

For discussion
on 20 October 2008

Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

Policy Initiatives of the Civil Service Bureau

Purpose

The 2008/09 Policy Address and Agenda set out the Government's new and on-going initiatives. This paper elaborates on the initiatives relating to the Civil Service Bureau ("CSB").

New Initiative under the 2008/09 Policy Address

Reviewing performance pledges

2. Since 1992, performance pledges have been adopted by government bureaux and departments with the aim of providing good quality services to the public and engendering a citizen-centric culture in the delivery of public services. To date, some 50 government bureaux and departments directly serving the public have promulgated and published their performance pledges annually, informing customers what services are available, what the standards are and how these standards are met. These pledges are regularly monitored, reviewed and improved having regard to changes in circumstances. Over the years, performance pledges have helped improve government services to the public, and have greatly enhanced transparency as the public now know what to expect from government agencies and how those standards are being achieved.

3. To ensure that performance pledges meet present day circumstances, with continued focus on improving the quality of service provided, we will support Heads of Departments in reviewing their performance pledges in the coming year. The review will focus on the key elements underpinning performance pledges, namely 'achievement' (i.e. previous targets achieved and planned improvement); 'targets' (i.e. whether existing targets are appropriate and set in meaningful terms); 'monitoring' (i.e. arrangement to oversee performance); and 'communication' (i.e. arrangements for obtaining feedback

to improve services, promulgating performance pledges and their updates, handling appeals and complaints, etc). We will also commend and promote the best practices in performance pledges, and continue our customer service training in support of the implementation of performance pledges.

On-going Initiatives under the 2008/09 Policy Agenda

4. The 2008/09 Policy Agenda contains on-going initiatives on the management of the civil service in the chapter of “Developing Democracy and Enhancing Governance”. The implementation of these on-going initiatives is set out in the following paragraphs.

(a) Setting out the framework within which civil servants are expected to work with political appointees under an expanded Political Appointment System through the issue of a Civil Service Code

5. Earlier this year, the Administration has further developed the political appointment system by creating two additional layers of political appointment positions, namely, Deputy Director of Bureau and Political Assistant to Director of Bureau. To complement this development, we are drawing up a Civil Service Code which will be applicable to all civil servants. The Code will set out the core values which civil servants are expected to uphold, the role and responsibilities of civil servants in relation to politically appointed officials, and the framework within which civil servants are expected to work with political appointees. We will consult the staff sides and the LegCo Panel on Public Service on the Code before finalising it for promulgation.

(b) Continuing to control the size of the civil service by providing the necessary management tools to assist bureaux and departments to make more effective use of manpower resources and enhance efficiency, while at the same time giving due consideration of the need for additional manpower resources for delivering new and improved services

6. We will continue to control the size of the civil service in keeping with the “big market – small government” principle as well as the prudent management of public resources. We estimate the civil service establishment at end-March 2009 will stand at around 164 500, compared with the peak of around 198 000 in early 2000. Through measures such as internal deployment, streamlining, re-engineering, etc, we will continue to work with individual bureaux and departments to control the size of their establishment and to enhance efficiency. At the same time, we will ensure that they have the

necessary manpower to implement the various new policy initiatives in the 2008/09 Policy Address.

7. We are also mindful of the need to inject new talents into the civil service and to forestall succession problem in the longer term. Heads of Departments/Heads of Grades may now conduct open recruitment to fill vacancies in most grades as they consider necessary. For selected grades with existing/anticipated surplus staff or are in a state of obsolescence, or where new intakes generally come from in-service recruitment, they may conduct in-service recruitment to fill vacancies or conduct open recruitment with prior approval from the CSB.

(c) Continuing to provide civil servants with training and development opportunities. Continuing to enhance the variety and content of the training materials on our e-learning portal, and promote wider use of e-learning, as part of our endeavours to fortify a culture of continuous learning in the civil service

8. In order to ensure the civil service keeps pace with the changing environment and demands of the community, we are committed to providing civil servants at different ranks with a variety of training and development opportunities, thereby equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge.

9. Various management-related training programmes, such as leadership development, public engagement and people-based governance, are provided to middle managers and senior staff. We provide training to assist junior staff to cope with change. We also provide training on job skills and personal effectiveness to junior staff to enhance their capability to take on new job assignments with competence and confidence. We will continue with these efforts in the coming year.

10. Over the years, we have made continuous endeavours to deepen civil servants' knowledge in the latest developments in the Mainland through training courses, theme-based visits, civil service exchange and a dedicated website. We now offer national studies programmes at Tsinghua University, Peking University, China Foreign Affairs University, National School of Administration, Sun Yat-sen University and Peking University Shenzhen Graduate School. We also provide local national studies training to enhance civil servants' understanding of the latest political, social and economic developments in the Mainland. The Civil Service Exchange Programme with the Mainland now covers Guangdong, Shanghai, Beijing and Hangzhou. We will continue to enrich our dedicated website on national studies to provide more learning resources.

11. We will continue to enhance the quality and variety of the e-learning resources available at the Cyber Learning Centre Plus (“CLC Plus”) website in order to facilitate the pursuit of continuous learning among civil servants. There are now nearly 300 web courses and job aids on language, information technology, management, and a whole array of e-learning resources on national studies, health and stress management, etc.

(d) Continuing to implement an action plan which will ensure that the Basic Law forms an integral part of training for civil servants, and that the training is provided in a systematic and planned manner which takes into account the needs of civil servants of different levels and work nature

12. To enhance knowledge of the Basic Law among civil servants, we have launched an action plan in 2008/09 which includes the structured provision of introductory courses on the Basic Law for new appointees, intermediate and advanced courses for middle and senior civil servants and a web course for civil servants of all levels. We have also organised different activities to sustain the interests of civil servants, in particular junior and frontline civil servants, in the learning of Basic Law. In the coming year, we will continue to implement the action plan and closely monitor it to ensure that the various courses meet the needs of different levels of civil servants.

