

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE
Meeting on 15 January 2007

Commendation schemes for civil servants

Purpose

At the Panel meeting on 16 October 2006, Members made some observations on the award of commendations for civil servants. The purpose of this paper is to brief the Panel on the commendation schemes in the civil service.

Background

2. The Administration is committed to upholding high standards of performance and conduct in the civil service. Maintaining a clean, effective and dedicated civil service is essential in ensuring the continued stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. To maintain an environment in which civil servants are motivated to deliver quality service that meets the rising expectations of the general public, we need a fair commendation system that would help induce proactive and sustained exemplary performance from civil servants.

Present position

3. There are four commendation schemes applicable to civil servants. They are briefly described in the paragraphs below.

The Honours and Awards System of the HKSAR

4. This is a community-wide honours recognition system and is not limited to civil servants only. Each year, members of the public and public officers (including civil servants) are nominated for various honours and awards having regard to their contribution to Hong Kong and their public and community service. The recipients for the different types of awards (e.g.

Bauhinia Awards, Medal of Honour, Bravery Awards, Disciplined Services and ICAC Awards, Chief Executive's Commendation) are decided by the Chief Executive on the recommendation of an Honours Committee comprising government officials and eminent community leaders. Since July 1997, an average of around 120 civil servants have received awards each year, including around 30 who received the Chief Executive's Commendation Award and around 60 who received various Disciplined Services and ICAC Awards. The full list of recipients is published every year. The Chief Executive personally presents the award to each recipient, in the presence of guests invited by the recipients, at a ceremony (in two parts) held in the Government House each year.

The Commendation Letter Scheme (CLS)

5. This is a civil service-specific recognition scheme and is administered at the bureau/departmental level. Under it, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments may issue commendation letters to civil servants who have provided consistently outstanding service for at least three consecutive years; or have made significant contribution towards enhancing the efficiency or the image of his bureau/department; or have performed a meritorious or brave act warranting special recognition. Nominations may be made all year round and they are considered by a commendation committee set up by individual bureau/department under the chairmanship of a directorate officer. In recent years, an average of about 1,200 civil servants received commendation letters every year.

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

6. In 2004, we introduced this civil service-specific scheme as a separate tier of award between the Honours and Awards System of the HKSAR and the bureau/departmental Commendation Letter Scheme. Each year, SCS, on behalf of the Administration, gives recognition to selected civil servants on a service-wide basis for consistently outstanding and exemplary performance. To qualify for an award under the Scheme, a civil servant needs to provide outstanding performance for at least five consecutive years. The number of recipients per annum is targeted at 80, which may be relaxed for exceptionally deserving cases. Nominations are made by Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments/Grades to CSB. The recipients are

decided by SCS on the recommendation of an Award Committee, comprising representatives of CSB, relevant Bureaux and Heads of Grades.

7. The awards are presented by SCS at a ceremony held annually, in the presence of guests invited by the recipients and representatives from bureaux/departmental management. Each award recipient receives a certificate of recognition and a gold pin. For those award recipients who have 20 or more years of service and have not enjoyed government sponsored external travel before, they and their spouse also receive a travel award. In 2006, 75 civil servants from 37 bureaux/departments received the award.

The Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme

8. Different from the above three schemes which are designed to recognize individuals, the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme aims to promote team work within the civil service. Organized by CSB since 1999 at approximately biennial frequency, it recognises teams of civil servants and departments for their outstanding achievements in providing quality services to the public. Awards under the Scheme are presented at three levels, namely:

- team awards for service enhancement in specific service areas such as the application of technology and innovation;
- departmental awards, comprising the Service Enhancement Award and the Best Public Image Award; and
- inter-departmental Partnership Award for quality services to the public through collaboration among government departments.

9. Participating teams and departments undergo a rigorous adjudication process. A two-staged adjudication process is adopted for the team awards and the departmental Service Enhancement Award. Stage one includes screening of written submissions, conducting site visits and short interviews by a board of examiners; while stage two requires short-listed teams and departments to give a presentation and answer questions from the final adjudication panels. The adjudicating panels consist of Legislative Councilors, District Councilors, representatives of professional bodies, staff of the Central Consultative Councils and officers from CSB. The

departmental Best Public Image Award is decided through voting by the public (selected by random sample). All members of the Legislative Council and the District Council are invited to select the winner of the inter-departmental Partnership Award.

10. A prize presentation ceremony is held to publicly recognise and publicize the achievements of the winning teams/departments. In 2005, 57 awards (champion, first runner-up, second runner-up and merit awards) were given to 27 departments. They comprised of 27 awards at the team level for five different service categories (namely Frontline/Counter Service, Internal Service, Specialised Service, E-service, and Innovation/Application of Technology), 11 awards at the departmental level for the Best Public Image Award and the two categories of Service Enhancement Award (the large and small departments categories respectively), and 19 awards at the inter-departmental level for the collaborating departments' outstanding achievements in the best three partnership projects.

Engaging the public in recognising civil servants with outstanding performance

11. As described above, members of the public are already directly involved in the selection of the Best Public Image Award under the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme. We will broaden the adjudication for this Award to include members of the Legislative Council and District Councils when it next takes place in 2007. For the other awards under this Scheme, we will increase private sector participation through joining forces with the Hong Kong Management Association and inviting seasoned practitioners and experts from the finance, hospitality, property management and public utilities sectors to form boards of examiners to conduct the first round of assessment. We consider this will help enhance the objectivity of the assessment process and facilitate benchmarking with the private sector.

12. For privacy consideration, the Commendation Letter Scheme and the SCS's Commendation Award are not readily amenable to public participation. This is because the assessments for both schemes are made on the basis of the performance and contribution of individual civil servants, which require access to their personal information and performance

appraisals. There is also the consideration that the performance of some civil servants whose work does not have a direct interface with the public may not be known to and easily assessed by the general public.

Publicity of the outstanding work of civil servants

13. We take every opportunity to publicise the civil-service specific award schemes. For example, at the 2006 SCS's Commendation Award presentation ceremony held on 27 November 2006, some of the award recipients were interviewed by journalists. The overall media coverage was considered positive. For the coming 2007 Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme, we will organise an award presentation ceremony and arrange publicity through TV documentaries.

14. We are also actively exploring other ways to enhance the publicity of the outstanding work of civil servants. These include radio programmes, newspaper supplements and broadcasting of video programmes at waiting areas of public service counters. We will also liaise with schools and youth groups to organise promotional projects to recognise exemplary services and enhance public understanding of the work of the civil servants.

Conclusion

15. Award schemes are useful management tools to recognise good performance, to boost staff morale and to encourage further improvement in the delivery of public service. We will continue to make use of them judiciously.

16. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.