

CHAPTER 4

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Review of Civil Service Housing Benefits

4.1 In Chapter 2 of our Report No. 20 published in January 1988, we mentioned that the Administration had begun a review of current civil service housing benefits and that it would engage a consultant to conduct a financial study of possible options. We had also asked the Administration to seek our advice upon finalisation of the detailed proposals.

4.2 Subsequently, the consultant's report and the Administration's preliminary proposals for a revised housing benefits package were put to staff for comment. After staff consultation, the preliminary proposals were modified and in March 1990 referred to us for advice.

4.3 The Administration's main proposals were as follows :-

- (a) A new Home Financing Scheme (HFS) would be introduced for officers remunerated on MPS 34 (Old MPS 38) and above as a replacement for the existing provision of Private Tenancy Allowance, Non-departmental Quarters, Home Purchase Scheme and Housing Loan Scheme for these officers.
- (b) The coverage of the existing Home Purchase Scheme (HPS) would be expanded and new rates of allowance would be introduced to take account of prevailing property prices.
- (c) An Accommodation Allowance for renting housing would be introduced for officers appointed in future on overseas terms. These officers would be eligible for neither HFS nor HPS.

4.4 We examined the proposals and satisfied ourselves that the proposed package would encourage and enable more civil servants to own their homes. We noted that the terms of provision of some housing benefits had been modified,

which would not only result in more effective use of existing financial resources but would also narrow the gap between the cost of the benefits to the Government and their perceived value to staff. We endorsed the Administration's proposals and made a number of detailed observations. These were set out in our letter of 29 May 1990 to the Governor (Appendix F).

4.5 The revised housing benefits package was accepted by the Government and implemented on 1 October 1990.

Special Allowance for General Duties Team

4.6 In June 1990, the Administration sought our advice on a proposal for a Special Allowance to the General Duties Team staff in the Urban Services Department and the Regional Services Department engaged in hawker control duties. The proposed allowance is to recognise their onerous and special working conditions, including shift working, obnoxious and hazardous work associated with seizure and arrest operations and subjection to a special code of conduct. Two rates (\$1,200 and \$800 per month) were proposed, having regard to different degrees of exposure to danger and confrontation. The existing Shift Duty and Obnoxious Duty Allowances payable to the staff concerned would be subsumed under the Special Allowance.

4.7 We were satisfied that there was a need to give suitable recognition to the job factors associated with direct hawker control duties. Since less than half of the staff in the grades concerned would be involved in such work, we agreed to the payment of an allowance rather than an improvement in the salary scale. The proposed rates of allowance were appropriate.

4.8 We further recommended that, if similar job factors were applicable, the Special Allowance should also be extended to the staff of the Housing Department, with different rates of allowance to reflect the particular circumstances of their case.