

Appendix G

21 December 1994

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

Dear Sir,

**Special Allowance for the
Social Secretary and Housekeeper
Government House**

We have been invited by the Administration to advise, under Clause 1(e) of our Terms of Reference, on its proposal to grant a special allowance to the Social Secretary and Housekeeper in Government House.

BACKGROUND

2. The Social Secretary grade and the Housekeeper grade belong to the establishment of Government House. The Social Secretary grade comprises a Social Secretary (MPS 30-32) and an Assistant Social Secretary (MPS 24-26). The Social Secretary, currently filled by an overseas agreement officer, is responsible for co-ordinating arrangements for Government House functions, providing personal assistance and secretarial services to the wife of the Governor, and providing secretarial and support services to Government House guests.

3. The Housekeeper grade has only a single post of Housekeeper (MPS 26-31) which is also currently filled by an overseas agreement officer. The Housekeeper is responsible for all domestic services (housekeeping, catering and supervision of domestic staff) at Government House and at the Governor's Lodge at Fanling.

4. In the view of the Administration, the salary structure for the Social Secretary is quite flat - a spread of only three pay points - providing no incentive to remain beyond a single contract. There is no career path. The incumbent reached the maximum point in 1992. The Housekeeper's salary scale covers six

increments but the incumbent will on normal progression reach the maximum point next year. Both have agreed to extend their agreements, but by only one year (to September 1995 for the Social Secretary and June 1995 for the Housekeeper) rather than until 1997 as requested by management. They argue that the nature of their work has changed, their responsibilities and workload have increased, and that the remuneration offered is not commensurate with the duties demanded of them. As a result, Government House faces difficulty in retaining the incumbent Social Secretary and Housekeeper who have acquired considerable experience in Government House work. Retaining them for the less than three years remaining in which there will be a British Governor is considered desirable by the Administration because of their experience and of the anticipated difficulty in securing suitable replacements for a short contract of two years or so.

INCREASED RESPONSIBILITIES AND WORKLOAD

5. The Administration has advised us that over the last two years, the workload and responsibilities of the Social Secretary and Housekeeper have increased considerably, as follows -

- (a) monthly ballroom functions (concerts, gala dinners, ballet performances, etc) are organised as part of a programme to open up Government House to the community. The Social Secretary is responsible for programming, for all liaison with the organisations invited to perform and for attending to the performers, audience and guests on the night. The Housekeeper makes all the catering and service staff management arrangements;
- (b) apart from arranging more functions, the Social Secretary is now required also to attend many of the outside engagements undertaken by the Governor's wife, to provide on-scene assistance and liaise with the parties concerned on the follow up action required;
- (c) the Housekeeper has had to oversee a major programme of renovation works to Government House. While this is now substantially complete, one of the effects of the renovation has been to turn the public areas of Government House into a display area for works of art on loan from the Hong Kong Museum of Art and private collections. The Housekeeper is responsible for care and supervision of the exhibits while they are in the House;
- (d) in consequence of activities undertaken by the Governor's wife, both

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the Social Secretary and the Housekeeper are now required to carry out their duties with less detailed supervision and to display more initiative. For example, they are expected to submit proposals for functions and prepare programmes, menus and guest lists without initial direction;

- (e) full responsibility for organising outside social functions for the Governor, previously undertaken by the Aide-de-Camp, has been transferred to the Social Secretary since June 1992;
- (f) the nature of house guests has been changing, as well as the number. More senior political and VIP visitors are staying, requiring a higher standard of service from the Social Secretary and Housekeeper; and
- (g) partly on account of the increased responsibilities and partly through the sheer increase in the number of functions and visitors at Government House and in the number of activities undertaken by the Governor's wife, the average weekly hours worked by the Social Secretary has increased from 49 hours to 56 hours and that for the Housekeeper from 48 hours to 51 hours.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSAL

6. To recognise the increase in responsibilities and workload as detailed in paragraph 5 above and to provide an incentive for the officers concerned to extend their contract until 1997, the Administration proposes the granting of a special allowance to the Social Secretary and Housekeeper, as follows -

- (a) with effect from a current date, two additional increments on top of the salary scale of the Social Secretary be granted to the Social Secretary who is already at the maximum of her pay point. The award of two additional increments is justified on grounds of the significant increase in the complexity of her work and level of responsibility;
- (b) with effect from June 1996, an additional increment on top of the salary scale of the Housekeeper be granted to the Housekeeper after she has reached her maximum pay point in June in the previous year. Given the less significant increase in both the workload and the level of responsibility, the award of one additional increment to the

Housekeeper is considered to be in the right order.

The Administration has indicated that both allowances will fall away in 1997 at the time the establishment of Government House is reviewed. The Administration has also confirmed that as most of the additional duties and responsibilities fall on the shoulders of the Social Secretary, there is no case for recommending an allowance for the Assistant Social Secretary.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

7. The Administration has advised us that it has considered the payment of other job-related allowances to the Social Secretary and the Housekeeper but has not found any of them to be appropriate for their case. Neither is eligible for an overtime allowance. The payment of an honorarium to compensate for their overtime worked would be much more costly than the award of increments. Recruiting extra staff to cope with the additional workload would not address the concern of the staff, as the problem is not simply a question of workload but the changing nature of duties.

COMMISSION'S VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8. We note that the present problem faced by the Administration is one of retaining the existing incumbents of the Social Secretary and Housekeeper whose continued service in Government House for the remaining three years until 1997 is considered to be of considerable value. In normal circumstances, this would call for an overall review of the pay and conditions of service of the Social Secretary and the Housekeeper grades. This is not, however, possible in the present case. The difficulty faced by the Administration is that until the future Chief Executive has been appointed and his/her requirements are known, it would not be appropriate to introduce any permanent change to the Government House establishment or the pay scales of staff. As advised by the Administration, a major review of the entire Government House establishment will take place post-June 1997.

9. In the circumstances, and having regard to the fact that none of the other alternative options explored by the Administration are viable, we agree that the granting of a special allowance in the form of additional increments is an appropriate arrangement in addressing the present problems. This arrangement is also in line with our recommendations in the 1989 Salary Structure Review, inter alia, that the Civil Service Branch should be authorised to grant additional increments as a temporary arrangement to deal with recruitment and retention difficulties which were sufficiently serious as to justify special treatment.

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10. In view of the increased responsibilities and workload of the Social Secretary and the Housekeeper described in paragraph 5 above, and having regard to the need to provide sufficient incentive for the officers concerned to continue their service in Government House until 1997, we support the Administration's proposal that a special allowance of two additional increments and one additional increment be granted respectively to the Social Secretary and the Housekeeper. We also consider it appropriate, as proposed by the Administration, that the special allowance for the Social Secretary be implemented with effect from a current date since the present incumbent has already reached the maximum point of her pay scale while that for the Housekeeper should take effect from June 1996, one year after she has reached her maximum pay point. This notwithstanding, we suggest that the Administration should make it clear to the staff concerned that the granting of the special allowance is conditional upon their performance being satisfactory and their workload and responsibilities continuing as heavy as at present. This is particularly relevant in the case of the Housekeeper who will not be eligible for the special allowance until June 1996. The Administration should keep the job situation of the Social Secretary and the Housekeeper under review to ensure that the payment of the special allowance to them is warranted at all times.

CONCLUSION

11. In conclusion, we support the Administration's proposal to grant a special allowance to the Social Secretary and Housekeeper in Government House at rates as set out in paragraph 6 above.

Yours faithfully,

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