

LCQ8: Work attitude of civil servants

Following is a question by the Hon Shiu Ka-fai and a written reply by the Secretary for the Civil Service, Mr Patrick Nip, in the Legislative Council today (June 9):

Question:

Quite a number of members of the public have relayed that despite their having lodged complaints repeatedly with government departments about public affairs, the problems concerned have not been followed up or resolved after a prolonged period of time, which gives them the impression that the work attitude of some civil servants is perfunctory, and that they often "accept complaints but continue to work as usual". In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of complaints about the perfunctory work attitude of civil servants received in each of the past five years (with a breakdown by the government department to which the civil servants under complaint belonged), and the relevant investigation procedure;

(2) among the complaints mentioned in (1), of the number of those found substantiated after investigation, and the number of civil servants disciplined as a result (with a breakdown by type of disciplinary actions);

(3) whether it knows the total number of complaints of a similar type received by the Office of The Ombudsman and other relevant organisations in each of the past five years (with a breakdown by organisation); among such complaints, of the number of those found substantiated after investigation, and the number of civil servants disciplined as a result (with a breakdown by type of disciplinary actions); and

(4) whether it has assessed if the perfunctory work attitude of some civil servants is related to their enjoying immense job stability (i.e. the so-called "iron rice bowls"); if it has assessed and the outcome is in the affirmative, how the Government will make improvements; if the assessment outcome is in the negative, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The civil service is the backbone of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. "Dedication, professionalism and diligence" is a core value that civil servants are required to uphold. The civil service endeavours to serve the community and contributes to the effective governance as well as stability and prosperity of Hong Kong.

Our consolidated reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) and (3) The complaint figures kept by the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) do not include the category of "perfunctory work attitude of civil servants". It is our understanding that The Ombudsman's statistics do not include the above category either.

Under the established mechanism, complaints against civil servants are handled by their departments. Members of the public generally also lodge their complaints with the relevant departments directly. If such complaints are directed to the CSB, the CSB will refer them, in accordance with the established practice, to the relevant departments for follow-up.

Civil servants are subject to performance appraisal on an annual basis which enables the management to monitor and assess staff performance. However, if an officer is observed by his/her department as less than fully efficient or productive, or there are other areas for improvement in his/her work performance, this should normally be dealt with as soon as the shortcoming is observed either by speaking to him/her or writing to him/her, without waiting for the annual staff report. If a civil servant is suspected to have committed misconduct, the relevant department will conduct investigation having regard to the actual circumstances of the case. If it is confirmed upon investigation that the civil servant has committed misconduct, the department should take appropriate disciplinary action under the disciplinary mechanism.

(2) In the past five financial years from 2016-17 to 2020-21, the number of cases involving punishment against misconduct relating to insubordination, negligence/neglect of duty and unauthorised absence/unpunctuality broken down by year is as follows:

Financial Year	Number of cases
2016-17	239
2017-18	252
2018-19	267
2019-20	150
2020-21	167

The majority of the above disciplinary cases involved minor misconduct, and the officers were punished with verbal or written warnings. There were a small portion of cases which involved repeated or more serious misconduct, and the punishments imposed included reprimand, severe reprimand, compulsory retirement or dismissal, etc.

(4) As mentioned above, civil servants are subject to performance appraisal on an annual basis which enables the management to monitor and assess staff performance. A civil servant may be granted an increment only if his/her performance at work has been satisfactory during the appraisal period. For an appraisee with substandard performance, his/her increment could be stopped or deferred. An officer's work performance is also an important consideration

for the departmental or grade management when selecting suitable officers for promotion and training. For individual civil servants with persistent sub-standard performance, the Government may invoke section 12 of the Public Service (Administration) Order to retire the officer concerned in the public interest.

On the other hand, the Government has made use of various commendation schemes (such as the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme, the Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Award Scheme and the Commendation Letter Scheme, etc.) to recognise and motivate exemplary performance of civil servants, and encourage them to provide quality service to members of the public with dedication.

With the community's rising expectations for public services, the civil service will continue to strive for excellence.