

Public Administration Circular : 27/2023

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Ministry of Public Administration, Home Affairs,
Provincial Councils and Local Government
Independence Square,
Colombo 07

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Secretaries to Ministries
Chief Secretaries of Provinces
Heads of Departments

The Responsibility of Public Officers Towards “An Open and Accountable Government”

The responsibility of all public officers is to ensure an efficient and productive service delivery to the general public in consistent with the policies of the government. Even though, instructions have been given constantly to fulfil this responsibility, the views circulated among various parties regarding the instances where the officers do not follow those instructions in the performance of their duties, may cause damage to the credibility of the people on the public service delivery. Therefore, it is hereby emphasized that the responsibility of all the public officers is to be committed to avoid such situation.

02. Public officers should be committed strictly to follow the following instructions with the sole objective of ensuring an efficient and productive service delivery to the general public.

2.1 Attendance, general conduct and disciplinary of public officers.

- a) The general office hours during which the public officers, who serve in the offices, are from 8.30 a.m. to 4.15 p.m. on all working days and the government offices shall remain open for cash transactions till 3.00 p.m. on all working days.
- b) Though, these are the general office hours, a Head of Department/ Head of Institution is not restricted to employ his office-based officers and field officers only within these hours when there is a necessity for their services outside these hours. Provisions for this purpose have been given in Sub Section 1:1 and 1:2, Chapter XXVIII of the Establishments Code.

- c) The office-based officers and field officers shall deal respectively with the general public, who visit government offices for their necessities and the general public or any other stakeholder, with whom the field officers have to deal with in the field, without causing any issue. Further, they should see to assist without any hesitation in their service delivery to the general public with courtesy. Provisions for this purpose have been given in Sub Section 1:8, Chapter XLVII, Volume II of the Establishments Code.
- d) Every public officer should follow the provisions of the Establishments Code and Financial Regulations, instructions of Public Service Commission Circulars, Public Administration Circulars, Treasury Circulars and Circulars issued by other Departments and the provisions in the manuals and sets of instructions of the Departments reading and understanding them thoroughly. Provisions for this purpose have been given in Sub Section 1:3, Chapter XLVII, Volume II of the Establishments Code.
- e) Disciplinary action should be taken at such occasions where it is revealed that an officer serving in the institution/ division violates or does not follow the provisions/ instructions of Establishments Code, Circular or other sets of instructions.

2.2. Attire of Public Officers

It has been observed that a problematic situation has arisen in ensuring the dignity of the profession and duties as certain public officers used to report for duty in attire which is not suitable for their place of work. Therefore, every public officer should see to

- a) Report for duty in an appropriate and modest attire to preserve the dignity of the public service.
- b) Wear the office identity card during the office hours.
- c) Further, all the public officers receiving the allowance for uniform shall wear the uniform prescribed for them.

2.3 Maintaining public relations.

2.3.1 Remaining at the office

- a) It is compulsory for all the office-based officers to report for duty on due time, remain at the office within the prescribed period whilst ensuring the maximum service during such period.

- b) It is compulsory for the field officers to remain at the office within the prescribed time on the days on which they are prescribed to remain at office. Entries should be made in the required documents on the duties performed in the field and such documents should be submitted whenever necessary to the officers in charge of this supervision, maintaining field entries in an appropriate manner.
- c) It is extremely essential that Public Officials at all levels from minor grades to the Ministry Secretary to remain in the office, on Monday which is declared as the Public Day.
- d) It is important to imply the commitment of officers in every aspect for the benefit of general public on public days.
- e) No other meetings, workshops and ceremonies should be organized, and no one should leave office to participate in such activities on the public day.
- f) On this day, the Head of Department should ensure that no leave is granted, except under exceptional circumstances or on medical grounds.
- g) In order to make it a success, attending and remaining in office is compulsory for Staff Grade officers in particular.
- h) Officers in all Public Institutions serving at counters established for enquiries and rendering information, accepting applications and cash etc. should refrain from taking their lunch break simultaneously and the counters should be kept open continuously.
- i) Further any functions, which are not relevant to official duties, should not be organized within the office premises during duty hours and also the officers should refrain from attending various private functions outside office premises, which are not relevant to the official duties, while on duty.

2.3.2 Taking action on complaints made by the General Public

- a) The foundation of the public service is the General Public. Therefore, all public officers should pay their attention to the complaints/grievances of the General Public. Accordingly, every public institution should appoint a suitable officer with necessary training in this regard and the General Public should also be made aware of this arrangement.

