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\$21m to pay for postmen's overtime

By TERRY LEE

THE Post Office is asking for an extra \$21 million to pay for overtime by postal workers.

The Government is seeking approval for the extra money on top of an original request for \$41 million in anticipation of sharp increases in demand for postal services in the next few months.

The request is almost three times the sum agreed to by the Legislative Council's Finance Committee last month to create new Post Office jobs.

Last month, legislators accepted a request for \$8 million to create 193 senior postal jobs following pressure from postal unions.

Although the money would be enough to hire hundreds of postal workers, Finance Committee papers claim there are reasons for staff working overtime.

The document, now being circulated to councillors, says overtime work takes up 96.6 per cent of total allowance payments.

At present, there are 2,863 postmen and 1,578 postal officers under the Post Office's establishment.

However, the papers say permanent and temporary staff in the Post Office are only able to meet 8½ million hours, or 83.6 per cent, of the total workload resulted from processing an estimated 769 million postal items this year.

While the remaining 1.7 million hours have to be met

by overtime work, present provisions can only pay for slightly less than 1.1 million hours.

To cover the shortfall, the Post Office says it will need another \$21 million.

The document claims the volume of mail during peak periods and some unexpected occasions cannot be met by regular staff planning.

"The nature of postal operations is such that the workload is uneven and while staffing is geared to normal traffic levels, peak workloads have to be covered by overtime," it says.

The bulk of overtime has also been caused by work on Sundays and public holidays to collect, sort and despatch mail.

Moreover, overtime work is needed to cover manpower shortages resulting from vacancies to ensure a smooth operation of the postal service.

The document says the need for an extra \$21 million has been caused by civil service pay rises and the larger than expected growth in postal traffic.

An increase in the sale of philatelic products by the Post Office has given rise to more overtime work.

Councillors have been given until Thursday to indicate their approval or otherwise of the fund application.

Unless they want to challenge it, the item will not be put for discussion at the Finance Committee meeting next week.