

立法會

Legislative Council

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Report of the Panel on Public Service for submission to the Legislative Council

Purpose

This report gives an account of the work of the Panel on Public Service (“the Panel”) during the 2023 Legislative Council session. It will be tabled at the Council meeting of 6 December 2023 in accordance with Rule 77(14) of the Rules of Procedure of the Council.

The Panel

2. The Panel was formed by a resolution passed by the Council on 8 July 1998 and as amended on 20 December 2000, 9 October 2002, 11 July 2007, 2 July 2008 and 26 October 2022 for the purpose of monitoring and examining government policies and issues of public concern relating to the civil service and government-funded public bodies, and other public service organizations. The terms of reference of the Panel are in **Appendix 1**.

3. The Panel comprises 14 members, with Hon KWOK Wai-keung and Hon LAI Tung-kwok elected Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Panel respectively. The membership list of the Panel is in **Appendix 2**.

Major work

Appointments and employment

Civil service establishment

4. The Panel received an update on the civil service establishment, strength, retirement, resignation, age profile and gender profile. According to the Administration, as at 31 March 2022, the civil service establishment and strength

stood at around 193 000 and 176 000 respectively, while the establishment and strength stood at around 192 000 and 174 000 respectively as at 31 March 2023.

5. The Panel noted with concern the significant difference and widening gap between the civil service establishment and strength. Some members pointed out that as a result of insufficient manpower, the workload of civil servants was extremely heavy and many of them had to perform overtime work without compensation. All these would in turn affect the delivery of quality public service. The Administration was asked to help departments streamline work procedures and make use of technology to alleviate the workload of civil servants, and speed up recruitment process to fill vacancies timely. In the long run, the Administration should strengthen promotion and recruitment efforts, review the remuneration package of civil servants, introduce more family-friendly employment practices and conduct grade structure review for individual grades, with a view to attracting and retaining talents.

6. Some members also noted that according to the Administration, the projected number of retirees was about 2.9% of the civil service strength for the five-year period ending 2027-2028. These members expressed concern that there would be succession problem in the civil service, particularly in the disciplinary forces. For experience transfer and succession planning, the Administration was asked to review and extend the retirement age of disciplined services officers when needed.

Lifeguards of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department

7. The Panel has been closely following up the manpower situation of lifeguards at aquatic venues under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD). As advised by the Administration in May 2023, due to insufficient number of lifeguards at present, LCSD only provided life-saving services in 42 public swimming pools (not including 3 swimming pools which were closed for maintenance works), among which 17 were partially open, and 22 (out of 39) gazetted beaches. Members considered it a waste of public resources if not all public swimming pools and beaches were open. The Administration should set a clear target to reopen all public swimming pools and beaches.

8. Members noted that the Administration had formulated short-, mid- and long-term measures to increase and stabilize the manpower provision of lifeguards. As lifeguard shortage had existed for a long time, the Administration was urged to devise concrete timetables and roadmaps for prompt implementation of those measures and ensure that the quality of life-saving services would not be compromised.

9. Members further suggested that in the interim, the Administration could introduce advanced life-saving equipment and facilities, install artificial intelligence drowning detection system in public swimming pools, and recruit civil servants possessing lifeguard awards to be volunteer lifeguards for public swimming pools and beaches, so as to assist the work of lifeguards. In the long run, the Administration could consider increasing the salary of LCSD lifeguards to enhance its competitiveness over private market and allowing qualified lifeguards in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to fill the vacancies in Hong Kong. Besides, as it had been proven that there were persistent difficulties in recruiting both fulltime and seasonal lifeguard, the Administration should re-consider conducting a grade structure review (“GSR”) for civil service lifeguards.

Non-civil service contract staff

10. The Panel has been closely following up the policy on employment of Non-Civil Service Contract (“NCSC”) staff. As at 30 June 2023, there were 9 468 full-time NCSC staff and about 30% of them (about 3 190 in number) had continuous service of five years or more. The Administration was asked to replace NCSC positions by civil service posts where long-term operational and service needs could be established.

11. Members noted that the pay for NCSC staff could not exceed the mid-point salaries of comparable civil service ranks or civil servants undertaking comparable levels of responsibilities. Members considered that this had given rise to the problem of “unequal pay for equal work” and asked the Administration to review the terms and conditions of NCSC staff.

