

Hongkong Post responds to concerns about its manpower deployment measures

With regard to the concerns about Hongkong Post's manpower deployment measures expressed today (December 13), Hongkong Post responded as follows:

Manpower Deployment Measures

Hongkong Post's recent manpower deployment measures are mainly to address the Audit Commission's previous criticism about the habitual overtime work issue of Hongkong Post's staff, as well as its usual practice of compensating such overtime work primarily by overtime allowance rather than time-off in lieu, which deviates from the Civil Service Regulations (CSRs) and relevant guidelines. Hongkong Post accepts the Audit Commission's criticism. As a trading fund department, Hongkong Post is also subject to the rules of the CSRs and the monitoring by the Audit Commission. Over the past three years, Hongkong Post kept communicating with staff and unions about the arrangements for compliance with the requirements, until recently that such arrangements have been put into implementation. The manpower deployment measures are implemented on the premise that no changes have been made to the contractual terms on remuneration, establishment and job duties of postmen. It has absolutely nothing to do with the operating deficit of the Post Office Trading Fund. The manpower deployment measures, which have been running smoothly since their implementation, enable Hongkong Post to comply with the CSRs and relevant guidelines on one hand, and maintain the provision of public services effectively on the other.

Details of the individual manpower deployment measures recently implemented by Hongkong Post are as follows:

First of all, Hongkong Post must point out that according to the Guidelines on Control and Administration of Overtime issued by the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), civil servants may undertake overtime work only when it is strictly unavoidable. When overtime becomes a regular pattern of work or has reached an excessive level, management should review the work patterns and consider alternative methods of deploying staff. As a result, Hongkong Post's recent manpower deployment measures aim to address the requirements for compliance in this regard, and none of the measures have changed the contractual terms on remuneration, establishment and job duties of postmen.

i) Recruitment of retired postmen as supplementary workforce

Staff of delivery offices may need to take sick leave or time-off for medical appointments from time to time. Although Hongkong Post has put in place a leave reserve establishment in accordance with the ratio derived under the CSB's mechanism, it cannot fully cope with the operational needs with these absences. Other staff are therefore required to work overtime to share the duties. In view of this, pursuant to the guidelines and procedures

of the Post-retirement Service Contract Scheme of the CSB, Hongkong Post recruited 30 retired postmen for 27 delivery offices as supplementary workforce to fill in the absences when needed, so as to maintain day-to-day mail delivery service. At present, there are 2 400 postmen responsible for mail delivery.

Hongkong Post must reinstate that those retired postmen will not be included into the postmen establishment and this has also been made cleared to its staff. The above arrangements are made on the premise of no change to the contractual terms of remuneration and job duties of postmen, and thus the establishment and duties of postmen will not be cut down.

ii) Internal redeployment of contract staff to street posting box mail collection

In the past, mail collection from street posting boxes of certain routes could not be completed within the regular working hours of postmen, and had to be covered by overtime work. To ensure that overtime work is undertaken by civil servants only when it is strictly unavoidable, Hongkong Post has reorganised certain routes and redeployed internally certain contract staff to take up 20 per cent of the duty of mail collection from street posting boxes without changing the contractual terms on remuneration and the establishment of postmen. In fact, mail collection was listed as one of the job duties of these contract staff when they were employed.

These contract staff are also employees of Hongkong Post who have undergone stringent recruitment formalities and their performances are also closely monitored. When performing the duty of mail collection from street posting boxes, they are required to follow the designated routes for daily operation and check in at each collection point via a personal digital assistant in accordance with the established procedures. Every day upon completion of work, they need to return the keys of the posting boxes to their supervisors for safe keeping. Within every street posting box there is a mail bag to contain all the mail items. Hence, for mail collection from street posting boxes by either contract staff or postmen, they only need to tie up the mail bag and place it direct in the mail van parked nearby, during which it is neither necessary for them to check nor have any contact with the items inside. Contract staff must put on a Hongkong Post vest when performing outdoor duties for the ease of identification by the public in order to meet the stringent service requirement.

iii) Deployment of postmen previously responsible for platform work in the Air Mail Centre (AMC) to mail delivery

Platform work is part of the operation of the AMC. Currently, 42 staff members in total are deployed for platform work, including 26 postmen. As the platform still operates on Sundays and public holidays, platform staff used to work overtime to maintain its operation. To ensure that overtime work is undertaken by civil servants only when it is strictly unavoidable, Hongkong Post has conducted a review of the operation model and engaged services through established procurement procedures to maintain the operation of AMC

platform, including transporting mailbags and bulky mail items.

Since mail delivery is the essential and main duty of a postman, Hongkong Post, after review, considers that it is necessary to make good use of the manpower of the AMC platform by deploying them to mail delivery posts and take up the duty of mail delivery. This will help increase the overall manpower for providing delivery service to the public and enable flexible manpower deployment to ensure the best use of public money.

No severe shortage of overall manpower

Hongkong Post formulates manpower planning taking into consideration of its operational needs, business development and projected postal traffic on a yearly basis. Hongkong Post has also made available a sufficient ratio of leave reserve according to the CSB's mechanism. In addition, Hongkong Post recruited frontline staff to fill the vacancies arising from turnover in the past few years. Therefore, there is no severe shortage of manpower in Hongkong Post.