

**For Discussion  
on 20 March 2023**

**Legislative Council Panel on Public Service**

**The “Government-wide Mobilisation” Level under  
the Enhanced Mobilisation Protocol**

**Purpose**

This paper aims to brief Members on the newly introduced “government-wide mobilisation” level under the enhanced mobilisation protocol and to report on its first drill and review findings.

**Background**

2. At present, the Government has put in place a number of contingency plans to deal with different emergency situations, including the “Contingency Plan for Natural Disasters”, the “Emergency Response Operations Outside the HKSAR”, the “Daya Bay Contingency Plan”, etc. In the event of emergencies, the Government will activate the relevant contingency plans immediately and mobilise personnel of the dedicated departments to handle specific incidents according to their designated duties.

3. If there arises an emergency situation not covered by an existing contingency plan and considerable manpower is required to handle the situation, or one that is covered by an existing contingency plan, but the relevant departments handling the situation require extra manpower for logistics/supporting work, the Government will deploy civil servants from various departments to provide support as necessary. During the fifth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic, the Government deployed manpower to undertake anti-epidemic work in accordance with the aforesaid arrangement, involving more than 140 000 civil servants in anti-epidemic work at different times and in different posts. However, the mobilisation

arrangement at the time was subject to refinement and had room for enhancement.

4. The current-term Government believes that, in order to respond to major and unexpected incidents more effectively, the Government must maintain a sense of crisis. Ahead of incidents, the Government should devise deployment plans; as an incident arises, the senior echelon should intervene early and co-ordinate efforts, and should promptly mobilise sufficient manpower across departments when necessary, such that the Government's efficiency, flexibility and resilience in facing major incidents can be enhanced. For this reason, the Chief Executive (CE) announced in the 2022 Policy Address that, as an important measure to further improve governance, improve the systemic resilience and enhance the Government's emergency response capabilities, the existing mobilisation protocol would be enhanced in 2022 Q4 through the introduction of a "government-wide mobilisation" level, under which a list of designated personnel from various departments will be drawn up in advance to ensure that an auxiliary quick response unit (QRU) formed by government employees can be mobilised promptly during major incidents requiring considerable manpower support to provide immense manpower reinforcement for the core response team formed by dedicated departments. CE also undertook that the first drill under the "government-wide mobilisation" level would be conducted within 2023 Q1.

### **Implementation of the "Government-wide Mobilisation" Level**

5. In December 2022, the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) implemented the enhanced mobilisation protocol by introducing a "government-wide mobilisation" level and informed policy bureaux and departments (B/Ds) of the implementation details. The "government-wide mobilisation" level aims to institutionalise the principle of "early planning and early intervention" in handling emergency situations through setting up a command system, a rostering system and a mobilisation mechanism.

#### *Command System*

6. As mentioned above, the Government has put in place a well-

established mechanism and contingency plans to deal with different emergency situations. The “government-wide mobilisation” level is not a standing mechanism for handling incidents. Upon initiation of the “government-wide mobilisation level”, considerable manpower will need to be temporarily redeployed from normal duties, public services may be affected. As such, the mobilisation level will only be initiated under very exceptional circumstances. Specifically, when a major incident occurs, the policy bureau responsible for handling the incident (the Initiating Bureau) should only seek CE’s endorsement for initiation of the “government-wide mobilisation” level where, after assessment, it considers that the scale, seriousness or urgency of the incident is far beyond its capability in terms of manpower resources to handle or contain.

7. Upon CE’s endorsement for the initiation of the “government-wide mobilisation” level, the Initiating Bureau will promptly formulate, coordinate and take command of the entire emergency operation, including the necessary staff deployment to the QRU, work arrangements and other logistical support. A command centre will also be set up with a senior official of the Initiating Bureau as the commander. Besides, the Initiating Bureau will be in charge of matters relating to the operation, such as issuance of press releases and responding to media enquiries, etc. It will closely monitor the development of the incident, keep the manpower requirement under constant review, and make an early request for manpower reinforcement if necessary.

### *Rostering System*

8. Under the “government-wide mobilisation” level, at least 10 000 government staff can be mobilised promptly to form a QRU to provide support for the core response team in case of a major incident.

9. To achieve the goal of mobilising considerable manpower speedily, all B/Ds are required to draw up a list of designated personnel in advance. CSB has worked out the manpower requirements of individual B/Ds with reference to each B/D’s civil service strength. B/Ds will maintain rosters with three shifts of designated personnel on their lists to ensure that there will be sufficient rostered staff in case the emergency operation continues round-the-clock or for an extended period. In

addition, B/Ds are also required to reserve additional manpower as leave relief when drawing up the list to cater for the situations where some rostered staff need to take vacation or sick leave. In light of the operational needs of departments or exceptional circumstances of individual staff (such as medical grounds), Heads of Departments may exempt staff from being rostered. All B/Ds have already drawn up the list of designated personnel in accordance with the above principles.