12. Some members suggested that the Administration could consider giving priority to NCSC staff with outstanding performance when recruitment exercises were conducted to fill relevant civil service posts. The Administration advised that its recruitment policy was to select the most suitable persons for the specified civil service vacancies through an open, fair and competitive process. Since relevant working experience was one of the factors to be taken into account in the recruitment, NSCS staff would generally have a competitive edge over other candidates because of their working experience in the Government.

Attracting young talents to join the Government

13. The Administration briefed the Panel on the series of initiatives taken by the Government in promoting job opportunities for the youth and efforts in

attracting young people to join the Government. Members saw a need to step up efforts in promoting civil service jobs, taking in new recruits and retaining talents.

14. On promotion efforts, members suggested that the Administration should facilitate young people to better understand the civil service through diversified means, such as introducing the nature of different civil service jobs and operations of the Government to secondary school students through seminars, mentorship programmes, etc.; increasing the number of career talks on civil service recruitment in local universities; promoting civil service job opportunities through the Youth Hostel Scheme; and disseminating information about civil service jobs to Hong Kong people studying/working in the Mainland through various social media platforms, such as TikTok and Xiaohongshu. In the long run, the Administration should identify the reasons why young people were not willing to join the civil service so as to formulate targeted promotion measures.

15. On recruitment efforts, members noted that since June 2023, 22 grades had accepted/would accept applications from undergraduate or postgraduate students in their penultimate year of study (e.g. in a four-year undergraduate curriculum, they refer to students in the third year of study) in the coming recruitment exercises. Members suggested that the Administration should further expand the pool of eligible candidates by conducting recruitment examinations in the Guangdong Province and ASEAN countries for the convenience of Hong Kong people studying or residing there. Also, more departments/grades should be encouraged to conduct year-round recruitment to facilitate job seekers to apply for civil service jobs.

16. The resignation rate of civil servants was quite high in recent years. For talent retention, members considered that the Administration should alleviate the heavy workload of civil servants by narrowing the gap between civil service establishment and strength, review the remuneration package of civil servants to make it competitive with the private sector, enhance the career prospects and job satisfaction of civil service jobs, and conduct GSRs for individual grades/rank.

Pay and conditions of service

2023-2024 civil service pay adjustment

17. The Chief Executive-in-Council decided on 13 June 2023 that with retrospective effect from 1 April 2023, civil service pay should be increased by 2.87% for civil servants in the directorate and upper salary band, and 4.65% for civil servants in the middle and lower salary bands.

18. Some members relayed the dissatisfaction of the civil servants in the upper salary band that the proposed pay increase for civil servants in the upper salary band was notably lower than that for the middle and lower salary bands. There were worries that the proposed low pay rise might reduce the willingness of senior civil servants to stay in the civil service. The Administration was requested to consider a pay rise above the respective net pay trend indicator (“PTI”) for the upper salary band when the economy recovered and in the long run, put in place a mechanism to ensure a reasonable pay adjustment for civil servants.

19. Some members pointed out that the civil service pay adjustments were lower than the net PTIs in the past five years, constituting an accumulated shortfall of 4.24% and 3.41% for the upper and middle salary bands respectively. The Administration was asked to narrow the pay difference of the civil service and the private sector by taking into consideration the difference between the net PTIs and actual pay adjustments these few years in future pay adjustment exercises when the economic situation had improved.

20. As the Administration and the staff side had different views on the civil service pay adjustment almost every year, members asked the Administration to communicate with the staff side to review and improve the civil service pay adjustment mechanism. For example, the Administration should consider enhancing the transparency of the mechanism and devising the equations for calculating pay adjustment. The Administration undertook to continue to explain to the public the justifications for the pay offers and continue to maintain communication with the staff side to better understand their pay claims each year.

21. Some members were of the view that the salary of civil servants should be linked to performance for fairness and motivation. The Administration advised that a series of measures would be introduced to strengthen the civil service performance management system.

