

For discussion on
18 December 2023

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE

Commendation Schemes for Civil Servants

Purpose

The Government has endeavoured to encourage civil servants to strive for excellence and provide quality public service through various commendation schemes. This paper reports to Members the relevant schemes and the latest progress of their implementation.

Background

2. The civil service is the backbone of the HKSAR Government. Its capability and efficiency is the key to good-quality government services. The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address sets out a number of measures for strengthening the civil service management system, including advancement of the performance-based management system and continual implementation of various commendation schemes for civil servants, so as to give due recognition to civil servants with outstanding performances and dedication to serving the community. These schemes include the Chief Executive's Award for Exemplary Performance, the Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Award Scheme, the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme, the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme, the HKSAR Honours and Awards System, and the Commendation Letter Scheme. The Government will also spare no effort to publicise good stories of civil servants to showcase their achievements and dedication to serving the community. This will help boost staff morale and work efficacy while attracting talents to join the civil service.

Commendation Schemes for Civil Servants

(a) Chief Executive's Award for Exemplary Performance

3. The Government launched the "Chief Executive's Award for Exemplary Performance" in the second quarter of 2023 to give recognition to exemplary teams or individuals on a regular basis. Acclaimed contributions may cover a wide variety of different areas, such as spearheading reform in

organisational culture, promoting selfless dedication to volunteer services, accomplishing “missions impossible” by overcoming obstacles, saving resources while substantially enhancing efficiency, and exceeding requirements and targets of important tasks. There is no limit on the number of teams or individuals to be acclaimed each time but their performance has to be outstanding enough to warrant commendation. The Government will publicise the “good stories” of the award recipients so that the public can have a better understanding of the Government’s work and the excellence of the civil service.

4. The HKSAR search and rescue team, which carried out search and rescue operations in quake-stricken areas in Türkiye, was announced as award recipient for the inaugural “Chief Executive’s Award for Exemplary Performance” on 27 June 2023. The team, comprising members from 10 grades of the Security Bureau, Fire Services Department, Department of Health and Immigration Department, made highly efficient preparation and planning within an extremely short period of time. Professionally well-trained, they risked their lives in discharging their mission in the quake-stricken areas, overcame all difficulties with dedicated professionalism and rescued four survivors under horrendous conditions, fully demonstrating great teamwork and setting a role model for the civil service. We have widely publicised the good stories of the award team through various channels, including television, radio, social media platforms, print media and government venues.

(b) The Secretary for the Civil Service’s Commendation Award Scheme

5. The Secretary for the Civil Service (“SCS”) gives recognition each year to select civil servants on a service-wide basis for their consistently outstanding performance under this scheme which is specific to the civil service. To qualify for an award under the scheme, a civil servant should have put up outstanding performance for at least five consecutive years. The target number of recipients per annum is 100. Nominations are made by Permanent Secretaries or Heads of Departments/Grades. Recipients of awards are selected by SCS on the recommendation of an Award Committee comprising representatives of the Civil Service Bureau (“CSB”) and other bureaux/grades (“B/Ds”).

6. The awards are presented by SCS at a ceremony held annually. Each award recipient receives a certificate of recognition and a gold pin. Those who have 20 or more years of service and have yet to enjoy government sponsored travel outside Hong Kong will receive a travel award as well¹. The award granted will be recorded in the personal file of the recipients to register the

¹ The rate of the travel amount and the way in which the travel amount is granted to the recipient are the same as those of the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme mentioned in paragraph 8 of this paper.

Government's appreciation of their outstanding performance. In 2023, 100 civil servants from 38 B/Ds were commended, covering 50 different grades, including professional and technical grades, disciplined services, general grades and Model Scale 1 grades.

7. Given that the awardees must have outstanding performance for at least five consecutive years, most of them are civil servants with longer length of service, while some of them are relatively junior in service, with the most junior one having only six years of service. It is evident that the departments concerned not only assign challenging tasks to junior colleagues and closely observe their performance, but are also willing to commend those for their outstanding performance so as to encourage them and set an example for others to follow.

(c) Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme

8. The Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme aims at recognising and awarding long and meritorious service of serving civil servants. All local non-directorate officers with a continuous service of 20 years or more and a track record of consistently very good performance are eligible for consideration for the grant of an award. Civil servants may only be awarded once in their civil service career. The award is granted on a reimbursement basis. The awardees can flexibly choose to nominate a travelling companion, and use the granted amount for a single trip, which is \$27,470 per person in the 2023/2024 financial year. The number of awards for each year is determined on the basis of one award for every 27 officers meeting the length of service requirement (i.e. at a ratio of 1:27). In the 2023/2024 financial year, there are about 1 900 award quotas. In most circumstances, the number of eligible officers in a B/D would exceed the award quotas, and the departmental management is required to assess carefully and select the most suitable candidates to receive the awards².

² Under ordinary arrangements, awardees of the Scheme have to use the travel award to make a trip outside Hong Kong within a validity period (i.e. within the financial year of receiving the award or before the pre-retirement leave ends (whichever is the earlier)). As the COVID-19 pandemic impacted seriously on outbound travel earlier, an exceptional arrangement was introduced to the Scheme. Awardees and their travelling companions may apply for reimbursements on local spending items comparable to those which may be reimbursed for outbound travel (i.e. dining, staycation or "cruise-to-nowhere"). Such exceptional arrangement, apart from enabling the awardees to use the travel award, helps boost the economy by encouraging local consumption. Though outbound travel has resumed, since not all awardees during the three-year pandemic period could take vacation leave within a short period of time for outbound travel, this exceptional arrangement has been extended to 31 March 2024. We will review the relevant exceptional arrangement.

