

LCQ1: Remuneration packages for disciplined services staff

Following is a question by Dr Hon Elizabeth Quat and a reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Joshua Law, in the Legislative Council today (April 3):

Question:

Some disciplined services staff have indicated that they have all along been dedicated to their work, making Hong Kong one of the safest cities in the world. However, the remuneration packages for disciplined services staff have not reasonably reflected their contributions, thereby undermining their morale and leading to talent wastage. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that while the work of the disciplined services is more dangerous than that of civilian staff, the pay difference between successive pay points on the General Disciplined Services (Rank and File) Pay Scale is only about 3 per cent, whether the authorities will consider adjusting upward the pay difference between successive pay points on the pay scale to 6 per cent, so as to make it on a par with that on the pay scale for civilian staff; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) given the manpower wastage problem currently faced by and the need to pass on experience in the disciplined services, whether the authorities will consider afresh offering disciplined services staff appointed before June 2000 the choice of extending their retirement age; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) given the acute shortfall of departmental quarters for disciplined services at present, of the authorities' measures in place to mitigate the situation; whether they will identify land for constructing new quarters; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government fully recognises the efforts and contributions made by colleagues in the disciplined services all along in maintaining prosperity and stability of our society, and safeguarding the lives and property of our people. In order to attract suitable talents to join the disciplined services and to retain serving staff, the relevant Government policy is to provide appropriate remuneration and support to the disciplined services. As it is not possible to find comparable posts and jobs in the private sector for the disciplined services, and individual disciplined services grades are also facing recruitment or retention difficulties, the Chief Executive-in-Council has decided to conduct

a grade structure review (GSR) for the disciplined services and once every 10 years in future, so as to ensure that the grade structure and remuneration of the disciplined services are effective in attracting and retaining talents.

Moreover, having considered the operational need of each disciplined services, a total of over 7 100 posts have been created in the disciplined services over the past five years. We have also upgraded and strengthened the equipment for the disciplined services to enhance their service quality. In addition, we have introduced and enhanced a number of job-related allowances, improved housing benefits, and taken forward the construction projects of disciplined services quarters, etc. for the disciplined services. These are to ensure that their conditions of service and benefits can keep up with the times.

Having consulted the relevant bureau, my consolidated reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) the pay scales applicable to the disciplined services have evolved over the years, like those applicable to other civil servants. The differences between pay points on each pay scale and between pay points among different pay scales reflect the cumulative results of the reviews conducted over different periods in the past. Their internal relativities cannot be worked out by any simple formula. As such, it is not comprehensive to only compare the differences between pay points on the pay scales of the disciplined services and those of the civilian staff.

That said, the Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Service (SCDS) has accepted the Government's invitation to conduct a GSR for the disciplined services grades. At the same time, the Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service (SDCS) has also agreed to advise on the salaries and conditions of service of the heads of the disciplined services. The two advisory bodies will conduct the review independently and have commenced work. If the staff side of the disciplined services have any views or suggestions on the pay of individual grades or the differences between pay points of the relevant pay scales, they may raise them with the SCDS and the SDCS. In the course of the review, the two advisory bodies will maintain communication with the management and the staff side of the disciplined services. They will thoroughly consider proposals submitted by the management and the staff side and listen to stakeholders' views;

(2) in order to tie in with the goal of expanding the labour force and to respond to the aspirations of civil service colleagues, the Government launched in July 2018 the option of allowing serving civil servants in the civilian and disciplined services grades who joined the Government between June 1, 2000 and May 31, 2015 to choose to extend their retirement age to 65 and 60 respectively.

As for civil servants who joined the Government before June 1, 2000, most of them will reach their currently applicable retirement age in the next decade or so, but it is expected that the overall labour force will only become a relatively critical issue in 2030. Therefore, from the population

policy perspective, it is unjustifiable to also allow these officers to choose to retire at a later age. Moreover, quite a number of civil servants who joined the Government before June 1, 2000 will retire soon. If these officers are also allowed to choose to extend their retirement age, departments may not have sufficient time to adjust their manpower planning accordingly, and to address management problems that might arise immediately, such as blockage to promotion and hindrance to healthy turnover, and mismatch of human resources. All these will affect the planning and deployment of manpower resources in departments, and such situations should be avoided.

Although civil servants who joined the Government before June 1, 2000 cannot choose to retire at a later age, departments may, taking into account factors such as their overall manpower situation (e.g. wastage rate), operational needs and succession arrangement, flexibly employ various pliable initiatives for extending the service of civil servants, including the Post-retirement Service Contract Scheme, final extension of service and the adjusted further employment mechanism, to retain civil servants reaching their retirement age and meet the manpower demand and the need to pass on experience; and

(3) the Government has been providing departmental quarters for married disciplined services staff, subject to the availability of resources. The Government understands colleagues' concerns about the shortfall in disciplined services quarters and hence has been actively exploring various options to increase the supply of departmental quarters.

In the 2014 Policy Address, the then Chief Executive stated that the Government would expedite eight departmental quarters projects for the disciplined services. With the concerted efforts of the relevant bureaux and the various disciplined services departments, funding approval for the eight projects has been obtained from the Legislative Council. The projects include the Immigration Department staff quarters at Heng Lam Street, Kowloon and the Customs and Excise Department rank and file quarters at Yau Yue Wan Village Road, Tseung Kwan O, where works have been completed and residents have moved in the commissioned quarters commencing from the end of last year. The Government is stepping up the construction of the remaining six projects, and the estimated date of occupation of the quarters is from around mid-2019 to mid-2022.

In addition to the eight projects mentioned, the disciplined services departments are endeavouring to take forward new quarters projects in order to continue to alleviate the shortfall in quarters. Also, the Government will explore the feasibility of other disciplined services quarters redevelopment or construction projects. Upon finalisation of the details and timetable, the Government will consult the District Councils concerned as soon as possible and submit funding applications to the Legislative Council in a timely manner.

Thank you, President.