Pilot Scheme on Dental Services (Dental Scaling) for Civil Service Eligible Persons

22. The Panel was briefed on the Pilot Scheme on Dental Services (Dental Scaling) for Civil Service Eligible Persons (“the Pilot Scheme”) where 140 000 eligible civil service eligible persons (“CSEPs”) would be arranged to receive dental scaling services from private dental clinics (“PDCs”) once within the 18-month service period from 1 August 2023 to 31 January 2025.

23. Members pointed out that some members of the public were under the mistaken impression that the Pilot Scheme was a new special treatment to CSEPs. The Administration was asked to clarify with the public that the Pilot Scheme was only a new service delivery mode to provide dental services to CSEPs to fulfill the contractual obligation of the Government as an employer. The Administration advised that the Pilot Scheme aimed at shortening CSEPs waiting time for dental scaling services, and freeing up consultation time slots at the dental clinics of the Department of Health (“DH”) for allocating to other patients for new consultations or other dental treatment.

24. Members were concerned whether the eligible 140 000 CSEPs would have to wait for a long time before they could receive the dental scaling services from PDCs, and whether a mechanism would be in place to ensure the provision of quality services by PDCs. According to the Administration, notification would be sent to eligible CSEPs in phases and eligible CSEPs would be able to receive the dental scaling service from August 2023 at the earliest. Meanwhile, the Administration was exploring with the participating private dental organizations (“PDOs”) the feasibility of increasing their service capacity. On quality assurance, DH had formulated a set of detailed service guidelines for strict compliance by the PDOs to ensure the service quality. If PDOs were found to be in violation of the service guidelines, DH would issue warning notice for serious cases and consider suspension/termination of their participation in the Pilot Scheme.

25. Members considered it necessary for the Administration to address the shortage of Dental Officers in the public sector and formulate long term planning to ensure CSEPs would receive the best services. There was a suggestion that the Administration should require local dental graduates to serve in public dental clinics for a specified period of time, so as to help ensure sufficient provision of dental services for CSEPs.

Benefits for civil servants, retired civil servants and eligible persons

26. The Panel attached great importance to the benefits for civil servants, retired civil servants and eligible persons. A subcommittee had been set up in May 2023 to closely follow up issues relating to the benefits for civil servants, retired civil servants and eligible persons. Hon LAI Tung-kwok and Hon Dennis LEUNG Tsz-wing were the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Subcommittee respectively.

Performance management of civil servants

Management of persistent sub-standard performers

27. The Panel was briefed on the streamlined mechanism for retiring civil servants in the public interest on grounds of persistent sub-standard performance as well as Civil Service Bureau's ("CSB") follow-up work after the promulgation of the streamlined mechanism. Members generally supported the implementation of the streamlined mechanism to terminate the appointment of persistent sub-standard performance in a timely manner, so as to maintain the professionalism and efficiency of the civil service.

28. Members considered it of utmost importance to handle each case under the streamlined mechanism in a fair and just manner. Hence, CSB should take a proactive role in conducting random checks to ensure that the performance appraisals factually and accurately indicated employees' performance, all comments made by the appraising officer in an appraisal were objective and impartial, and consistency was maintained in measuring performance from employee to employee. There was a suggestion that a 360-degree performance appraisal be adopted to provide a well-rounded and constructive performance review.

29. To enhance the effectiveness of the streamlined mechanism, CSB was asked to oversee the departments to make good use of the streamlined mechanism, find out whether they had encountered any difficulties in working out the mechanism, and review from time to time the mechanism and make necessary improvement to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the mechanism.

Promotion of a clean civil service

30. The Panel was briefed on the work of CSB in promoting integrity management in the civil service. Members considered it of vital importance for the Administration to continue enhancing the promotion of integrity management in the civil service to maintain Hong Kong as one of the least corrupt places in the world. In doing so, the Administration should in particular reinforce the importance of prudent financial management in the civil service; enhance the management of staff indebtedness; and analyze the corruption cases involving civil servants, identify their common causes and devise targeted measures to reduce bribery and corruption.

31. Members were concerned that there were signs of syndicated corruption in the civil service. They asked the Administration to explore ways to enhance civil servants' alertness to corruption, conflict of interest and integrity issues (such as strengthening collaboration with the Independent Commission Against Corruption); and to identify the causes of the increase in syndicated corruption (such as examining whether there were any loopholes in the work practices and procedures that might be conducive to corrupt practices) to reduce the likelihood of the occurrence of corrupt practices.

