

Report No. 45 of the Director of Audit — Chapter 5

OPERATION AND TRAINING OF THE CIVIL AID SERVICE

Summary

1. The Civil Aid Service (CAS), established in January 1952, is a government-financed auxiliary emergency organisation. The operation of the CAS is governed by the CAS Ordinance (Cap. 518) and the CAS Regulation. The aim of the CAS is to provide an effective auxiliary force to augment the Government's regular emergency services in emergency situations, provide civic services to government departments and outside agencies, and provide young people (aged between 12 and 17 years) with the opportunity to develop self-confidence and civic-mindedness through participation in the CAS Cadet Corps. The Commissioner of the CAS is appointed by and accountable to the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The Chief Staff Officer of the CAS, assisted by a team of civil servants, provides administrative support to the CAS auxiliary force. As at 31 March 2005, the CAS had 113 staff, 3,338 CAS members and 2,748 cadets. The pay and allowances of CAS members are governed by the Auxiliary Forces Pay and Allowances Ordinance (AFPAO — Cap. 254). In 2004-05, the pay and allowances of CAS members were \$25.5 million, and the expenditure of the CAS was \$73.6 million.

Training of Civil Aid Service members and cadets

2. CAS members are trained to perform emergency duties. Cadets are trained in a wide variety of disciplines and skills. The Audit Commission (Audit) has found that: (a) in 2003 and 2004, on average, 1,427 (40%) CAS members did not meet the minimum training attendance requirement of 60 hours stipulated in the CAS Regulation, and 1,164 (32%) CAS members did not meet the minimum unit training attendance requirement of 30 hours stipulated in the CAS General Order; (b) the CAS did not impose punishments upon its members who failed to comply with the minimum training attendance requirements; (c) in 2001-02, some CAS members did not have prior approval for claiming pay and allowances for training in excess of the specified maximum training hours; (d) since 2002-03, the CAS has not specified the maximum number of unit training hours per member per year and there is no control over excessive training to individual members; (e) CAS members attending regular meetings and performing unit administrative and clerical work have all been classified as "training" and it is difficult to monitor their actual training attendance; and (f) the CAS did not keep track of its members who resigned from the CAS within one year after completing their recruitment training and did not recover the recruitment training costs from them.

3. *Audit has recommended that the CAS management should: (a) ensure that all CAS members comply with the minimum training attendance requirements; (b) consider taking disciplinary action against those CAS members for non-compliance with the minimum training attendance requirements; (c) ensure that prior approval is obtained by CAS members before attending training in excess of the specified maximum training hours; (d) tighten control over the maximum training attendance by individual CAS members; (e) review the practice of classifying attendance at regular meetings, and unit administrative and clerical work as training; and (f) keep track of those members who, without reasonable excuse, resign from the CAS within one year of the completion of their recruitment training and recover the recruitment training costs from them in accordance with the CAS Regulation.*

Services provided by Civil Aid Service members

4. Charges are required if CAS services are provided to non-government organisations (NGOs), unless prior approval has been obtained from the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury. Audit has found that: (a) since 1993, the establishment of the CAS auxiliary force had not been reviewed or revised despite substantial changes in its operational needs; (b) the CAS has not laid down the minimum service requirement for its members; (c) in 2003 and 2004, on average, 1,328 (37%) CAS members performed less than 50 hours of services in a year, including 412 (12%) CAS members who did not provide any service at all; (d) the CAS did not discharge those members who had not provided any service and had not attended any training in a year; and (e) the CAS had not imposed charges for some services rendered to NGOs in 2004-05 and had not sought the approval of the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury to waive the charges for services provided to NGOs since 2001.

5. *Audit has recommended that the CAS management should: (a) in consultation with the Secretary for Security, conduct an establishment review of the CAS, taking into account changes in the CAS operational needs since the last establishment review in 1993; (b) state clearly the minimum service requirement for CAS members in the CAS General Order; (c) closely monitor the services provided by individual CAS members; (d) introduce an assessment system to ensure that CAS members meet the requirements of the CAS Regulation for retaining their membership and discharge those members who fail to meet the requirements; and (e) tighten control to ensure that all services rendered to NGOs by CAS members are properly charged and seek the approval of the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury for waiver of charges.*

Pay and allowances of Civil Aid Service members

6. **Pay and allowances.** According to sections 6, 8 and 9 of the AFPAO, CAS members, undergoing training or called out for active service in the event of a limited call out or a full call out, are eligible to be paid at the standard rates of pay. Audit has found that: (a) since 1992, the CAS has not provided funds for the normal training and riding practice of its Motor Cycle Demonstration Team; and (b) the CAS had rejected a number of requests for CAS assistance without attempting to enlist its members' participation on a no-pay basis. *Audit has recommended that the CAS management should: (a) consider limiting the pay of CAS members to only those training courses that fall within the statutory*

duties of the CAS; and (b) consider encouraging CAS members to participate in community services on a no-pay basis, and recognise such no-pay service hours towards the efficiency requirements specified in the CAS Regulation and the CAS General Orders.

