Extra Responsibilities on Top of the Regular Duties of Departments

6. Apart from implementing response measures for the areas of work under their respective purview, each department has shouldered additional responsibilities in the fight against the pandemic. The whole civil service is fully aware of the limited manpower resources of the Government, and therefore the commitment of everyone is important to the successful implementation of the anti-epidemic measures. There are also departments which fully make use of their facilities and manpower resources to support the anti-epidemic work proactively. The following are a few examples:

(a) Commerce and Economic Development Bureau

To facilitate local production of masks in order to stabilise supply and to build up stock, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau launched the Local Mask Production Subsidy Scheme (the Subsidy Scheme) in March 2020. The Subsidy Scheme provides subsidies to 20 production lines which have collectively delivered about 289 million masks to the Government during the period from June 2020 to January 2021. In the spirit of community sharing, the Government distributed 28 million masks procured under the Subsidy Scheme to residential households in Hong Kong in June to July 2020. Aside from delivery by the Hong Kong Post, the Home Affairs Department (HAD) and SWD assisted in distributing masks to residential addresses not covered by Hong Kong Post's delivery service, such as households in villages and sub-divided flats.

(b) Correctional Services Department

In collaboration with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) and the Architectural Services Department (ArchSD), the Correctional Services Department (CSD) had converted four existing workshops at the Lo Wu Correctional Institution, Tung Tau Correctional Institution and Stanley Prison into Filter Mask Workshops. Over 2 500 off-duty or retired CSD

officers had been recruited as volunteers to participate in the production of masks. CSD arranged to operate its production facilities at Lo Wu Correctional Institution round-the-clock and it was the very first time for CSD to extend its production to 24 hours under its operational and security constraints. Such arrangements have greatly increased CSD's capacity in the production of filter masks in particular when there was shortage of masks during the early months of the pandemic. CSD also set up new production lines for small-size masks to meet the demand from GLD.

(c) Innovation and Technology Bureau, Office of the Government Chief Information Officer

In order to help the community fight against the epidemic, the Innovation and Technology Bureau (ITB) has been allocated funds under the AEF to distribute 10 million CuMask+™, developed by the Hong Kong Research Institute of Textiles and Apparel, to Hong Kong residents for free. In this connection, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) has developed an online system which facilitated a large number of registrations by residents within a short period of time in an orderly manner. Most of the masks were delivered to door by Hong Kong Post. The CuMask+™ were also distributed to ethnic minorities, domestic helpers, underprivileged groups, street sleepers, etc. through departments such as SWD and HAD. OGCIO has also developed a number of information systems, for example, the “StayHomeSafe” mobile app and electronic wristbands to monitor those persons placed under compulsory home quarantine, and the “LeaveHomeSafe” mobile app to encourage the public to keep a more precise record of their whereabouts.

(d) Home Affairs Department and District Offices

HAD and the District Offices (DOs) play an important role in the coordination of anti-epidemic work at district level. In order to cut the transmission chain in the community as soon as possible,

the Government has actively expanded the coverage of compulsory testing on a mandatory basis especially for residential buildings. DOs of HAD have coordinated such compulsory testing arrangements, including liaising closely with local residents, coordinating the setting up of mobile specimen collection stations by testing contractors at appropriate locations, arranging registration of residents undergoing compulsory testing, as well as providing assistance and counselling support to those in needs.

The Government has exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make "restriction-testing declarations". From 23 January 2021 to 23 February 2021, a total of 27 declarations and associated enforcement operations were made and carried out, covering various districts. The district work network of DOs had greatly facilitated the swift coordination with different departments in each operation. DOs also maintained close communication with the residents to ensure the operations were carried out smoothly and to minimise the impacts caused to the residents.

(e) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, Home Affairs Department, Hong Kong Police Force, Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Taking into account the development of the pandemic, the Government announced a number of measures on the disease control requirements for catering premises and designated business premises, as well as statutory measures to enhance social distancing in public places. Relevant departments have spared no effort in taking up the enforcement work and stepping up inspection. FEHD has conducted more than 285 000 inspections to catering premises and about 9 100 inspections to the scheduled premises under its purview (such as places of public entertainment and commercial bathhouses), and about 300 000 inspections to cooked food stalls in its markets, etc. The department has also taken out summonses action and issued fixed penalty tickets

against non-compliance cases. In respect of club-houses, hotels/guesthouses, amusement game centres and Mahjong/Tin-kau premises, HAD has strengthened manpower support so as to step up inspections and conducted joint inspections with the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) as appropriate to ensure compliance with the relevant requirements and directions. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department has deployed staff to inspect the licensed premises under the Places of Amusement Regulation (Cap. 132 BA) to ensure the related licensees strictly comply with the conditions set for opening of the premises.