### *Mobilisation mechanism*

10. In order to ensure smooth communication between the Initiating Bureau, CSB and B/Ds during major incidents, all B/Ds should designate an officer at directorate level to serve as their Coordinator. Coordinators are responsible for working out the internal communication arrangements within their B/Ds. When the “government-wide mobilisation” level is initiated, they serve as the contact person with the Initiating Bureau and CSB and are responsible for arranging designated personnel of their B/Ds to participate in the emergency operation.

11. Upon CE’s endorsement for the initiation of the “government-wide mobilisation” level, CSB will initiate the mobilisation mechanism immediately. Coordinators of B/Ds should immediately contact the staff rostered on shift one of their list of designated personnel and inform them to be on standby upon receipt of CSB’s notification. The Initiating Bureau will formulate the operational plans (including manpower arrangements, assignment of tasks, etc.), provide clear instructions to participating staff and make proper arrangements for the necessary logistical support and supplies before the operation, so as to ensure that the relevant staff will participate in the QRU’s operations under safe conditions.

12. As the supporting work to be assigned to members of the QRU will require no special skills, civilian staff will be able to discharge such duties. QRU members will mainly assist in performing managerial, supervisory, general support and logistical duties, depending on their salary points on the pay scale. In general, civil servants of senior level will be responsible for managerial and supervisory duties, whereas those of middle and junior levels will take up frontline support and logistical duties.

13. Individual B/Ds may need to provide specialist support according to their remits, such as information and communication technology support from the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer; procurement, transportation and logistics support from the Government Logistics Department (GLD), hotline services from the Efficiency Office, and provision of venues by the Home Affairs Department (HAD) and the Leisure and Cultural Services Department. CSB has reminded relevant B/Ds to draw up contingency plans in advance to facilitate the speedy deployment of staff when specialist support is required. B/Ds were also reminded to conduct in-house drills and exercises to familiarise the staff concerned with the procedures and arrangements for handling emergencies, thereby enhancing their emergency response capability.

### **First Drill under “Government-wide Mobilisation” Level**

14. CSB conducted the first drill under the “government-wide mobilisation” level on 16 February this year. Codenamed “Exercise Touchdown I”, the drill simulated a scenario in which Hong Kong would be significantly affected by a tsunami in the neighbouring waters, which was likely to result in serious flooding of low-lying areas, and a large number of residents would need to be evacuated to shelters on higher ground in a short time. There was a need to promptly mobilise staff across departments to form a QRU to assist in evacuating the affected residents immediately and arranging for distribution of various supplies and resources.

15. The purpose of the drill was to test the B/Ds’ capabilities in internal communication and prompt mobilisation of staff to form a QRU under the mobilisation mechanism, and the focus rested on the effectiveness of communication channels and the readiness of B/Ds’ Coordinators and designated personnel in emergency call-outs, so as to familiarise the participating units with the work process after initiation of the “government-wide mobilisation” level. To this end, CSB did not inform B/Ds of the arrangements and details of the drill in advance.

16. Besides, the “government-wide mobilisation” level is to cover

emergency situations which do not fall within the ambit of the existing contingency plans, and the nature and scope of actual operations can vary greatly. As such, unlike other contingency plans, CSB will not conduct drills for actual emergency handling operations. As far as the simulated scenario for this drill is concerned, staff participating in the field operation drill did not need to simulate assisting in evacuating the affected residents or arranging the distribution of supplies and resources. Given the difference in their nature, the drills under the “government-wide mobilisation” level will not replace those conducted under other contingency or rescue plans.

17. “Exercise Touchdown I” started at 11:45 am. Upon CSB’s notification, all B/Ds had to inform staff rostered on shift one of their list of designated personnel as quickly as possible to be on standby according to their established internal communication arrangements (i.e. a total of around 10 000 staff from 77 B/Ds and the Independent Commission Against Corruption), in order to test the effectiveness of the communication mechanism and the means of communication.

18. In order to test the capabilities of the departments and the readiness of their designated personnel in emergency call-outs during an emergency operation, 26 B/Ds had to participate in field operation drill. In the drill, six of the departments had to deploy 50 staff members each (i.e. 300 staff members in total) to arrive at the North Point Community Hall within a specified time to simulate receiving a pre-operation briefing. Meanwhile, each of the other 20 B/Ds had to deploy 30 staff members (i.e. 600 staff members in total) to arrive and assemble at their self-arranged designated locations within a specified time for briefings. The Hong Kong Police Force and the GLD also participated in the drill in accordance with their remits, simulating the need to enhance police presence in the district to maintain law and order and to provide logistic support, while the Efficiency Office simulated the provision of enquiry hotline support services.

