

**SPEECH BY DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER TEO CHEE HEAN AND  
MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE CIVIL SERVICE**

**PUBLIC SERVICE DIVISION (PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE)**

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY 2012  
1 MARCH 2012**

**Preamble**

1. Mr Chairman, Sir, I would like to thank the Members for their interest and support in the Public Service.

**Caring for Our Employees**

*Re-employment*

2. This year's Budget has committed to building a fair and inclusive society, and the Public Service will play its part as a responsible employer. Mr Heng Chee How asked for an update on re-employment in the Public Service. The new Public Service guidelines on re-employment for retiring officers took effect on 1 July 2011, six months ahead of national legislation.

3. Even before 1 July 2011, the Public Service was already re-employing many of its retired officers. In the first half of 2011, 385 officers or 74% of those who retired were re-employed. In the second half of the year after the guidelines took effect, 448 officers or 81% of those who retired were re-employed. This is a 7 percentage point increase.

4. Of the 107 officers who were not re-employed from 1 July to 31 December 2011, 48 did not meet the qualifying criteria such as the minimum performance requirement. 52 chose not to be re-employed. The remaining 7 officers were not re-employed due to reasons such as poor health and lack of suitable positions.

5. Agencies have the flexibility to re-employ officers who did not meet the qualifying criteria. In the second half of 2011, 22 such officers were re-employed as they were assessed to be able to continue contributing to the organisation.

6. In general, the implementation of re-employment has been smooth as they were the result of extensive consultation with public sector agencies and unions. Our older officers have generally kept an open mind about the re-employment options presented to them. There were some appeals from officers who did not meet the qualifying criteria.

7. The national legislation for re-employment has just taken effect on 1 January 2012, and PSD will monitor the implementation of re-employment in the private sector, and see how we can learn from best practices there.

#### *Medical Benefits in Re-employment*

8. Mr Heng also asked about medical benefits for re-employed officers. When public sector agencies offer re-employment, this is seen as a fresh episode of employment. This allows for flexibility in job arrangements, to take into consideration officers' preferences and availability of suitable positions in the organisations. As such, re-employed officers are placed on the prevailing medical benefit scheme available to those entering into new employment contracts, that is, the Medisave cum Subsidised Outpatient (MSO) scheme.

9. Civil servants on the MSO scheme receive an additional sum of 1% of their monthly salary (currently capped at \$70 per month) in their Medisave account. This sum is meant for the purchase of MediShield or Medisave-approved medical insurance. Since October 2006, PSD has made arrangements for a panel of insurance companies to provide Medisave-approved medical insurance coverage at discounted rates to public officers and their dependants. Some 98% of MSO officers have taken up such insurance plans.

10. Older civil servants on the Co Payment on Ward medical scheme or Comprehensive Co-payment Scheme should also take up medical insurance early. While these two schemes provide good medical coverage while the officer is in service, non-pensionable officers will cease to have these medical benefits after retirement. Officers should therefore plan early to take up medical insurance to make sure of coverage after their retirement.

11. The Civil Service will also work with insurance companies to examine the feasibility of having appropriate medical insurance packages to cater to these non-pensionable officers who wish to have medical coverage only after they retire. The insurance companies will have to assess the viability and cost of the proposal based on commercial considerations.

#### *Civil Service Medical Benefits*

12. Mr Yeo Guat Kwang asked for a review of the Civil Service medical benefits. The Civil Service reviews its medical benefits periodically to ensure that they are adequate. Our past reviews have shown that the provisions of the MSO scheme have been adequate when compared to the private sector. As part of our regular reviews, PSD will take another look at the MSO scheme, and see whether any adjustments need to be made. We will also engage the unions as part of this process. The review should be completed in the second half of the year.

### *Lower-income employees*

13. Mr Heng shared his concerns for the development, employability and wage growth of the Division 4 officers and Daily Rated employees in the Public Service.

14. As at the end of last year, there were 3,761 Division 4 and Daily-rated employees, or about 3% of the total public sector staff strength.

15. The Civil Service has a Training Incentive Scheme to encourage officers to upgrade themselves. Officers may receive cash incentives for completing specific work-related National-level Training Programmes, and Ministries may also customize their own training schemes to develop their officers.