Working Together: Deployment of Civil Servants by Departments to Conduct Joint Operations

7. To fight against the epidemic, we have to take into account the latest development of the pandemic for implementation of appropriate measures. Extensive manpower is required for the Government to introduce various large-scale targeted measures, some of which are still ongoing, at different stages of the pandemic. The planning and organisation of these measures were completed within a short period of time with the deployment of manpower by various departments. The following are a few major examples:

(a) Assistance provided to stranded Hong Kong residents

At the onset of the worldwide outbreak of COVID-19, a significant number of Hong Kong residents were stranded in different parts of the world. The Immigration Department (ImmD), the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices and other relevant departments had mobilised their staff to provide assistance to stranded Hong Kong residents. In February 2020, the Government sent a specialized team comprising Security Bureau officers, immigration officers and healthcare officers from DH and the Hospital Authority (HA) to assist Hong Kong passengers on board the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan to return to Hong Kong via chartered flights arranged by the Government. Besides, in March 2020, the Government arranged

eight chartered flights in two separate operations to bring back Hong Kong residents stranded in Hubei Province. A Hong Kong team comprising staff from the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, ImmD, DH, Information Services Department (ISD) and HA participated in the operation.

(b) Universal Community Testing Programme

CSB coordinated the implementation of the UCTP which was held in September 2020 to provide voluntary virus testing for all citizens to cut the transmission chain in the community. Apart from recruiting some 6 000 healthcare personnel from outside the Government and arranging 1 279 ambulance personnel of the Fire Services Department (FSD) in collecting specimens through combined nasal and throat swabs for COVID-19 testing, a total of around 4 000 government officers (20% of which are retired civil servants) were invited from 75 bureaux and departments to participate in this 14-day Programme within very short notice. They took up the administrative support and centre management duties at various testing centres across the territory and coordination duties at the Command Centre. Over 1 500 staff from various departments also worked behind the scene to discharge the duties of planning, coordination, monitoring, information and technology support hotline, logistics and safety management. Under the UCTP, a total of about 1 783 000 specimens had been collected for COVID-19 nucleic acid test. This extensive territory-wide community testing programme was held smoothly with the concerted effort of the civil service and healthcare personnel.

(c) Community Vaccination Programme

The Government announced on 18 February 2021 the arrangements for territory-wide COVID-19 CVP. A dedicated task force led by FHB and CSB has been working for this large-scale programme to arrange for the public to receive voluntary vaccination free of charge in phases. 29 Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs) will be set up over the territory providing vaccination service to the public. It is anticipated that

over 1 000 civil servants from various departments will be deployed to perform administrative duties for the operation and management of the CVCs and to provide other administrative support under the CVP.

(d) Contact Tracing

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of DH has all along spared no effort in following up on the epidemiological investigations of confirmed cases and tracing of their close contacts. Nevertheless, in the face of a surge in the number of confirmed cases, the healthcare manpower of the CHP cannot cope with the workload of relevant work. To assist in strengthening the contact tracing work, HKPF has activated the Major Incident Investigation and Disaster Support System. Over 200 officers from the disciplined forces, including HKPF, ImmD, FSD and Customs and Excise Department have been deployed to work in the Contact Tracing Centre in the Kai Tak Community Hall which commenced operation on 11 January 2021 to enhance efficiency in the contact tracing work of confirmed cases.

(e) "Restriction-testing Declaration" and Compulsory Testing Notice in respect of Specified "Restricted Areas"

From 23 January 2021 to 23 February 2021, the Government made a total of 27 compulsory testing declarations and associated enforcement operations in specified "restricted areas" of various districts. During the operations, over 24 000 people underwent testing in the specified "restricted areas". Apart from HAD and DH which played an essential role in the operations, around 12 000 man-time of civil servants from 40 bureaux and departments participated in the operations, including police officers to maintain order; staff from law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to conduct home visits; as well as civilian staff to assist in other duties including registration work, the distribution of food and supplies and crowd control. When necessary, ethnic minority staff also participated and assisted in providing language support services.

8. With the joint efforts of colleagues coming from different departments, these operations were conducted successfully with the targeted objectives and result being achieved. Some of the civil servants were responsible for work which they had not taken up before. For example, staff responsible for policy analysis and professional work in their bureaux or departments were deployed to the frontline for discharging registration work and distribution of supplies to the public. Regardless of which type of work the civil servants are responsible for, such team work have brought valuable organisation and coordination experience to the civil servants participated in the operations.

9. Other civil servants have to take up extra work when manpower are deployed to assist in the anti-epidemic operations by their departments. These colleagues, though not working in the frontline, have also made significant contribution to the anti-epidemic work.