Training and development for civil servants

32. Training and development for civil servants received on-going attention of the Panel. In members' view, it was pivotal for the Administration to nurture a team of civil servants who loved Hong Kong and were patriotic, had good morals and integrity, and were competent, people-oriented and efficient for Hong Kong's continual progress.

33. Members noted that it was a major priority of the Civil Service College ("CSC") to enhance civil servants' understanding of national affairs and their awareness of their responsibility in safeguarding national security. However, only 20 000 civil servants could attend national studies training provided by CSC in a year owing to the limited manpower of CSC. Some members suggested that the Administration could collaborate with the staff associations/unions in providing training on national affairs and constitutional order of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, etc. for junior and middle-ranking civil servants.

34. While members were pleased that the exchange period of the Civil Service Staff Exchange Programme would be extended from four weeks to three months, there was a view that the duration should be further extended to at least one year to facilitate participants to experience more deeply the work process, work culture and development of the country. There was also a suggestion that apart from civil servants on Directorate Pay Scale Point 3 or above, the Administration should consider providing sponsorship for more civil servants on Master Pay Scale Point 34 or above to attend the Executive Master of Public Administration Programme for the Project of Hong Kong Public Administrative Talents at Tsinghua University to enrich their perspectives in public administration.

35. On mindset building among civil servants, the Administration was asked to enrich the programme content, diversify the delivery mode and enhance the emotional impact of the relevant training programmes, with a view to building a

correct mindset among civil servants to uphold the civil service core values while serving the society.

36. To enhance overall training effectiveness, some members suggested that the Administration should review the relevant policy to encourage civil servants to attend training, such as granting paid study leave and arranging training reserve posts to release staff to attend training for a longer period. Some members were of the view that the Administration should ensure civil servants to take training seriously, for instance, by requiring civil servants to attend mandatory training and undergo an assessment/examination upon completion of training programmes lasting more than two months as eligibility criteria for consideration of promotion. In addition, the Administration should draw reference from the practices in the private sector to review the number of years prescribed for post-training service and consider lengthening the period from two years to five or eight years.

Implementation of five-day week in the Government

37. Members were deeply concerned that only around 82% of the civil servants were working on a five-day week (“FDW”) pattern after the FDW initiative had been introduced in the Government for about 17 years. They urged for full implementation of FDW as soon as practicable.

38. To achieve full implementation of FDW, members suggested that CSB could consider setting up a dedicated team to help bureaux/departments (“B/Ds”) which had not fully implemented FDW to migrate more staff to FDW according to their specific needs and circumstances, narrowing the gap between the civil service establishment and strength to create space for full implementation of FDW, estimating the overall civil service manpower for flexible deployment of civil servants so that FDW could be fully implemented, and standardizing/shortening the working hours and adjusting the salaries and entry pay points of newly-joined civil servants to facilitate full implementation of FDW. In the interim, the Administration should consider bringing in alternative family-friendly employment practices (such as family leave) for non-FDW civil servants.

“Government-wide mobilization” level under the enhanced mobilization protocol

39. The Panel was briefed on the newly introduced “government-wide mobilization” level under the enhanced mobilization protocol as well as its first drill and review findings. Members in general recognized the need to conduct drills under the “government-wide mobilization” level to enhance the Administration’s emergency response capability.

40. To enhance the effectiveness of future drills, members suggested that the Administration should map out more targeted and refined strategies and measures to cope with different unexpected incidents, including scenarios in which public transport services were seriously disrupted; devise a comprehensive contingency plan with concrete operational details for every future drill, including B/Ds involved and their distribution of work, the operational commander to be appointed to take command of the entire operation, allocation of responsibilities among participating personnel, staff safety, rostering arrangements, etc.; purchase or upgrade information technology or communication equipment to enhance the internal communication arrangements in future drills; devise an app to facilitate mobilization of staff and collection of data on the special skills, knowledge and experience of civil servants to help mobilize adequate and suitable manpower promptly; liaise with the suppliers of essential items in advance to ensure that the Administration could secure a stable supply of resources with priority in major incidents; and shorten the time allowed for participating personnel to report to the designated locations of the drills, with a view to meeting the operational needs of real emergency incidents.