### **Effectiveness Assessment and Follow-up Work**

19. CSB immediately reviewed and analysed the effectiveness of the

drill once it had drawn to a close. Data and feedback were collected through time records provided and surveys completed by departments. The time records mainly set out the time taken for B/Ds to contact all the staff rostered on shift one of their list of designated personnel after receiving notification from CSB, and the time at which each participant of the field operation drill arrived at the designated locations; while the surveys captured the means of internal communication and rostering arrangements of B/Ds and their feedback on the effectiveness of the drill. B/Ds were also asked to review their rostering and internal communication arrangements, and suggest ways to improve them.

20. Having reviewed the data, we have the following findings:

- (a) All 900 staff members participating in the field operation drill arrived at the designated locations on time;
- (b) The three departments (namely, the Hong Kong Police Force, the GLD and the Efficiency Office) that were required to simulate the provision of specialist support in the drill were able to act in accordance with the specified requirements, including deploying swiftly staff members and vehicles to arrive at the site of the drill at the specified time, and setting up support hotlines; and
- (c) Most B/Ds contacted and disseminated messages to rostered staff by instant messaging applications with the aid of follow-up phone calls, while some B/Ds with a smaller establishment contacted their staff by phone only. Upon notification by CSB, 70% of the B/Ds were able to inform staff rostered on shift one of the list of designated personnel to be on standby within two hours, and the vast majority of the rest managed to do the same within three hours.

21. As reflected by individual departments which took more time to call upon staff rostered on shift one of the list of designated personnel, a longer time was needed given their relatively large establishments and the relatively large number of staff they had to contact. However, we noticed that some departments with a comparable establishment were able to complete the relevant process within two hours despite the need to contact

a large number of staff. It follows that there is little correlation between the number of staff to be contacted and the time taken to contact them. The drill indicates that there is room for further enhancement to B/Ds' internal communication mechanism. In fact, many departments have reported that they will increase the number of designated officers responsible for mobilising staff and make better use of the functions of instant messaging applications in the future.

22. Moreover, a number of departments reported that in contacting staff, they spent considerable time to address their staff's enquiries about the drill and the detailed arrangements. Some staff expressed concerns over the possible initiation of the "government-wide mobilisation" level, duties for which they were responsible, staff safety, rostering arrangements, and whether they could take vacation leave or travel outside Hong Kong while on roster. As this was the first drill after the introduction of the "government-wide mobilisation" level, we understand that colleagues have concerns over the above issues. As it was necessary for departments to explain the details in the process, it took longer time for them to complete the drill.

23. To summarise the experience of the first drill, enhancing the internal communication mechanism and raising the awareness of the "government-wide mobilisation" level among government staff are crucial to its efficient operation when the mobilisation level is initiated. In this regard, CSB will share the exemplary experience and best practices of various departments for other B/Ds' reference to help them enhance their internal communication capabilities. As for raising staff awareness, in view of the doubts and concerns of some colleagues about the "government-wide mobilisation" level, we provided all B/Ds with the necessary information on 10 March to help them address commonly asked questions raised by staff regarding the "government-wide mobilisation" level, and requested them, in particular, to review their existing rostering arrangements with a view to ensuring that the duration of the rosters is reasonable and that a healthy rotation of staff is maintained. In addition to regular and timely updating of the contact information of designated personnel, B/Ds are also required to brief their staff on the modus operandi of the "government-wide mobilisation" level (including their rostering arrangements), how the internal communication mechanism will function



upon initiation of the mobilisation level, the expected roles and obligations of designated personnel, etc., in order to enhance staff understanding of the policy objectives and the detailed arrangements of the new mobilisation level.

24. For B/Ds providing specialist support, we have reminded them again of the need to devise as early as possible contingency plans and operational manuals according to their remits following the introduction of the “government-wide mobilisation” level. The B/Ds concerned have enhanced their measures accordingly. Take the Efficiency Office as an example, its 1823 call centre has worked out an action plan, which includes a three-level mobilisation plan that can be activated as necessary. 1823 has also coordinated with major government call centres so that hotline service, if needed, can be provided as soon as possible upon initiation of the “government-wide mobilisation” level. As for HAD, based on its experiences in handling inclement weather and other major incidents, it will open up community halls for venue support when the “government-wide mobilisation” level is initiated. In addition, HAD will also activate its emergency response and relief services in its headquarters and 18 district offices. They will liaise with district organisations where necessary to disseminate government information and reflect the views of the public to the Government. Voluntary groups will also be called upon to provide appropriate assistance, if needed, etc.

25. We believe that all civil servants have the aspiration to serve the public with dedication, and when Hong Kong faces an adversity will work in cohesion to help the public. The setup of the “government-wide mobilisation” will enable the Government to mobilise civil servants in a more organised, systematic and efficient manner. CSB will continue to conduct regular drills in the future to further strengthen the execution capabilities of all participating units upon the initiation of the “government-wide mobilisation” level, with a view to enhancing the mobility and responsiveness of the civil service, and cultivating flexibility and efficiency in the organisational culture.

**Advice Sought**

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

**Civil Service Bureau  
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