

**For discussion on  
15 July 2024**

## **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE**

### **Promotion of a Clean Civil Service**

#### **Purpose**

This paper updates Members on the work of the Civil Service Bureau (“CSB”) in promoting integrity management in the civil service in collaboration with the Independent Commission Against Corruption (“ICAC”).

#### **Background**

2. In 2023, Hong Kong continued to perform well in global rankings/indices related to integrity. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index 2023<sup>1</sup>, Hong Kong was ranked the 14th least corrupt place among 180 countries/territories surveyed and was one of the best performing places in Asia-Pacific. In the World Competitiveness Yearbook 2024, Hong Kong was ranked the fifth most competitive among 67 economies surveyed as well as the fourth in the world and the first in Asia-Pacific region in respect of the “Bribery and corruption do not exist” indicator under “Government Efficiency”<sup>2</sup>, and all these rankings rose notably as compared to that of last year.

3. Hong Kong’s good performance in the area of integrity is the result of concerted efforts from various sectors. The civil service is the backbone of the HKSAR Government. Civil servants should act honestly and with integrity at all times, which is not only vital to maintaining effective governance but also conducive to preserving Hong Kong’s integrity and global competitiveness. The

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<sup>1</sup> Details are available at the ICAC website (<https://www.icac.org.hk/en/intl-persp/ranking-and-research/corruption-perceptions-index/index.html>).

<sup>2</sup> Details are available at the ICAC website (<https://www.icac.org.hk/en/intl-persp/ranking-and-research/world-competitiveness-yearbook/index.html>).

Administration will remain committed to upholding a high standard of probity and conduct in the civil service so as to instill and sustain the culture of integrity.

### **Strategy in promoting a clean civil service**

4. CSB and ICAC have been working closely with bureaux and departments (“B/Ds”) to promote and uphold integrity in the civil service through a three-pronged approach, namely prevention and regulation, training, and sanctions.

#### **(1) Active prevention and regulation**

5. The provision of clear rules plays an important part in prevention. Under the updated Civil Service Code (the “Code”) promulgated by CSB on 7 June 2024, “integrity” is one of the 12 core values which civil servants are required to uphold. Civil servants should act honestly and with integrity at all times. They must never act in an improper or dishonest manner, given that the public expect them to adhere to the highest probity standards. All civil servants should stay vigilant against corrupt practices and guard against possible breach of the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance (Cap. 201) and the common law offence of “misconduct in public office”. Furthermore, civil servants should ensure that no actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest will arise between their official duties and private interests.

6. In parallel, CSB has devised various integrity-related systems in the civil service through issuing the Civil Service Regulations, Civil Service Bureau Circulars and Civil Service Bureau Circular Memoranda, covering topics such as handling of conflict of interest situations, acceptance of advantages and entertainment, sponsored visits, private investments, outside work, etc. These systems manifest the policies of the Administration in a lucid manner and establish proper mechanisms for approval and declaration, thereby providing civil servants with clear guidelines and procedures to follow and also guidance in handling the relevant situations.

7. CSB encourages B/Ds to devise and promulgate more specific internal codes or guidelines for compliance by their staff having regard to their own circumstances and operational needs. To assist B/Ds in this regard, CSB and ICAC promulgated an updated Sample Guide on Conduct Matters for Civil Servants (“Sample Guide”) to B/Ds in July 2024, providing the latest information on government rules and guidelines relating to behaviour and conduct. The updates made to the Sample Guide cover various areas, including core values

under the Code which civil servants should uphold, government guidelines on managing conflict of interest in the civil service, requirements regarding prudent financial management for civil servants, etc. B/Ds can, modelling on the Sample Guide, develop/update their own codes of conduct or guidelines on integrity-related matters having regard to their own circumstances and operational needs.