16. The employability and earnings of these officers are also improved through job re-design. Last year, the National Environment Agency (NEA) re-designed the jobs of more than 600 Daily-rated Employees. The revised work scope resulted in better career advancement. Their monthly salaries were also increased by 4%.

17. Most of our Division 4 officers are in the Operations Support and related schemes. To ensure that salaries remain competitive, the monthly salaries of these officers were increased by approximately 5% in February 2012, and this benefited about 2,300 officers.

18. From 1 April 2012, the Public Service will also re-employ all eligible Division IV officers at their last drawn salaries at the point of retirement, and this will benefit about 590 officers retiring from 2012 to 2015.

### **A Capable Public Service**

#### *PSC Scholarships for Minority Students*

19. Mr Chairman, Sir, Mr Pritam Singh asked about PSC scholarships for minority students. PSC scholarships allow us to attract and develop some of the most capable and committed people with the right values each year, to ensure a steady pipeline of high calibre officers to serve Singapore.

20. Scholarship holders are selected on the basis of merit. Beyond academic records, the PSC is particularly interested in candidates with strong leadership qualities, good character and a keen interest in public service work. The PSC, through its Secretariat, partners our schools to reach out to all students who have demonstrated the highest potential, to apply for PSC scholarships, regardless of race, religion, family background or household income.

21. The MOE works closely with the self-help groups to give them the necessary support to raise the quality and the academic performance of students in the various racial groups.

22. There is no quota for the number of PSC scholarships awarded. Hence, if two candidates qualify and are equally deserving, PSC will award the scholarship to both.

23. I thank Mr Pritam Singh for acknowledging that the Public Service Commission is already working with these various agencies and I can understand why it's natural for him to ask for more to be done. We also would like more to be done, but we need to have practical suggestions on how this can be further improved.

#### *Ethos of Public Service*

24. Let me now turn to Professor Eugene Tan's points on promoting the ethos of public service and his reflections on the recent debate on ministerial salaries.

25. During the debate on ministers' salaries, the Prime Minister explained that establishing an appropriate salary framework is important to ensure that we have the leadership needed for our future. The Government agrees with the three principles for determining salaries of political office holders that were proposed by the Committee- competitive salary, ethos of public service embodies through sacrifice, and clean wage. These three principles were also endorsed by both sides of this House.

26. I agree with Professor Tan that we should encourage and nurture the ethos of public service among Singaporeans so as to groom future public service leaders. The idea of duty and doing something for your country and your people, these are important things which should inspire young people. Professor Tan also reflected on how to determine a fair wage, and was uncomfortable with the idea of sacrifice. The whole process of determining a fair wage was a fairly difficult one, which we asked the Committee to help us to do.

27. The Committee, with the assistance of HR consultants, assessed what the fair wage would be for a job which is equivalent to that of a minister, given the calibre and experience required of Ministers, the responsibilities and impact of their jobs, and the scope of decisions they are expected to make. The Committee then applied a discount to reflect the ethos of political service, which was not just a principle put forth by the Committee but also endorsed by this House, and expected now by many people in our society.

28. Professor Tan also expressed his views on applying these principles to the Public Service, and how we might develop an appropriate pay framework for the Public Service. The Government's policy is to pay competitive salaries that follow, but not lead the market. An important point that the Committee expressed was that public officers "are professionals and hence should not be subject to the same degree of sacrifice as political appointment holders".

29. The principle of paying salaries that are competitive relative to their market benchmarks is applied to all schemes of service in the Civil Service. I have asked PSD to carry out a review of the salaries of Administrative Service officers, the Judiciary and Statutory Appointment Holders to ensure that the salary framework remains fair and competitive for those officers who do very important jobs for us. This will ensure that the Public Service can continue to get a steady flow of able and committed people to helm and staff the key appointments in the Public Service and Organs of State. I expect that this review will be completed and ready for implementation in six to nine months.

### *Public Service Leaders*

30. Mr Lim Biow Chuan spoke about the Administrative Service. The Public Service needs strong and capable leaders to work with the elected Government to formulate and implement policies for Singapore's long-term success. Such leaders are expected to possess outstanding leadership qualities, uphold Public Service values and provide Whole-of-Government perspectives in tackling complex issues.