Professionalism: Solid Support Provided by Professional Departments

10. The professional grades of the civil service have provided strong, high quality and efficient support for the carrying out of the anti-epidemic measures. They have demonstrated remarkable professionalism in the provision of hardware facilities such as quarantine centres, and also software applications such as the “LeaveHomeSafe” mobile app and the “Retrun2HK” Scheme Online Booking System, scientific virus tracing and testing, as well as legislative work and dissemination of information. The professional staff have strived for frequent breakthroughs in these tasks within time and resources constraints.

(a) Office of the Government Chief Information Officer

The use of information technology (IT) has played a critical role in the anti-epidemic work. To facilitate the quarantine work, ITB/OGCIO, in collaboration with the IT sector, have developed the use of “StayHomeSafe” mobile app and electronic wristbands to monitor those persons placed under compulsory home quarantine. OGCIO has also developed a number of information

systems, including the “Retrun2HK” Scheme Online Booking System, and the appointment booking system and registration system for the UCTP and CVP to facilitate appointment and registration of information by the public. In addition, OGCIO developed the “LeaveHomeSafe” exposure notification mobile app for public download to encourage the public to keep a more precise record of their whereabouts. To expedite the introduction of various schemes by the departments, OGCIO always deployed its manpower flexibly to develop the systems within a very short span of time. Over 600 OGCIO staff (including contract staff) were involved in the development and support of the above range of IT systems and supporting services.

(b) Works Departments

In respect of quarantine facilities, the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) speedily carried out and completed the site formation and infrastructure works as well as a total of 400 quarantine units over the virgin ground at Penny’s Bay, and then ArchSD completed the construction of additional quarantine units thereat, boosting the supply of quarantine units by more than four times within the Penny's Bay Quarantine Camp.

As for healthcare facilities, with the support of the Central Government, an additional Community Treatment Facility (CTF) with 952 beds was set up at the AsiaWorld-Expo (AWE) within a month. Also, a temporary hospital (now named as North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre, HKICC) with 816 beds in negative pressure wards was built on a piece of land next to AWE within four months. The Development Bureau led a Working Group to coordinate with the Mainland counterparts for the construction of CTF and HKICC in accordance with the Hong Kong’s standards and statutory requirements. To make the site available, CEDD swiftly designed and constructed a new vehicular access to the AWE Public Transport Interchange within three weeks to facilitate the construction of the temporary hospital. With the concerted effort of various parties, the CTF and HKICC were completed and handed over to HA on 8 October 2020 and 20

January 2021 respectively. These facilities, which were completed speedily in an unprecedented manner, have greatly increased the resilience of the Hong Kong healthcare system against the pandemic.

(c) Environmental Protection Department and Drainage Services Department

In collaboration with a cross-disciplinary academic team of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), a joint professional team of the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) and the Drainage Services Department (DSD) monitors COVID-19 virus spread in local communities through a novel technique of testing the presence of the virus in sewage. The research started in October 2020 with 26 fixed monitoring points set up at sewerage facilities across the territory. Up to mid-February 2021, over 50 infection cases had been identified from compulsory tests ordered on building residents based upon positive virus signals from sewage tests. These successful attempts of tracking down COVID-19 infection cases through combined testing of sewage and compulsory testing on residents are unprecedented elsewhere in the world. To sustain a long-term COVID-19 surveillance programme, EPD and DSD are actively building up the capacity of sewage sampling and testing and facilitating the transfer of the novel testing technology from HKU to commercial laboratories.

(d) Department of Justice

Most of the new measures and programmes required to combat the disease are unprecedented and therefore new legislation is required to provide the legal basis for them. In response to instructions to prepare such legislation, the Department of Justice (DoJ) expeditiously delivered the legal advice and legislation needed. To date, over 60 pieces of legislation, including ten new pieces of subsidiary legislation², some of which prepared in about a week's time, and more than 50 subsequent amendments to them, have

² Including nine under the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance (Cap. 599) and the Medical Laboratory Technologists (Special Exemptions) Regulation (Cap. 359R).

been made in relation to border control, compulsory quarantine and testing, maintaining social distancing, implementing the mandatory wearing of masks, the UCTP and the CVP according to the changing demands for protecting public health at the relevant time.

In relation to law enforcement, legal support has been provided to bureaux and LEAs regarding cases in violation of the legislation. Public Prosecutors of the DoJ advised LEAs on questions of sufficiency of evidence, appropriateness of charge and venue of trial. Once criminal proceedings have been initiated, prosecutors are engaged to attend the hearings to deal with these cases in courts including taking pleas, attending sentencing hearings, and prosecuting trials and any appeals arising.