8. CSB has all along maintained close cooperation with ICAC in respect of the work concerning active prevention and regulation. To tie in with the promulgation of the updated Code, ICAC will put emphasis on the importance of commitment to the rule of law and integrity at seminars on integrity for civil servants. Besides, ICAC holds meetings of Corruption Prevention Groups with directorate officers of B/Ds on a regular basis to discuss anti-corruption work plans and areas, and has been providing corruption prevention advice on the civil service integrity management systems as well as work practices and procedures through assignment studies and consultation services. ICAC has also consolidated the corruption prevention advice given in the assignment studies which were conducted in the past year for B/Ds' reference.

## (2) Enhancing integrity training

9. Training is also an important aspect in the promotion of civil service integrity. CSB has implemented the Ethical Leadership Programme (“ELP”) jointly with ICAC since 2006 with the aim of consolidating the value on integrity and deepening the integrity culture in the civil service through the leadership and active participation of the senior management of B/Ds.

10. Under ELP, senior directorate officers are appointed by B/Ds as Ethics Officers (“EOs”) to serve as an important bridge of communication with CSB and ICAC. These designated officers assist CSB in promoting activities in order to spread integrity messages at the B/D level, and providing valuable feedback so that the relevant initiatives could better suit the needs of colleagues. Moreover, they also assist in mapping out and taking forward B/D-based activities (including talks, seminars and publicity activities) with appropriate support provided by ICAC.

11. At the central level, CSB and ICAC conduct thematic workshops regularly for EOs of B/Ds on various topics, e.g. acceptance of advantages and entertainment, prudent financial management, supervisory accountability, etc. A total of four workshops have been conducted for nearly 1 000 officers since 2020. CSB and ICAC will co-organise a new thematic workshop in November

this year. Different speakers will be invited to brief participants on the guidelines, case studies, and latest developments in relevant areas under specific themes with a view to assisting EOs in promoting activities on civil service integrity at the B/D level.

12. To strengthen connection and facilitate experience-sharing on integrity management among B/Ds and to enhance communication with B/Ds, CSB and ICAC have conducted four small-group sharing sessions for the representatives of EOs from 40 B/Ds according to their work nature since 2021. During the sharing sessions, ICAC introduced the corruption prevention measures for different areas of work. Besides, CSB and ICAC offered assistance to different B/Ds in conducting promotion activities for their respective staff, such as arranging appropriate officers to speak in various training programmes and providing suitable presentation materials.

13. CSB also conducts regular seminars on the offence of “Misconduct in Public Office” every year. Frontline staff and junior, middle and senior management are invited to participate in the seminars with a view to enhancing the understanding of this common law offence among civil servants of different ranks in a targeted manner. Over the past three years (i.e. from 2021 to 2023), a total of 16 seminars were conducted and attended by nearly 1 700 civil servants of different ranks. Participants in the various training activities mentioned above are expected to share with staff of the respective B/Ds the learning outcomes and to promote the integrity culture and messages.

14. In 2023, there were around 550 training programmes on corruption prevention, integrity and probity, and avoidance of conflict of interest for over 32 000 civil servants. The Civil Service College (“CSC”) has been collaborating with ICAC to provide integrity management training for civil servants so as to establish the core value of integrity. At present, all new recruits are required to complete within the probationary period a foundation training programme, which includes briefings on the anti-corruption laws and mechanism conducted by ICAC officers. CSC also invites ICAC officers to share different cases in its leadership development programmes so that supervisors can better understand their roles and responsibilities, and lead by example to promote the culture of integrity management.

15. Apart from face-to-face classroom training, CSB has also set up the Resource Centre on Civil Service Integrity Management (“RCIM”) and the Online Community for Ethics Officers intranets for all government officers and

EOs respectively to provide web-based learning and reference materials. These include Civil Service Regulations on conduct and integrity matters, publications, frequently-asked-questions, training videos, etc. Officers of all B/Ds can get access to relevant information at any time according to their work schedule. CSB will continue to enrich the web contents, and facilitate easier navigation and retrieval of the required reference materials. Furthermore, some of the open information provided in RCIM has been made available on CSB website from 2023 for easy reference by civil servants and members of the public. In parallel, ICAC also updated the contents of the Integrity Management e-learning Platform for Civil Servants (“the Platform”) on the Cyber Learning Centre Plus website in 2023. These include reminding civil servants to avoid money lending and borrowing among colleagues, information on the problems that may arise from engaging in gambling and high-risk investments, and supervisory responsibility over regulating contractors. ICAC will keep in view integrity challenges for civil servants and enhance the contents of the Platform in a timely manner.

