

APPENDIX III

Consultative Document on
Civil Service Consultative Machinery

1. INTRODUCTION

The Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service last reviewed the civil service consultative machinery in 1980 and formulated its recommendations in its Report on Consultative Machinery in the Civil Service (Report No. 4), published in September 1980. The Commission's recommendations were accepted and implemented by the Government in accordance with a phased programme which was completed in 1982.

In paragraph 9.3 of Report No. 4, the Commission indicated that it would further review the civil service consultative machinery in the light of experience. As the recommendations in Report No. 4 were implemented more than four years ago, and as requests have been received from the Administration and staff association members to conduct a comprehensive review of the existing system to see how it can be further improved, the Commission intends to examine this subject again.

This document provides information on the operation of the existing civil service consultative machinery, which is built on three inter-related levels : central, departmental and personal. It also serves to invite the views of staff and departmental management on how the existing system can be further improved.

2. CENTRAL CONSULTATIVE MACHINERY

The central consultative process revolves around the Senior Civil Service Council (SCSC), the Model Scale 1 Staff Consultative Council (MOD 1 Council) and the Police Force Council (PFC). Each of these three central councils comprises an Official Side and a Staff Side. Service-wide matters such as pay reviews, allowances, leave-earning rates, housing, passages, etc. are discussed at the councils.

Senior Civil Service Council

There has been no basic change to the SCSC since its establishment following the 1968 Agreement between the Government and the three main staff associations, namely, the Association of Expatriate Civil Servants, the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association and the Senior

Non-Expatriate Officers Association. These three staff associations, making up the Staff Side of the SCSC, are service-wide civil service trade unions, representing all staff interests other than those of the Directorate, the Model Scale 1 staff and the Police.

At present, admission to the Staff Side of the SCSC is confined to the above three main staff associations which signed the Agreement with the Administration in 1968, together with any others which may subsequently be granted central recognition by the Chief Secretary, subject to their meeting certain criteria. These criteria stipulate that any aspiring participant in the SCSC must be a civil service union registered under the Trade Unions Ordinance and that its membership, to be composed mainly of individual, fee-paying civil servants, must be sufficiently large to deserve recognition by central management. Such criteria have effectively excluded the smaller unions and staff associations, as well as organisations in the nature of federations which, under existing trade union policy, are prevented from registration as trade unions. It may therefore be felt that the criteria should be broadened to allow participation by smaller staff associations. On the other hand, it should also be borne in mind that the participation of a large number of organisations may result in an unwieldy Council and may affect the efficiency of its operation.

Under the present system, the Chief Secretary, after consulting the SCSC, has the authority to grant central recognition to any staff association for it to join the Staff Side of the SCSC. There have been suggestions that this arrangement should be replaced by some form of election. An electoral system has obvious attractions as a concept. Its drawbacks lie in the practical and administrative difficulties of devising an equitable electoral system. In addition, the substitution of a new, untried system for the existing system, which has proved viable, may result in undue upheaval and politicisation within the civil service, at a time when the society of Hong Kong itself is undergoing major political changes; such developments may therefore be considered undesirable at the present time.

Views Sought

The Commission would welcome views on :

- (a) whether the representativeness of the SCSC in its present form should be enhanced; and
- (b) if so, how such enhancement should be achieved.

Model Scale 1 Staff Consultative Council

The MOD 1 Council was established through implementation of the Commission's recommendations in its Report No. 4, as a means of extending the channels of communication with staff groups not represented on the SCSC. It represents the interests of all Model Scale 1 Staff. The six constituent Model Scale 1 staff unions at present on the Staff Side of the Council are the Hong Kong Chinese Civil Servants' Association, Hong Kong Civil Servants General Union, Hong Kong Government Waterworks Chinese Employees Union, Hong Kong Urban Services Department Staff General Association, Urban Services Department Kowloon Workers General Union and Government Parks, Playgrounds and Environmental Hygiene Chinese Workers Association. At present, any civil service trade union with 1,000 or more Model Scale 1 members is eligible to apply for admission into the Council.

The problem with this arrangement is that this relatively loose criterion for admission to the Model Scale 1 Staff Consultative Council may eventually result in an unwieldy Council, as the membership of more and more unions exceeds the minimum entry requirement of 1,000. In addition, some individuals hold membership of more than one union or staff association. Such duplication should be eliminated before the degree of representativeness of each staff group can be determined.

Views Sought

The Commission welcomes views on how the representativeness of the MOD 1 Council should be enhanced.

Police Force Council

By law Police Officers are not allowed to join trade unions. Their interests cannot, therefore, be represented by service-wide trade unions on the SCSC. In view of the size and the nature of the Police Force, and in the light of the Commission's recommendation, in Report

No. 4, that the channel of communication with staff groups not represented on SCSC should be extended, the PFC was established in July 1982 as a channel for consultation with the Police on various civil service issues. The current system appears to be working well and there seems to be no obvious need for any major change. However, the Commission would be happy to receive views from interested parties regarding improvements to the system's effectiveness and efficiency.

DEPARTMENTAL CONSULTATIVE MACHINERY

The Commission, in its Report No. 4, emphasized the importance of formalised consultative councils at the departmental level. Since then, over 70 Departmental Consultative Committees have been established, in over 50 departments each with a staff of 100 or more.

In general, DCCs have been found to be effective and have operated satisfactorily. They have facilitated understanding, helped to avoid unnecessary conflict between management and staff, and promoted greater efficiency in departmental operations.

DCCs have largely concentrated on issues which are of direct concern to the staff in the department or which affect a department's operations. They have not been extensively involved in the discussion of service-wide issues. It may be felt that this practice should continue, in view of the potential overlap in the roles of the DCCs and the central consultative councils which might occur if the topics for discussion at DCCs were widened to include those of service-wide interest.

Views Sought

The Commission would welcome views on :

- (a) whether the subjects for discussion at DCCs should normally be confined to departmental issues; and
- (b) how consultation at departmental level could be further improved.

CONSULTATIVE MACHINERY AT THE PERSONAL LEVEL

The existing system of formal consultation between management and staff at central and departmental levels is supplemented by other channels of communication by which staff groups or individual civil servants can make their views known to management. These include the following :

- (a) direct access to departmental management by individuals or staff groups for consultation;
- (b) regular liaison and consultation between grade management and grade associations;
- (c) staff complaints procedures;
- (d) staff suggestions scheme;
- (e) civil service publications such as Civil Service Newsletters;
- (f) liaison and consultation with the Staff Relations Division of the Civil Service Branch; and
- (g) goodwill visits by Departmental Welfare Officers or by senior officials.

These measures appear to have provided individual civil servants with effective means of putting forward their views on matters affecting their personal interests.

Views Sought

The Commission would appreciate views on how these measures could be further improved.

GENERAL

The Commission would welcome comments and suggestions from staff, staff unions, and departmental management on the existing consultative machinery in the civil service and how it can be further developed. All comments and suggestions will be given careful consideration in the course of the Commission's review of the subject.

Written representations should be sent to the Secretary-General of the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service before 30 April 1987 at the following address :

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Admiralty Centre, Tower 1
18 Harcourt Road
Hong Kong.