

9 December 1993

The Right Honourable Christopher Patten  
Governor of Hong Kong  
Government House  
Hong Kong

Dear Sir,

Special Allowance for Senior Personal Assistant  
and Senior Personal Secretary  
in Government House

We have been invited by the Administration to advise, under clause 1(e) of our Terms of Reference, on a proposal to pay a special allowance to the Senior Personal Assistant and the Senior Personal Secretary in Government House.

Background

2. The ranks of Senior Personal Assistant (SPA) and Senior Personal Secretary (SPS) belong to the Personal Secretary (PS) grade which comprises the following levels:

| <u>Rank</u>               | <u>Pay Scale (MPS)</u> | <u>Ranking of Principals</u> |
|---------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Senior Personal Assistant | 34 - 39                | D9 and above                 |
| Personal Assistant        | 28 - 33                | D8                           |
| Senior Personal Secretary | 22 - 27                | D4 to D7                     |
| Personal Secretary I      | 16 - 21                | D2 and D3                    |
| Personal Secretary II     | 4 - 15                 | D1 and below                 |

Senior Personal Assistants provide executive secretarial service for the Governor, the Chief Justice, the Chief Secretary, the Financial Secretary and the Attorney General, while Senior Personal Secretaries serve directorate officers on D4 (\$104,750) to D7 (\$126,700). As at 1 October 1993, there were 5 SPA and 130 SPS posts in the service.

The Administration's proposal

3. The Administration is of the view that compared with

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other officers in the same ranks, the SPA and SPS in Government House face greater work pressure and assume heavier responsibilities because:

- (a) working hours in Government House are long and unpredictable. To deal with the large volume of communications with London and Beijing arising from the current Sino-British negotiations on constitutional reforms, the two officers are regularly called upon to work overtime. They have to remain on standby at other times and are often called back to work on urgent and sensitive communications;
- (b) they have to handle matters of a sensitive nature often within a tight time-schedule and produce work of a consistently high quality; and
- (c) the SPA is responsible for complex duties such as organisation of investitures and coordination of the Governor's official and private diaries. Such duties must be carried out meticulously to ensure that no mistakes are made. The SPS is regularly called upon to assist the SPA and provide cover for her at other times.

4. To recognise their demanding duties and unusually heavy workload during the current negotiations, the Administration proposes to grant the officers a special allowance at the rate of one increment above their substantive salaries with effect from a current date and to review the continued payment of the allowance at the end of the negotiations.

Commission's views and recommendations

5. In reviewing job-related allowances in 1991, we upheld the long established principle that an allowance should be paid only when extra or unusual duties took up a significant proportion of an officer's time. We also re-affirmed that eligibility for such allowances should be determined by reference to a cut-off point at MPS 33 and that members of the administrative and professional grades should not be eligible for such allowances. However, exceptions to the rules should be allowed to cater for very special circumstances. Following these principles, the SPS in Government House is eligible for the payment of a special allowance, while such an allowance for the SPA has to be justified on exceptional grounds.

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6. We agree that the nature of work in Government House is such that the two officers have to shoulder heavier responsibilities and cope with greater demands on their time and dedication than other members of their ranks. We note that the Administration has examined various ways of recompensing the staff concerned and has concluded that the payment of a special allowance is the most practical and appropriate. The Administration has also assured us that the arrangement will not be extended to other SPAs and SPSSs in the service since they do not face the same working conditions.

7. Having regard to the special nature of the work in Government House and the unusual pressures placed on the SPA and the SPS there, we support the payment of a special allowance to them with effect from a current date. We consider it reasonable to set the rate at one increment above the officers' substantive salaries.

8. The Administration has advised us that the continued payment of the allowance would be reviewed at the conclusion of the current Sino-British negotiations. While the negotiations may have further increased the workload of the two officers concerned, we believe that the pressures they face are inherent in the nature of the work in Government House. We therefore recommend that the Administration should re-examine the problem with a view to finding a longer-term solution.

9. In conclusion, we endorse the Administration's proposal to pay the Senior Personal Assistant and the Senior Personal Secretary in Government House a special allowance at the rate of one increment above their substantive salaries with effect from a current date and recommend that the Administration should look for a longer-term solution to the problem.

Yours faithfully,

(Sidney Gordon)  
Chairman  
For and on behalf of  
Members of the Standing Commission