31. The Administrative Service inducts and trains a steady pipeline of high calibre officers for top leadership positions in the Public Service. This is a system that has worked well for Singapore, and is a key element in ensuring that we have a public service of high quality to serve Singaporeans.

32. Anyone, both from within or outside the Public Service, can apply to join the Administrative Service. Of the 190 appointments to the Administrative Service in the past 10 years, more than 90% started from other schemes of the Public Service. This includes the Management Executive scheme, the uniformed services, and the Economist, Teaching and Foreign Service. Of the 43 Permanent Secretaries and statutory board CEOs in the Administrative Service,<sup>1</sup> 22 were selected to join the Administrative Service later in their careers, after they had established themselves in their previous schemes of service.

33. Not all Public Service officers are suited for the wide-ranging and cross-sectoral work expected of Administrative Service officers. Some officers may

---

<sup>1</sup> Currently, all PS positions are held by AOs. There are 26 PS positions, but held by 22 AOs, as some have multiple PS portfolios. For the statutory boards, there are 54 CEO and CEO-equivalent positions. 21 statutory board CEO positions are currently held by AOs, while the rest are non-AOs.

be better suited, or prefer, to specialize or work in specific ministries or agencies.

34. Training and leadership development opportunities are also offered to all good officers. For instance, the key milestone programmes at the senior levels offered by the Civil Service College are extended to both Administrative Officers and officers from other schemes of service.

35. Selection and training help us to promote and reinforce the ethos of public service. We expect all our public officers, not just Administrative Officers, to demonstrate the values of Public Service – Integrity, Service and Excellence. And this is reflected in the way that we evaluate, reward and promote our officers.

36. Sir, good officers, especially those suited for the Administrative Service, have many attractive career options. Hence it is important that the remuneration and terms of service of these officers are kept competitive if we are to recruit and retain them in the long term.

#### *A robust system of checks and balances*

37. Mr Pritam Singh has called for the setting up of an office of the ombudsman. Sir, in principle, the idea of having such a function is a good one. Indeed there are already many avenues for members of the public to raise complaints, if they feel that they have received unfair or unreasonable treatment by government agencies, or if they want to report poor public service delivery or improper behaviour or wrongdoing. I appreciate his comments that he does not feel that there are inadequacies in the Public Service today.

#### *Complaints against unfair/ unreasonable treatment*

38. Citizens who feel aggrieved by Government decisions already write directly to the public service agencies in charge of the policy. There are processes for such grievances and appeals to be carefully considered.

39. Some also approach their MPs who help their constituents make representations to the relevant authorities. I am sure that Mr Pritam Singh must have received some visits from his constituents, and must have written such letters himself. MPs also raise pertinent concerns during question time in Parliament, to be addressed by the Minister-in-charge or the Prime Minister.

#### *Complaints against poor public service delivery*

40. Members of the public can also lodge complaints on unsatisfactory public service delivery, or send plaudits, to each public agency. Beyond the

individual agency, they can send complaints to REACH (Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry@Home), the Government's feedback unit that proactively engages citizens and promotes active citizenry; or the Public Service 21 Office at PSD which coordinates service quality efforts across the Public Service.

### *Complaints against improper behaviour/ wrongdoing*

41. As I said in Parliament last month, there are already many channels to report wrongdoing in the Public Service.

42. Apart from reporting to the heads of the department or agency, a member of the public can report the matter to the Permanent Secretary overseeing his Ministry or indeed, to the Minister. Alternatively, he can make a report to the Head of Civil Service or the Public Service Commission.

43. Corruption cases should be reported to the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB).

44. Many Singaporeans also write to the media, or express their views through the social media and new media. This is something that did not exist in 1966. There is thus no shortage of official or unofficial channels to lodge their complaints. In a sense, there is not just one ombudsman, everything centralised in one body or one agency, but many who collectively serve the same function. Therefore our view is that there is no need to create the separate office of ombudsman in our system of government. I was doing some background research on this subject and I was struck by how remarkably similar Mr Pritam Singh's speech is to a September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008 article on the Internet, "Time for an Ombudsman in Singapore", almost word for word.

