

**For discussion on
19 November 2012**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE

Conditioned Hours of Work of the Operational Staff in the Fire Stream of the Fire Services Department

PURPOSE

This paper briefs Members on the policy governing the conditioned hours of work of the civil service, with specific reference to the operational staff in the Fire Stream of the Fire Services Department (FSD).

BACKGROUND

2. The Administration provided two information papers on the conditioned hours of work for the civilian grades and the disciplined services vide LC Paper No. CB(1)2978/10-11(01) and LC Paper No. CB(1)2978/10-11(02) in September 2011. The Administration further set out its policy governing the conditioned hours of work of the civil service vide LC Paper No. CB(1)788/11-12(03) in January 2012.

POLICY ON CONDITIONED HOURS OF WORK

3. Conditioned hours of work means the hours of duty which salary is calculated to cover and the hours which must be worked before overtime work is counted. There is no uniform conditioned hours of work in the civil service. Specific conditioned hours of work are laid down for different grades of civil servants (including civilian and disciplined services staff) according to operational requirements and other relevant considerations. The stipulated conditioned hours of work is taken into account when the Administration determines the pay of different civil service grades.

4. The policy on civil service pay is to offer remuneration sufficient to attract, retain and motivate staff of a suitable calibre to serve in the civil service, and such remuneration should be regarded as fair by both civil servants and the general public by maintaining broad comparability with the private sector pay. As the conditioned hours of work have been taken into account in determining the overall remuneration package offered to civil servants, a reduction in the stipulated conditioned hours of work of a grade without any change to its pay scale is an improvement to the pay and conditions of service of the specific grade. A reduction in the stipulated conditioned hours of work of a grade may also lead to a demand for additional manpower or a reduction in the level or quality of service provided to the public. Hence, any proposal to reduce the conditioned hours of work of a grade has to be carefully considered.

5. The Administration is open to proposals for reduction of conditioned hours of work provided that they are supported by reasonable grounds and justifications. It will consider any proposal to reduce the conditioned hours of work of a particular grade against the three prerequisites of cost-neutrality, no additional manpower, and maintaining the same level of service to the public. It will also consider the duties and responsibilities of the concerned grade, the operational requirements, the manpower situation, the implications of reduction on other civil service grades, and other relevant factors. Each proposal will be considered on its own merits and the advice of the relevant advisory body¹ will be sought and taken into account in the Administration's decision.

CONDITIONED HOURS OF WORK OF DISCIPLINED SERVICES GRADES

General

6. The conditioned hours of work of the various disciplined services grades have evolved over the years as explained in LC Paper No. CB(1)2978/10-11(02). The existing position is set out at **Annex A**. In its report on the pay and conditions of service of the disciplined services grades (i.e. the 2008 Report on the Grade Structure Review (GSR) of the Disciplined Services), the Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service (SCDS) noted that the conditioned hours of work of the disciplined services varied, and that any direct comparison of conditioned hours of work was inappropriate as it was necessary to take into account the operational nature of different grades, including the intensity of efforts during the conditioned hours of work. It also reaffirmed that proposals for reduction in conditioned hours of work should be considered having regard to the three prerequisites described in paragraph 5 above.

¹ The Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service and the Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service are responsible for advising and making recommendations to the Chief Executive on matters concerning the pay and conditions of service of non-directorate civil service grades, including the conditioned hours of work of individual grades.

Operational Staff in the Fire Stream of FSD

7. As explained in LC Paper No. CB(1)2978/10-11(02), the conditioned hours of work of operational staff in the Fire Stream of the FSD have evolved over time and different shift patterns have been implemented to complement the changes in conditioned hours of work. A summary showing the changes in the conditioned hours of work and shift patterns of operational staff in the Fire Stream is set out at **Annex B**.

8. The current arrangement of 54 hours gross conditioned hours of work per week with a unique shift system of “24 hours on, 48 hours off” was reviewed by the SCDS in the context of the GSR undertaken in 2007-08. In its 2008 Report, the SCDS noted that the working hours of operational staff in the Fire Stream involved standby and rest time; and the unique shift pattern also offered the incidental benefits of incurring less travelling time and cost and reducing the total number of working days. It advised that any reduction in the existing conditioned hours of work for this group of staff should be considered against the three prerequisites set out in paragraph 6 above, and that the department should explore further with the staff and the Administration on the feasibility of reducing the conditioned hours of staff concerned, using an incremental approach and starting with a pilot scheme where appropriate.

9. The operational staff in the Fire Stream have to respond to emergency call-outs any time during their 24-hour shift. Generally speaking, apart from being on standby, each 24-hour shift comprises 11 hours of arranged duties (including drills for fire fighting and rescue, district visits, fire safety inspections and station routines etc.) and 13 hours of physical training, meal breaks, standby and rest time. Under the existing shift arrangement, operational staff in the Fire Stream perform 9.75 shifts of 24-hour duty per month (or working for around 10 whole days a month or 120 days a year).