(e) Assessing Basic Law knowledge in civil service recruitment

13. To heighten public awareness of the Basic Law and promote a culture of learning of Basic Law in the community, we have included the assessment of Basic Law knowledge in the recruitment for all civil service jobs with effect from September 2008. The ways in which Basic Law knowledge are tested are set according to the different academic qualifications requirements stipulated for different types of civil service jobs. Thus far, around 45 000 candidates seeking civil service jobs have been assessed on their Basic Law knowledge.

(f) Continuing with the development of an effective arrangement for implementing both upward and downward pay adjustments in future, as part and parcel of the improved civil service pay adjustment mechanism

14. The management of civil service pay comprises three main components: (i) the conduct of a pay level survey every six years to ascertain whether civil service pay is broadly comparable with private sector pay; (ii) the conduct of a starting salaries survey every three years to ascertain whether the starting pay specified for different entry ranks in the civil service requiring

different qualifications is comparable with private sector jobs requiring similar qualifications; and (iii) the conduct of a pay trend survey every year to ascertain the average year-on-year movements in private sector pay.

15. Developing an effective arrangement for implementing both upward and downward pay adjustments is part and parcel of the initiative to develop an improved civil service pay adjustment mechanism. We have started discussions with the staff sides since 2007, and will continue to engage them in the coming year.

(g) Continuing to provide support to the relevant advisory bodies on civil service salaries and conditions of service to conduct grade structure reviews for the directorate grades, the disciplined services grades, and selected civilian grades facing recruitment and retention difficulties. We will take follow-up action upon receipt of their recommendations.

16. In late 2007, we invited the Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service, the Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service, and the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service to conduct grade structure reviews (“GSRs”) for the directorate grades, disciplined services grades and selected non-directorate civilian grades facing recruitment and retention difficulties respectively. For the GSRs for selected non-directorate grades, they cover the Veterinary Officer grade, and the Government Counsel grade, as well as the related Solicitor grade and Legal Aid Counsel grade. We expect the advisory bodies to submit their recommendations in the near future.

17. Upon receipt of the recommendations, we will study them in detail, consult the departmental/grade management and the staff sides concerned, and seek the views of Members of the Panel on Public Service. We will then invite the Chief Executive-in-Council to make a decision on these recommendations. If the recommendations, as accepted by the Administration, involve changes to the rank or pay structure of civil service grades and ranks, we will consult this Panel again and seek the approval of the Establishment Subcommittee and Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in accordance with the established practice.

(h) Continuing to maintain and enhance morale of the civil service, and encourage fuller use of various commendation schemes to recognise and motivate exemplary performance

18. In keeping with our policy to induce meritorious performance through proper recognition, we introduced in 2004 the “Secretary for the Civil Service’s

Commendation Award Scheme”. A total of 76 civil servants from 36 bureaux/ departments will receive commendations at a presentation ceremony to be held next month (November 2008).

19. Since 1999, we have introduced the “Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme” which is organised at approximately biennial intervals. This Scheme aims to recognise departments and teams that are committed to continuous improvement and strive to provide high quality citizen-centric services to the public. Awards are granted at team, departmental and inter-departmental levels. Some 49 departments took part in the Scheme in 2007. The best practices distilled from these departments have been widely publicised. The Scheme will be launched again in October 2008.

(i) Continuing to maintain a vigorous, effective and efficient disciplinary system against misconduct in the civil service. Continuing to monitor closely implementation of the streamlined procedures for removing under-performers whilst sustaining efforts to further improve efficiency and productivity in the civil service

20. In the light of the recent court ruling on the judicial review concerning Mr Mike Rowse’s disciplinary case¹, we will review the issues with general relevance to the civil service disciplinary system and improve the related procedures where appropriate. These issues include legal representation for the accused civil servants during disciplinary proceedings, standard of proof adopted by inquiry committees and multiple roles of the Department of Justice in advising on civil service disciplinary proceedings, etc. We will also review section 20 of the Public Service (Administration) Order (“PS(AO”) which provides that the Chief Executive shall consider and act upon the representations made by public officers as public expediency and justice to the individual may require.

21. We have been keeping the procedures for removing persistent under-performers under regular review and revision to ensure that such cases are expeditiously handled. In 2005 we revised the procedures for handling sub-standard performers before recourse to action under section 12 of the

¹ In his application to the Court of First Instance in April 2007, Mr Mike Rowse sought to judicially review the Secretary for the Civil Service (“SCS”)’s decision to accept the findings of the Inquiry Committee (“IC”) in respect of his disciplinary proceedings; the Chief Executive (“CE”)’s decision to delegate to the Chief Secretary for Administration (“CS”) his authority to determine his appeal under section 20 of the PS(AO); and CS’s decision to uphold the IC’s findings accepted by SCS. In July 2008, Hartmann J delivered his judgment, quashing the decisions of the CE, CS and SCS.

PS(A)O². Amongst the changes was the lowering of the threshold for invoking section 12 action from 12 months of unsatisfactory performance to six months. We will continue to monitor closely the implementation of the revised procedures and its effectiveness in removing persistent under-performers. We will also keep up our efforts in promoting a performance-based culture in the civil service that is conducive to improving efficiency and productivity in the civil service.

Way Forward

22. We will continue to take forward the above initiatives in close consultation with departmental management and staff. We will seek Members' views or keep Members informed as appropriate. We are committed to maintaining a civil service with the highest level of integrity, efficiency and performance in order to contribute to the effective governance of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Civil Service Bureau
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² Under section 12 of the PS(A)O, an officer may be required to retire in the public interest on grounds of persistent sub-standard performance.