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1997 payout plan for police

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Proposals for a compensation scheme for expatriate officers who are required to retire in 1997, or who are superseded for promotion to make way for local officers before then, are being studied by top Government officials.

The scheme, modelled after programmes in former British dependent territories like Fiji and Kenya, could cost tens of millions of dollars in taxpayers' money if approved.

The compensation scheme is understood to be one of the more sensitive proposals submitted in a lengthy report on localisation of the police force, which was completed recently by senior Government officials.

The rationale behind the proposed lump sum payment to expatriate police officers is

that they should be compensated for their 'forced' early retirement.

The amount of compensation, if approved, will depend on the age of the officer, his years of service and his rank.

The Deputy Commissioner of Police (Management), Mr Eric Blackburn, confirmed last night that the compensation scheme, with other proposals in the just-completed report, is being considered by top Government policy-makers.

"There is no great rush to implement any of the recommendations as we still have 11½ ahead with the localisation programme," he said.

Mr Blackburn said there is no secret about what the White Paper on the Annual Report on Hongkong said about localisation of the

police force. The most urgent step needed is to identify and develop local officers with the potential to hold high posts within the force, he said.

Members of the Local Inspectors Association, however, reacted strongly to news of the compensation proposal.

An association spokesman said there should be similar treatment for local Chinese inspectors who might not wish to remain with the Special Administrative Region police force after 1997.

At present, if they retire in 1997 before the age of 55, or in some cases where early retirement is approved at 45, they will receive no payment from the Government, he said.

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1997 police payout proposed

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Other association members also complained yesterday that the police localisation policy was not being implemented fast enough, the spokesman said.

Asked to comment on the local inspectors' complaints, Mr Blackburn said he is closely in touch with the feelings and views of local inspectors as well as of other ranks of local and expatriate staff.

He said the new study is both complicated and sensitive and the Government is not expected to make any immediate drastic policy changes until the recommendations are thoroughly studied and weighed on their merits.

Another police source said last night that expatriate police officers, unlike officials in other Government departments, will not be able to stay on and work for the SAR government after 1997, even if they want to.

"It would be quite improper and too strong in colonial colour to have an armed security force packed with expatriate inspectors giving orders to junior Chinese police constables," he said.

"If expatriate officers are not promised some compensation when they leave in 1997, they might not want to stay on with the police and might change careers early, thus leaving too many gaps in the police force overnight," he said.