41. Members pointed out that many civil servants expressed concerns over the drills, such as whether every civil servant would have a chance to be selected as designated personnel; whether the requirement of providing support in the drills under the “government-wide mobilization” level and major incidents would be specified as one of the duties and responsibilities of civil servants; whether they would be disciplined for failing to report to the designated locations of the drills/major incidents; whether there would be a rostering system to cater for emergency operations which continued round-the-clock or for a long period of time; whether they could take vacation leave while on roster; and whether the designated personnel would be required to continue with their normal duties after participating in emergency operations. Members asked the Administration to communicate with the staff side and the staff unions to ease civil servants’ concerns.

Promotion of volunteer service in the civil service

42. The Panel was briefed on the latest development regarding civil servants’ participation in volunteerism and measures to promote volunteer service in the civil service. Members pointed out that through volunteer service, civil servants could understand the public needs for better delivery of public services, which would in turn build public trust in the civil service. The Administration should encourage more civil servants to use their expertise to serve the public through volunteer service.

43. Members suggested that CSB should help the volunteer teams of B/Ds collaborate with organizations and groups such as the District Services & Community Care Teams, to organize diversified volunteer activities for civil servants to participate in; launch commendation scheme to give recognition to volunteer teams of B/Ds and individual volunteers in the civil service; encourage principal officials to attend the volunteer activities to show appreciation and support to the volunteers; organize large-scale events for experience sharing to promote volunteerism and a positive image of civil service; and consider providing resources or assisting in soliciting donations from individual donors/nongovernmental organizations to support the operation of volunteer teams of B/Ds through matching.

44. Members considered that the volunteer teams of B/Ds could also serve the purpose of helping young people in the community gain a better understanding of the work of civil servants, thereby cultivating the future generation's positive values and skills in organizing volunteer activities and attracting them to join the civil service. In this connection, the Administration should help volunteer teams of B/Ds to explore with Home and Youth Affairs Bureau the feasibility of organizing volunteer activities with youth tenants under the Youth Hostel Scheme and invite young volunteers in the local communities to organize volunteer activities with the civil service volunteer teams.

Other issues

45. The Panel received briefings from the Administration on CSB's policy initiatives in 2023 and civil service-related matters featured in the 2023-2024 Budget. The Panel also gave views on two staffing proposals and supported their submission to the Establishment Subcommittee. These included the re-organization of the directorate establishment of the Chief Executive's Policy Unit and the creation of five permanent directorate posts in 2023-2024 (including four posts in CSC and one in the General Grades Office).

Meetings held

46. From January to November 2023, the Panel held a total of nine meetings. A meeting has been scheduled for 18 December 2023.

Legislative Council

Panel on Public Service

Terms of Reference

1. To monitor and examine Government policies and issues of public concern relating to the civil service and Government-funded public bodies, and other public service organizations.
2. To provide a forum for the exchange and dissemination of views on the above policy matters.
3. To receive briefings and to formulate views on any major legislative or financial proposals in respect of the above policy areas prior to their formal introduction to the Council or Finance Committee.
4. To monitor and examine, to the extent it considers necessary, the above policy matters referred to it by a member of the Panel or by the House Committee.
5. To make reports to the Council or to the House Committee as required by the Rules of Procedure.

Panel on Public Service

Membership list for the 2023 session

Chairman	Hon KWOK Wai-keung, JP
Deputy Chairman	Hon LAI Tung-kwok, GBS, IDSM, JP
Members	Hon Jeffrey LAM Kin-fung, GBM, GBS, JP Hon Steven HO Chun-yin, BBS, JP Hon Elizabeth QUAT, SBS, JP Hon CHAN Chun-ying, JP Hon Tony TSE Wai-chuen, BBS, JP Hon CHAU Siu-chung Hon Nixie LAM Lam Hon Dennis LEUNG Tsz-wing, MH Hon Kingsley WONG Kwok, BBS, JP Revd Canon Hon Peter Douglas KOON Ho-ming, BBS, JP Dr Hon NGAN Man-yu Dr Hon SO Cheung-wing, SBS, JP
	(Total : 14 members)
Clerk	Ms Angel WONG
Legal Adviser	Ms Doreen WAN