FSD’s Proposal to Reduce the Fire Stream Staff’s Conditioned Hours of Work

10. We understand that pursuant to the SCDS’s recommendations in its 2008 Report, the FSD management has been in discussion with the concerned staff associations on various possible ways to reduce the conditioned hours of work of operational staff in the Fire Stream against the three prerequisites described in paragraph 5 above. Having regard to operational needs (with particular reference to service demand in recent years), the manpower situation and the views of the staff associations concerned, the FSD management has recently formulated a new proposal to reduce the conditioned hours of Fire Stream staff from 54 hours to 51 hours per week² (“new 51 proposal”). The proposed reduction is achieved mainly through process re-engineering having regard to the enhanced functionalities of the fire appliances/equipment currently

² The FSD management drew up a proposal back in February 2012 for reducing the conditioned hours of work of operational staff of the Fire Stream to 51 hours per week through scaling down of fire appliances and manpower during night time, having regard to the service demand data in the past years. The proposal was not subsequently pursued since less than half of the respondents supported the conduct of a trial scheme for the purpose as revealed in an opinion survey conducted among relevant staff.

available, as well as the adoption of various efficiency measures taking into account the operational experience in recent years.

11. The key features of the proposal include the following:

(a) ***Streamlining the manning for designated types of fire appliances / vessel***

With technological advancement in equipment which alleviates laborious operations, FSD considers that the number of firemen on certain fire appliances/vessel (such as Major Pumps and Light Rescue Units) can be slightly reduced without compromising the service standard or the level of safety of frontline staff. FSD will ensure that sufficient manpower is available to meet the requirements at scene by adopting a vigorous strategy on deploying fire appliances.

(b) ***Rationalising the staffing complement and resource deployment in selected areas / units***

FSD sees scope in rationalising the manpower or type of fire appliances deployed in selected areas/units after conducting an operational review. For example, experienced and properly trained staff at a lower rank can also effectively assume the officer-in-charge posts of two rapid intervention vehicles deployed at the airport fire station.

(c) ***Re-structuring the FSD's diving unit***

FSD proposes to restructure the diving unit by strategically deploying some divers to serve on fireboats and solidifying the back up support and training of divers by setting up a Diving Operation and Training Support Team at the Diving Base while suspending the use of one diving tender with relatively low utilisation rate. The rationalisation will not result in any reduction in the number of qualified divers available for deployment and will not affect operational efficiency.

Under the proposal, operational firemen will be able to enjoy more rota leave ³.

³ At present, operational firemen are entitled to one rota leave (equivalent to three calendar days) in around 34 days, on top of the 48-hour time off entitled by the staff under the "24 hours on, 48 hours off" shift pattern and their annual entitlement.

12. A comprehensive opinion survey was conducted by FSD management in August 2012 to gauge the views of all 6 335 operational staff of the Fire Stream on the “new 51 proposal”. The survey recorded a high response rate of about 91.4%. Over half of the respondents (55.9% or 3 240 staff) indicated support to the proposal, as opposed to about 29.6% (1 712 staff) who were not supportive⁴. The ratio of respondents who supported and objected the proposal was about 2:1. Two out of the three concerned staff associations have also indicated their support to the “new 51 proposal”. The FSD management has been exchanging views and maintaining dialogue with all concerned staff associations, with a view to refining the proposal and then seeking the agreement of the concerned bureaux to implement the trial scheme. During the trial, the FSD management will closely monitor the situation and staff feedback and will ensure that the level of service provided to the public would be maintained. Upon successful completion of the trial scheme and subject to the ultimate endorsement for FSD to reduce the conditioned working hours of operational staff in the Fire Stream to 51 hours per week, FSD will study the feasibility of further reducing their weekly conditioned working hours to 48 hours.

Civil Service Bureau
Security Bureau
Fire Services Department
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⁴ About 12.9% (748 staff) indicated no comment on the proposal and the remaining 1.6% (92 staff) of the questionnaires returned were invalid (such as returning blank form or with more than one choice made).

**Conditioned Hours of Work of the Disciplined Services
(as at 1 September 2012)**

Disciplined services	Conditioned hours of work per week	
Hong Kong Police Force	48 hours gross	
Fire Services Department	Ambulance Officer grade	44 hours gross
	Fireman / Station Officer grades (Control Stream) and Ambulanceman grade	48 hours gross
	Fireman / Station Officer grades (Operational / Marine Stream)*	54 hours gross
Correctional Services Department	48 hours gross	
Customs and Excise Department	48 hours gross	
Immigration Department	44 hours gross	
Government Flying Service	44 hours gross	

* Including staff of the Control Stream who are deployed to undertake duties related to Fire Stream operations.

**Changes in Conditioned Hours of Work and Shift Patterns of
Operational Staff in the Fire Stream**

Year	Conditioned hours of work per week	Shift pattern
Before 1965	84 hours gross	Information not available
1965	72 hours gross	“24 hours on, 24 hours off”
1980	60 hours gross	“24 hours on, 24 hours off”
1990	54 hours gross	“12 hours on, 24 hours off” (from August 1990 to March 1992) “24 hours on, 48 hours off” (from April 1992 onwards)