(e) Information Services Department

In view of the latest epidemic developments, ISD has to disseminate messages to the media and the public expeditiously so as to ensure that the most updated information is received by the public. Through enhancing coordination and working with the concerned bureaux and departments closely, large scale promotion and publicity work of the anti-epidemic measures has been launched through various channels. Since January 2020, ISD, in collaboration with concerned bureaux and departments, produced more than 30 announcements in the public interests on television and radio, as well as videos in social media platforms to facilitate the dissemination of the Government's anti-epidemic work on various fronts in a timely manner. ISD also conducts promotional work related to the anti-epidemic measures outside Hong Kong. In respect of large scale and territory-wide measures such as the UCTP and CVP, ISD produced promotional materials to provide details on the schemes, from simple leaflets to explanations involving complicated scientific issues, within very short period of time. ISD acts at the forefront to facilitate thorough understanding of the public on the importance and advantages of these measures so that they can be taken forward smoothly to meet the expected targets. On the other hand, ISD

closely monitors public opinions and makes clarifications in response to misinformation to avoid the public from being misled. Furthermore, to facilitate more comprehensive understanding of the latest situation of the epidemic by the public, the Government with the collaboration of the industry launched the "Interactive Map Dashboard on the Latest Situation of Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Hong Kong", with a view to updating the information of the epidemic to the public at a glance.

Speedy Action: All Departments Strive to Complete the Work Within Very Short Timeframe

11. The fight against the pandemic is a race against time. Departments need to act expeditiously in order to implement the anti-epidemic measures within the shortest timeframe. While the professional departments mentioned above provide support to the development of hardware and software as well as implementation of legislative work and publicity work within an extremely short period of time, there are examples in which many departments have consolidated their manpower resources to participate in other anti-epidemic work, so that the Government can carry out the necessary measures promptly.

(a) Designated Quarantine Hotel Scheme

To further reduce the chance of cross-infection between returnees undergoing quarantine and other local guests, the Designated Quarantine Hotel Scheme (the Scheme) was launched in December 2020. Under the Scheme, people entering Hong Kong from places outside China are subject to compulsory quarantine for 21 days in designated quarantine hotels. DH and other relevant departments such as EMSD, Buildings Department and Auxiliary Medical Service conducted inspections of the hotels within a tight schedule to ensure that the design, facilities and workflow of the designated quarantine hotels fulfill the infection control requirements and the drainage systems in these hotels are in good working order complying with the statutory requirements. Since December 2020, a total of 26 000 returnees were

accommodated in these hotels and 85 confirmed cases were identified in the hotels.

(b) Quarantine Centre in Chun Yeung Estate

Converting Chun Yeung Estate into a quarantine centre is another challenge. Due to the tight schedule for making available a large number of quarantine units at Chun Yeung Estate in February 2020, EMSD had mobilised about 70 staff members to install electrical and mechanical equipment, such as gas water heaters and lighting units in phases at more than 3 000 residential units in the estate. To make available over 3 000 quarantine units, GLD had arranged urgent procurement, delivery and installation of furniture, electrical appliances and household items to each of these quarantine units. OGCIO also arranged the installation of Wi-Fi service for use by confinees in over 1 000 quarantine units in less than ten days.

Concerted Effort: Mobilisation of Retired Civil Servants, Volunteers, and Non-civil Service Contract Staff in addition to Serving Civil Servants

12. In the past 13 months, apart from serving civil servants and other government employees such as non-civil service contract staff, we have also mobilised about 2 100 retired civil servants to provide support for implementing various programmes and measures, such as supporting the operation of quarantine centres, manning telephone hotlines, participating in the production of anti-epidemic equipment, etc. during different periods of time. It is most impressive that those retired civil servants who are enjoying stable retirement life have responded proactively to the appeal of the Government in assisting the anti-epidemic work on a voluntary basis. Some of them even took the initiative to call the hotline of CSB to enquire the way of participating in the anti-epidemic work. Their contribution to the community and dedication to serve the public are highly commendable.

LOOKING AHEAD

13. The efforts in fighting against the virus are still on-going. All colleagues in the civil service will continue to take forward the anti-epidemic measures with commitment and professionalism. In taking forward the anti-epidemic work, no matter which departments, grades and ranks the government staff come from, no matter whether they volunteer or are deployed in times of difficulties, the civil service as a whole is united with enthusiasm in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. As of early March 2021, more than 70 000 staff, including civil servants, contract staff and retired civil servants, etc. have been engaged in the implementation of various anti-epidemic programmes and operations. The Government will, depending on the development of the epidemic situation and actual needs, continue to flexibly deploy manpower to support the anti-epidemic effort, and do our best to enable the lives of all people and our economic activities to return to normalcy at the soonest.

ADVICE SOUGHT

14. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Civil Service Bureau
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