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56-hour week for firemen suggested

By Franz Leung

A POWERFUL committee is expected to present a recommendation to the Governor today on a 56-hour working week for firemen.

A decision was believed to have been made by 11-member Standing Committee on Disciplined Services Salaries and Conditions of Services, an independent advisory body to the Governor, Sir David Wilson.

Sources close to the committee said it was "the only feasible option because other proposals may have involved a reduction in salaries".

"The firemen would have a compensation of two hours for a week. That means their weekly working hours would in effect be 54."

It is understood that the firemen would not be

compensated in cash and the Government would not need to spend extra money.

"They will have a day-off after six working days when 12 hours compensation are accumulated," sources said.

Sources said the committee also suggested the current 24-hour shift pattern be changed to 12 hours.

The new shift pattern may be implemented by July or August, when details have been worked out by the department.

"The details include regrouping the firemen from two groups into three, promoting dozens of senior firemen who would be needed for the new shift pattern, and regrouping the specially trained firemen who can drive engines and operate equipment," sources said.

Under the new shift pat-

tern, firemen would work 21 or 22 days a month, 12 hours a day.

A working party is to be set up on June 1 and would take a year to review the feasibility of implementing a 48-hour week, as promised by the Government.

Firemen are fighting for a reduction of their working week from 60 hours to 48, on par with other disciplinary forces.

They launched a hunger strike last month to press their demands. The radical action almost crippled the Fire Services Department.

The fast ended when the firemen agreed on a 54-hour working week for the interim period.

The firemen will meet tomorrow night to discuss their next course of action.