16. In order to achieve the desired effect on integrity management, CSB and ICAC will closely monitor the overall situation of the civil service, and stay connected with the designated officers of B/Ds from time to time in supporting and facilitating their promotion efforts.

### (3) Sanctions

17. The Administration attaches great importance to the conduct and integrity of civil servants and adopts a zero-tolerance approach in dealing with civil servants who have breached the laws or misconducted themselves. If individual officers are found to have committed corruption-related offences or have not acted with integrity, the Administration will definitely handle their cases in a serious manner, take disciplinary action promptly and mete out punishments of sufficient deterrence. Besides, ICAC compiles the “Report on Corruption and Malpractice in the Government” annually which consolidates cases involving prosecutions against and misconducts of civil servants in the previous year and identifies areas susceptible to corruption and malpractices in the Government for internal reference by B/Ds.

18. Over the past five years from 2019 to 2023, the overall corruption scene in the civil service has remained generally stable (details at Annex), indicating that corrupt activities have been under effective control and integrity upheld in the civil service. In 2023, the number of corruption complaints involving government officers accounting for less than one-fourth of the total number of

corruption complaints received, registering the second consecutive year of decline. Among them, the number of corruption complaints and pursuable complaints involving government departments went down by 15% and 20% respectively as compared to that of the previous year (i.e. 2022). The number of civil servants referred by ICAC to B/Ds for consideration of disciplinary or administrative action in 2023 is less than that of the previous year. This notwithstanding, ongoing efforts will be made to maintain integrity in the civil service. The Government will remain cautious and closely monitor the situation.

19. During the past five years (i.e. from 2019 to 2023), a total of 13 staff have been removed from office owing to conviction of an offence under the Prevention of Bribery Ordinance or the offence of “Misconduct in Public Office”, and another 18 staff have been removed from office after having been found culpable of misconduct following departmental investigation upon referral by ICAC. All these figures convey a clear message that the Administration will not tolerate any staff who have committed corruption-related offences or have not acted with integrity.

**Advice sought**

20. CSB will continue to join hands with ICAC and B/Ds in fostering integrity management and stepping up promotion efforts. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Civil Service Bureau**  
**July 2024**

**Figures on Corruption Complaints, Prosecutions and Convictions  
Involving Government Officers in the Past Five Years** <sup>Note 1</sup>

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Corruption complaints involving government departments received by ICAC					
➤ No. of cases received	647	629	645	533	451
➤ No. of pursuable complaints	401	400	426	372	298
Government officers prosecuted for/convicted of corruption and related offences					
➤ No. of staff prosecuted	13	5	14	20	13
➤ Among those prosecuted during the year, number of government officers subsequently convicted <sup>Note 2</sup> (as of 31 May 2024)	11	3	10 <small>Note 3</small>	7 <small>Note 3</small>	11 <small>Note 3</small>
Government officers referred by ICAC to B/Ds for consideration of disciplinary or administrative action <sup>Note 4</sup>					
➤ No. of officers referred	91	107	65	116 <small>Note 5</small>	62

Note 1:“Government officers” includes civil servants and government contract staff.

Note 2:As the trials take time, government officers prosecuted may not be convicted in the same year.

Note 3:Some of the cases prosecuted in 2021 to 2023 are pending plea/trial/judgment.

Note 4:For cases where no prosecution is made against individual staff after investigation but possible misconduct or malpractice has been revealed during the ICAC investigation, ICAC may, on the advice of its Operations Review Committee, refer them to the B/Ds concerned for consideration of disciplinary or administrative action.

Note 5:The number of officers referred to B/Ds for consideration of disciplinary or administrative action in 2022 is higher than that of 2021 because the number of staff involved in individual cases was relatively large.