## **Serving the Public**

### *WOG Coordination*

45. Finally, let me address the points on service delivery and Whole-of-Government coordination raised by Mr Heng Chee How and Professor Fatimah Lateef.

46. The challenges in service delivery usually occur where no clear agency is in charge, or where the problem needs to be dealt with by several agencies. And I do empathise with the frustrations that members of the public may face from time to time. The dual role of being a Minister in our government system is that he is also a Member of Parliament, so I do face some of these frustrations myself when representing my constituents. So everyone is dealt with very fairly; We all have our fair share.

### *"No Wrong Door" Policy*

47. The Public Service introduced the 'No Wrong Door' policy in 2004. When an agency receives a query that is not under its charge, it must identify the right agency or agencies to look into the issue, and help to coordinate a response. This has helped to resolve a good number of issues. However, there are still situations that are poorly defined and fall through the cracks, and the Public Service can do better in finding solutions to these. I freely acknowledge that.

### *"First Responder Protocol" Pilot*

48. To improve on the No Wrong Door policy, PSD will pilot a First Responder Protocol. Under this protocol, the first agency that receives the feedback, *if this agency has some domain expertise*, must diagnose the problem, and draw the required expertise from across the agencies to coordinate an effective response. This agency must then close the loop with the member of public who raised this issue in the first place, so he knows some action has been taken.

49. The Public Service will pilot the First Responder Protocol in the area of handling feedback about animal-related issues, with the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority being the first First Responder. Depending on the lessons from the pilot, the First Responder Protocol could eventually have broader application across more service delivery areas and agencies.

50. There is also a group of issues which quite frankly, we will find it hard to meet the expectations of members of the public. People will have different views on, for example, whether a bird singing in the morning is noise or a happy reminder of nature. Some members of the public want public agencies to act against neighbours, or sometimes even family members, with whom they have a private disagreement. In these cases, we hope that members of the public understand that it may not be possible for the Public Service to meet their expectations.

### *A Partnership with the Public*

51. Mr Chairman, Sir, While I want to reassure the Members that the Public Service is working hard to coordinate solutions to address the needs of the public, I would also like to urge the public to also be reasonable in their requests. Let me cite a few examples of some requests that our officers on the ground have dealt with patiently and with good humour.

52. I am told that a member of the public dropped four books at an HDB counter and told the officer to return them to the National Library Board (NLB), because there is a No-Wrong-Door policy. On another occasion, a resident in



Jurong called the NLB call centre to ask for the weather conditions in Ang Mo Kio. In both cases, the public officers did help. The HDB officer dropped the books off at the library on her own time; while the NLB officer called a colleague at Ang Mo Kio to check, and told the caller that “the weather is very hot”.

53. I am not saying that such stories are rampant, but we should all take a reasonable and even-handed approach. Policies like the No Wrong Door policy are meant to address real and pressing needs, and the time and resources taken to deal with unreasonable requests means that someone else’s needs are being put on hold. This is surely not how we want our public officers’ time, and taxpayers’ monies, to be utilised.

54. The Public Service must also proactively identify service delivery issues that require a more structural or long-term solution. One such area is cleaning of public spaces, which is under the responsibility of various agencies such as the National Environment Agency for public roads and the PUB for drains. The Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources will provide an update on an initiative to better integrate the public cleansing efforts of various agencies.

## **Conclusion**

55. Mr Chairman, Sir, we have covered a wide range of topics on the Public Service today. In Singapore, we are fortunate that our public officers serve with commitment, pride and passion.

56. They are the heart and soul of the Singapore Public Service which is recognized internationally for its excellence, honesty and effectiveness in delivering public services to Singaporeans. I thank members for their interest in, and support for, our public officers.

57. A career in the Public Service offers the opportunity to shape Singapore’s future and do meaningful work, which impacts the lives of Singaporeans. The recruitment, retention and general morale of personnel within the Public Service therefore goes beyond monetary considerations, as the Public Service offers intrinsic satisfaction to our officers. But it also depends on whether the work they do is recognised and appreciated by Singaporeans.

58. I encourage our public officers and members of the public to continue to work together, in the spirit of cooperation and understanding, to make Singapore a better home for us all.

**END**