

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE
Meeting on 16 February 2004

**Enhanced commendation schemes
in the civil service**

Purpose

The Administration is committed to upholding high standards of performance and conduct in the civil service. The performance management and commendation systems that we have built up over the years are reviewed and enhanced from time to time. This paper presents for Members' information the evolutionary changes that we have recently introduced to our commendation system.

Background

2. Maintaining a clean, effective and dedicated civil service is essential for ensuring the continued stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. Due to economic re-structuring and other factors affecting the performance of our economy, all sectors of the community have to go through a difficult period of adjustment in recent years. The civil service is no exception. In the face of persistent budgetary constraints, the need to down-size the civil service as part of wider measures to tackle the fiscal deficit, as well as the rising expectations and rapidly changing demands of the community we serve, the civil service is going through a period of immense pressure and challenges. The civil service as a whole has persevered and continued to provide quality service to the public, with dedication and professionalism.

3. To maintain an environment in which civil servants are well motivated to deliver quality service that meets the rising expectations of the general public, we need a robust commendation system that would help induce proactive as well as sustained exemplary performance from civil servants. In the 2003 Policy Agenda, we undertook to consider enhancing the commendation system in the civil service.

Present position

4. Hitherto, civil servants may be awarded under either one of the two commendation schemes detailed in paragraphs 5 to 7 below.

The Chief Executive(CE)'s Honours and Awards System

5. Under the CE's Honours and Awards System, public officers (including civil servants) may be nominated for various honours and awards having regard to the level of their contributions to the well being of society. In the past three years, about 120 civil servants received awards under this system annually.

The Commendation Letter Scheme (CLS)

6. The Commendation Letter Scheme is basically administered at the departmental level. Under the scheme, bureau or departmental management may issue a commendation letter to an officer who has –

- (a) made a significant contribution towards enhancing the efficiency or the image of his bureau/department, a contribution beyond that required of his normal duties; or
- (b) performed a meritorious or brave act warranting special recognition.

7. Nominations under the CLS may be made all year round and they will be considered by a commendation committee set up by individual bureau/department under the chairmanship of a directorate officer. In 2002, some 1200 commendation letters were issued.

Review

8. In 2003, we conducted a review on the operation and efficacy of the commendation system. We saw scope for enhancing the system, having regard to the following observations :

- (a) the number of civil servants awarded under the CE's Honours and Awards System is limited and quite rightly so as the system aims at giving recognition to contributions from all sectors of the community;
- (b) strong demands are being placed on civil servants to contribute proactively towards business re-engineering, cost-saving and efficiency improvements etc. Such demands are likely to prevail. A more robust approach in commendation is called for to encourage and recognize contributions on these fronts;
- (c) departmental participation in the present CLS is less than even and most of the recipients were from the disciplined services. There appears to be room for inducing a wider cross-section of departments to come forward with nominations. Expanding the ambit of the CLS may help in this respect; and
- (d) we have a good number of civil servants with consistently outstanding performance which just falls short of the requirements for the CE's Commendation for Government/Public Service. We see room for an additional tier of award which enables the Administration to show its appreciation of their sterling efforts.

The Enhanced Commendation System

9. In the light of the review findings outlined in paragraph 8 above and following consultation with bureaux/departments and the staff sides, we have enhanced the commendation system by –

- (a) expanding the ambit of the CLS so that civil servants with consistently outstanding performance may be awarded. NCSC staff may also qualify for an award under certain circumstances; and
- (b) introducing the Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS)'s Commendation Award, as a separate tier of award between the CE's Honours and Awards System and the CLS. Through the

award, SCS will, on behalf of the Administration, give recognition to selected civil servants for consistently outstanding performance.

10. Details of the enhanced commendation system in the civil service are given in paragraphs 11 to 16 below.

The Enhanced CLS

11. Under this enhanced scheme, a Head of Bureau/Department may issue a Commendation Letter to an officer who has:

- (a) provided outstanding service for a reasonably long period of time; or
- (b) made a substantial contribution towards enhancing the efficiency or the image of his bureau/department/grade; or
- (c) performed an exceptionally meritorious act warranting special recognition.

12. To qualify for an award under paragraph 11(a) above, an officer should have provided consistently outstanding or exemplary service for at least 3 consecutive years. Reference will be made, where applicable, to past performance appraisals, having regard to the general standards of reporting for the grade(s) concerned. The intention is to identify the truly deserving cases of exemplary performance and give due recognition.

13. The criterion under paragraph 11(b) applies to situations where a member of staff has acted in an exemplary manner beyond that required of his normal duties. For the purpose of paragraph 11(c), a meritorious act may be a brave act, or special endeavour voluntarily undertaken by a staff in coping with a crisis or an emergency situation. The nature of the crisis or emergency may or may not be job-related, but the act of the staff should be praise-worthy and have the effect of promoting the image of the bureau/department/grade or the Government.

The Secretary for the Civil Service (SCS)'s Commendation Award Scheme

14. The newly introduced SCS's Commendation Award Scheme is administered by the Civil Service Bureau (CSB). To qualify for an award under the Scheme, the officer should be an exceptionally meritorious officer who has been providing outstanding performance for at least 5 consecutive years. In considering making nominations to the CSB, Heads of Bureaux/Departments/Grades are requested to make reference, where applicable, to past staff appraisals, having regard to the general standards of reporting for the grade(s) concerned. Similar to the CLS, the intention is to identify the truly deserving cases of exemplary performance and give due recognition on a service-wide basis.

15. This Scheme will not cover staff engaged on NCSC terms in the first instance, but the matter will be reviewed later in the light of experience. As regards the number of awards, an initial target is set at 80 awards per annum for indicative purpose. It can be relaxed for deserving cases. The number of awards will also be reviewed in the light of experience.

16. To underline the importance we attach to the contributions of recipients of the SCS's Commendation, the awards will be presented by SCS at a ceremony to be held annually, in the presence of guests invited by the recipients.

Implementation

17. The enhanced commendation system has come into operation in January 2004. The first batch of "SCS's Commendation" is expected to be awarded in the second quarter of 2004.

18. In the light of experience in administering the enhanced system, we will introduce further improvements as and when required.