(d) Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme

9. CSB conducts the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme every three years. The Scheme aims to recognise the exceptional achievements of departments and teams in providing quality service; promote a citizen-centric culture in the civil service; encourage team spirit; inspire innovation; and share experience in pioneering public service improvement. The Scheme in 2022 covered four groups of awards, including the Partnership Award, the Service Enhancement Award, the Team Collaboration Award and the Innovation and Technology Award. More than 190 entries were received for the Scheme and a total of 55 entries from 32 B/Ds were awarded Gold, Silver and Bronze Prizes and Meritorious Awards.

10. For publicity and promotion, representatives of the winning departments attended the award presentation ceremony and gave interviews to the media. We produced a dedicated TV programme and a video series on civil servants' efforts and achievements both at the frontline and behind-the-scene in providing public service, which were shown via different channels including RTHK, the thematic website on Service Excellence, government venues and social media such as Facebook pages and YouTube channels. We also organised seminars for the winning departments and teams to share their experience and insights. Training materials have also been made from relevant cases. A new round of the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme will be held in 2025.

(e) HKSAR Honours and Awards System

11. Civil servants who have made significant contributions at work can be awarded under the honours and awards system of the HKSAR. Many officers have, over the years, received Bauhinia Awards, Bravery Awards, Disciplined Services and ICAC Awards, Medals of Honour and Chief Executive's Commendations. In 2023, a total of 180 civil servants were awarded under this system. Among them, 90 received awards of different kinds and 90 received the Chief Executive's Commendation for Community Service or Government/Public Service. A full list of recipients is published by the Government every year. The Chief Executive presents awards to recipients at the ceremony held at the Government House each year.

(f) The Commendation Letter Scheme

12. Apart from the above schemes, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments may also issue commendation letters to officers whose performance can meet the prescribed criteria under the Commendation Letter Scheme. Such criteria include: whether the officers have put up outstanding

service for at least three consecutive years; or have made significant contribution towards enhancing the efficiency or the image of their B/Ds; or have performed a meritorious or brave act warranting special recognition. Nominations may be made all year round and they are considered by a commendation committee set up by individual B/Ds under the chairmanship of a directorate officer. Same as the practice of the SCS's Commendation Award Scheme, the commendation letter issued will be recorded in the personal file of the recipients.

“Publicising good stories of civil servants”

13. If civil servants are recognised and commended for their outstanding achievements, it will not only maintain their passion for public service, but will also help attract talents to join the civil service. We will enhance our efforts to publicise good stories of civil servants. Following the extensive publicity of the award team of the Chief Executive's Award for Exemplary Performance from July to September this year, we have selected 10 good stories among the award recipients of the recent SCS's Commendation Award Scheme for production of short videos. These videos will be broadcast on television, social media, publicity platforms of mass public transport and in government venues to recognise the achievements of the awardees and showcase their commitment, perseverance and dedication to serving the community as civil servants of the HKSAR. These good stories are not the only examples of civil servants devoting themselves to serving the society. For instance, we have recently published on social media and the Civil Service Newsletter the good stories of two civil servants who are avid blood donors. They each have donated blood for about 200 times, helping patients in need and demonstrating their commitment to serve as civil servants. In the future, we will continue to publicise through various channels the outstanding work and good stories of civil servants, showcasing their enthusiasm to serve and contribute to the society, as well as giving civil servants a sense of belonging to the Government and a boost in morale.

Other Measures to Encourage and Support Civil Servants

14. We will continue to make full use of the award schemes to give recognition to good performance. Moreover, we will also encourage and support colleagues by continuously providing training on quality service as well as emotional wellness, improving the quality of public service provided by civil servants, and fostering a stronger sense of commitment in serving the public among civil servants. CSB has commissioned professional bodies to provide hotline counselling service on stress management to help staff cope with stress arising from work and other personal problems. The service, available to staff

from some 60 B/Ds, includes telephone and face-to-face counselling and referral services. Separately, about 10 departments provide dedicated counselling services for their own staff.

15. Furthermore, SCS will visit departments to keep abreast of their latest achievements and the new challenges faced by them, and to exchange views with frontline staff and encourage them. We also encourage departmental management to maintain close communication with staff, particularly frontline staff, with a view to promoting mutual understanding and partnership between the two sides and better fostering a sense of belonging among staff.

Awards and Commendations from Outside Organisations

16. Apart from the Government's commendations schemes, government departments receive awards and commendations from outside organisations from time to time. For instance, three government departments received the Award for Public Organisation and the Award on Mediation of the Ombudsman's Awards recently presented in November, while another 40 civil servants from 26 departments were given individual awards. Various government departments also received international awards that demonstrate the recognition of their works. These honours and commendations play an important role in encouraging the acclaimed teams and colleagues.

Advice Sought

17. Members are invited to note the information in this paper on various civil service commendation schemes and their implementation, and offer comments.

Civil Service Bureau
December 2023