

\$972m more for civil servants

By FANNY WONG

TAXPAYERS will have to pay an extra \$972 million this year for a government package to improve the pay structure of about half the territory's 186,000 civil servants.

The Government is hopeful the scheme, which is on top of a 15 per cent pay rise across the board, will help solve recruitment and retention problems faced by several categories of officers in the civil service.

The scheme will translate into an average additional salary hike of 10 per cent or more for five government grades which are currently receiving temporary allowances.

They are nurses, medical and health officers, analysts and programmers, executive officers and assistant social work officers.

Other grades standing to benefit from the adjustment will receive an additional pay rise of about five per cent, sources said.

The package, recommended by the Standing Commission on Civil Service Salaries and Conditions of Service, was endorsed by the Executive Council on Tuesday.

Coupled with the annual pay rise, the 1990-91 bill for civil service salary increases will add up to \$6 billion.

Sources said of the \$972 million, \$534 million was needed for improving the Master Pay Scale (MPS) and the pay scale of training ranks and changing the pay structure of about half the 126 individual grades under review.

A source said: "Subject to the Finance Committee's approval, these recommendations would be immediately implemented."

Restructuring of the MPS includes improvement to the top end of the scale covering about 1,500 officers.

The bars of increments within several points on the scale will also be slightly adjusted.

The remaining \$438 million is earmarked for raising the pay benchmarks used to set the starting pay of entry ranks of several junior grades and transferring the senior artisan and artisan grades from the Model Scale 1 to the MPS.

Sources said the funds for these two commitments would be sought after the Standing Commission had finished the review of the remaining 216 civil service grades early next year.

The Government estimated that the package would cost about the same amount as awarding an extra two per cent to all civil servants.

But a source said the \$972 million package was not connected with the Government's decision in granting a rise of 15 per cent, instead of 17 per cent.

The source said the Government had made provisions in the 1990-91 budget for the \$972 million commitment.

"But whether it is enough, we don't know."

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This is because we are not at the end of the review, we will have more reports [on pay reviews]," he said.

Another source said it was possible that part of the payment might not be made until the next financial year.

However, as all permanent changes to existing pay scales arising from the current review will take effect from October 1 last year, another \$486 million will be needed for backdated payments.

A source said: "It sounds like a lot of money, but in fact it only amounts to three per cent of the expenditure on personal emoluments in the civil service and the subvented sector.

"These recommendations were formulated by the Standing Commission which is made up by non-of-

ficials and the proposals were examined by the Executive Council and will shortly be scrutinised by the Finance Committee.

"Whether the package is the best deal for taxpayers, I am sure the Finance Committee will address the question."

The five grades will cease to receive their allowance once the pay scale adjustment is implemented.

A source said: "Some of them will face immediate loss as a result of the recommendations. But almost all will be better off in the long run after a period of years as a result of restructuring their pay scales."

But Government Doctors' Association chairman, Dr Ho Shui-wai, warned the package would further erode staff morale by ignoring the

interest of doctors at both ends of the hierarchy.

Dr Ho said junior doctors with less than three years of service would be getting less under the proposal.

A one-point increase in salary, for instance, would only give them an extra \$120 a month when they cease to get the \$1,800 monthly temporary allowance, Dr Ho said.

"The commission failed to make any improvement for senior doctors with more than 10 years of service whose wastage is at its peak," he said.

The doctors were upset by the commission's rejection of their demand for an independent pay scale.

Dr Ho also slammed the proposal for excluding government dentists from the adjustment.