

Ombudsman as “clear mirror” of public administration commends public organisations and public officers who provided quality public service (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

At the 26th Presentation Ceremony of The Ombudsman's Awards today (November 15), The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, presented the Grand Award to the Immigration Department (ImmD), an Award for Public Organisation to the Efficiency Office (EO) and the Hospital Authority (HA) separately, and the Award on Mediation to the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office (CSO). Individual Awards were also given to 62 public officers.

Ms Chiu said, "Throughout the years, our Office has been like a clear mirror when handling public complaints: we examine complaint cases in an impartial manner, reveal the facts as they are, make objective and unbiased comments, then put forward improvement recommendations. Our ultimate goal is to lift the standard of public administration."

As a six-time winner of the Grand Award, the ImmD has triumphed more times at the Ombudsman's Awards than any other department. In early 2023, there had been a sharp increase in demand for identity document replacement services. The ImmD responded by implementing a series of measures, such as extended office hours, special service days on public holidays, additional days available for appointments to replace/apply for identity cards, enhanced website information, etc. It had, as always, provided flexible, efficient and "people-oriented" public services, and been co-operating proactively with the Office of The Ombudsman investigations.

In response to the Office inquiries into complaint cases, the EO could always explain the course of events clearly and provide detailed records to give the Office full pictures of the cases. The 1823 contact centre under the EO had been helpful in several direct investigations of the Office which involved only other departments. It readily provided the Office with useful data, case studies and its observations so that the Office could analyse the issues from multiple perspectives and make improvement recommendations.

The HA had to deploy resources to handle COVID-19 cases and pay close attention to the pandemic situation in order to make necessary adjustments to other areas of work in hospitals. Amid the pandemic, HA staff dedicated themselves to providing quality services and caring for patients, and endeavoured to maintain an effective public healthcare system in Hong Kong. The HA positively responded to complaints, provided the Office with

information and explained their work in detail despite the challenges at the time.

The CSO was presented the Award on Mediation this year. In 2022/23, it handled 95 complaint cases by way of mediation upon the Office's intervention, which accounted for 31 per cent of all mediation cases the Office handled in the year. Many of the complaints against the CSO the Office received were related to government subsidies provided during the pandemic. The CSO handled the complaints by way of mediation. It had promptly contacted the complainants, informed them of the progress of their cases, reviewed their applications and provided a dedicated hotline for checking the progress of the case and results at any time, sparing no effort to relieve the financial stress of members of the public and business enterprises affected by the pandemic.

At the presentation ceremony, Ms Chiu also commended the recipients of the Individual Awards and recognised their contributions. She said, "Government departments and public organisations rely on their committed and diligent staff to provide quality public service. This year, 62 public officers received the Individual Award. I am very pleased to see that more officers are commended for their professional and excellent services, as they have earned the recognition and commendation of the general public, the department/organisation concerned and my Office alike."

A full list of the recipients of the Individual Awards this year and the experiences and thoughts of some of them about receiving the Awards are in Appendices I and II respectively.

The Ombudsman's Awards Scheme was introduced in 1997. In 1999, the Scheme was extended to honour individual public officers. In 2018, an additional Award on Mediation for a public organisation was introduced.