7. ***Ration allowance and the provision of direct feeding.*** According to section 10 of the AFPAO, a CAS member, who attends for duty for eight consecutive hours during which he is not provided with free meals or rations, shall be eligible to receive a daily ration allowance. In respect of the same period of 24 hours, no member shall be eligible to receive more than one ration allowance. Audit has found that: (a) on 1 January 2001, the CAS began to arrange direct feeding to its members irrespective of the duration of their duty/training hours and in some cases, two to five meals or rations were provided to CAS members when they were on voluntary duty or training in a day; and (b) the CAS implemented the new arrangement of direct feeding eight months before obtaining policy support of the Secretary for Security. *Audit has recommended that the CAS management should: (a) critically review the cost-effectiveness of the existing arrangement of direct feeding to CAS members; and (b) obtain policy support of the Secretary for Security before implementing a new arrangement/policy.*

Utilisation of the training venues and sub-offices

8. ***Training venues.*** Training of CAS members is mainly conducted at four training centres and two campsites located in different districts. The CAS also hires other training accommodation, including government-aided and private schools and educational institutes, to conduct training activities. Audit has found that the average usage rates of the CAS training venues were low. In 2004, the average usage rates of the four training centres and the two campsites were 23% and 32% respectively, and the usage rate of the morning session of the CAS Hong Kong Training Centre in Causeway Bay was 4%. *Audit has recommended that the CAS management should: (a) examine the need to retain all the under-utilised training venues; (b) review the need to continue hiring other training accommodation; and (c) in consultation with the Government Property Administrator, consider sharing those under-utilised training venues with other government departments or educational institutes.*

9. ***Sub-offices.*** As at 31 May 2005, the CAS had 25 sub-offices. Audit has found that: (a) in response to audit enquiries in January 2005, the CAS had conducted a review of its sub-offices in early 2005 and considered that the number of sub-offices should be reduced from 25 to 16; and (b) the CAS would return nine surplus sub-offices to the Government Property Agency by 2009-10. *Audit has recommended that the CAS management should: (a) expedite action to surrender the nine surplus sub-offices to the Government Property Agency; and (b) critically review the justifications for retaining the remaining 16 sub-offices, taking into account centralised training at the Company level, and the availability of electronic communications and public transportation networks.*

Control and procurement of stores items

10. As at 31 March 2005, the CAS had 506 stores items with a total value of \$4.4 million. The Departmental Stores Ledger Posting System (DSLPS) of the

Government Logistics Department is used for the maintenance of stores items. Audit has found that: (a) the CAS had erroneously input the unit costs of five stores items to the DSLPS; (b) the CAS had purchased extra quantities of three stores items from suppliers arising from their surplus production; (c) some stores items were replenished without justifications and the quantities ordered were in excess of the annual consumption; and (d) the CAS kept 47 items of unserviceable microcomputers and accessories for up to more than five years, and 180 unserviceable bulky stores items as at 31 March 2005.

11. *Audit has recommended that the CAS management should: (a) ensure that the CAS stock records are accurate and correct; (b) avoid purchasing stores items arising from surplus production of suppliers; (c) tighten the control procedures in the purchase of additional stores items, taking into account the annual usage pattern and other factors which may affect their consumption; and (d) dispose of any unserviceable microcomputers and accessories, and unserviceable stores items to reduce administrative work and make available the storage space.*

Management information

12. The CAS has a Database Management System for maintaining the personnel records of all CAS members and cadets, and a computerised Payroll System for computing the monthly pay and allowances for CAS members. In November 2003, a contractor was appointed to upgrade and combine the existing Database Management System and Payroll System into a Human Resource Management System. The plan was to implement the new system by December 2005. Audit has found that the CAS: (a) did not compile statistics on the total hours of recruit training and centralised training attended by individual CAS members and cadets in a year; (b) did not compile statistics on the services provided by individual CAS members and cadets; (c) did not compile statistics on the usage rates of its training venues; (d) did not keep records and did not compile statistics on the usage of its 25 sub-offices; and (e) needs to enhance the new Human Resource Management System so that it would generate management reports.

13. *Audit has recommended that the CAS management should: (a) compile statistics and management reports on all the training attendance of and the services provided by individual CAS members and cadets; (b) keep proper records and compile management reports on the usage of the CAS training venues and sub-offices; and (c) consider enhancing the new Human Resource Management System so that it would generate management reports, including reports on training and service attendance of individual CAS members and cadets, and the usage rates of the CAS training venues and sub-offices.*

Response from the Administration

14. The Administration generally agrees with the audit recommendations.

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