- b) A complaint box or counter should be maintained at every government office enabling the General Public to make their complaints and for this purpose, it is advisable to use a form to collect the views of the General Public.
- c) Necessary action should be taken on the complaints in the complaint box examining them at regular intervals. Such examination should be conducted at least once a week and if it is a premises frequently visited by the General Public, such examination should be conducted within a period less than the above.
- d) Direct or hotline facility should be provided to the institution if it has to deal frequently with the complaints of the General Public.
- e) Feedback should be obtained from the recipient to verify whether he/she is satisfied with the response from the institution. Further investigations should be conducted on the negative feedback from the General Public and immediate action should be taken to rectify the identified faults if the weakness of the institution has paved way for such negative responses.

2.3.3 Responding to the letters sent by General Public

- a) Although Provisions of the Section 3:8, Chapter XXVIII of the Establishments Code requires that any communication received from a member of the Public or another Government Department should be replied promptly, in cases where it is not possible to send a formal and an accurate reply immediately, an interim reply should be sent within one week of the receipt of the communication. However, the final reply should be sent within 4 weeks.
- b) Replies to communications personally addressed to Hon. Minister in charge of relevant Ministry by Hon. Ministers/ Members of Parliament and Members of Provincial Councils should be signed by the Hon. Minister personally as the case may be. In other instances, the communications should bear the signature of the Secretary of the Ministry/Head of the Institution.
- c) Where a policy decision is necessary before a reply can be sent to any communication, it should be referred immediately to the Secretary of the relevant Ministry for instructions.
- d) Attention is hereby drawn to the Public Administration Circular 03/2010 dated 01.09.2010 issued informing to send replies to the

General Public in the same language medium of their letter. Further attention should be made to the effect that such instructions are strictly followed.

- e) When corresponding with the General Public and maintaining minutes and reports at the office, officers should be vigilant to use polite and decent language as mentioned in sub section 1.9, Chapter XLVII, Volume II of the Establishments Code.
- f) When corresponding with General Public, it is hereby requested to apply the phrase 'Dedicated to your service' at the end of the letter instead of the phrase in (e), sub section 3.1, Chapter XXVIII of the Establishments Code.
- g) Office letter heads should be used in office correspondence and such letter heads should contain the important contact numbers of the institution.
- h) When replying to all official letters, the direct number, fax number and e-mail address should be indicated just below the signature of the staff officer in charge of the subject.
- i) The mail sent to the common e-mail addresses should be checked daily and an officer should specially be appointed for the purpose. In the meantime, mails sent to the e-mail addresses of the staff officers should also be checked daily.
- j) Prompt action should be taken to send reply to the letters received through e-mail and in case, where a prompt reply cannot be sent, an interim reply should be sent along with an acknowledgement informing the time required for replying. In such cases, action should be taken to send a reply to the writer within a reasonable period/ before the date given.

2.3.4 Replying to the telephone calls received by the office

- a) Courteous response should be made to the inquiries made by General Public through telephones.
- b) Actions should be taken to answer all the telephone calls made to the office and an officer should be appointed specially to answer such calls, if the numbers of incoming calls received by any institution/ division are high.

- c) Staff Officers/ Officers in charge of the subjects should take actions to reply within a reasonable period regarding the matters for which immediate replies cannot/ are difficult to be made.
- d) An arrangement should have been strictly made to answer the caller even by an officer of the staff in case where the staff officer, to whom the telephone is assigned, is not in his/ her seat.
- e) The officers, who receive the allowance for telephones, should be vigilant to keep their mobiles switched on as far as possible and to reply the caller.

2.4 Ensuring facilities required by General Public

- a) Action should be taken to implement the official language policy as per the provisions in Public Administration Circular 03/2010. Dated 01.09.2010 (Delivering services in three languages)
- b) The Head of Institutions should see to formulate and implement the Citizen/ client charter of the institution in the proper and methodical manner and to display it for the information of the General Public.
- c) An arrangement should be established and maintained enabling to direct the General Public properly to the correct division/ unit, which is responsible to attend the relevant matter, when General Public visits a government institute seeking a certain service.
- d) Action should be taken to ensure facilities for disabled recipients to enter the office.

Sgd./ K.D.N. Ranjith Asoka

Secretary

Ministry of Public Administration, Home Affairs,
Provincial Councils and Local Government

Telephone : 0112662340
Fax : 0112692158
Email Address : ade-i@pubad.gov.lk