

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(1)1352/00-01

(These minutes have been
seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB1/PL/ITB/1

Legislative Council
Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Minutes of meeting
held on Monday, 12 March 2001, at 2:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

- Members present** : Hon SIN Chung-kai (Chairman)
Hon Howard YOUNG, JP (Deputy Chairman)
Hon Kenneth TING Woo-shou, JP
Hon David CHU Yu-lin
Hon Eric LI Ka-cheung, JP
Hon CHAN Kwok-keung
Hon LAW Chi-kwong, JP
- Members absent** : Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong
Hon YEUNG Yiu-chung
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, SBS, JP
- Public officers attending** : For Item IV

Mr Rex CHANG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Information
Technology and Broadcasting (D)

Mr NG Hon-wah
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs

Mr Jason PUN
Assistant Secretary for Information Technology and
Broadcasting (D)2

Mr Simon YAN
Assistant Director of Information Technology
Services

Miss Fannie KONG
Principal Information Officer, Information Services
Department

For Item V

Ms Eva CHENG
Deputy Secretary for Information Technology and
Broadcasting (1)

Mr Eddie MAK
Principal Assistant Secretary for Information
Technology and Broadcasting (A)

Mr Eddy CHAN
Commissioner for Television and Entertainment
Licensing

For Item VI

Ms Eva CHENG
Deputy Secretary for Information Technology and
Broadcasting (1)

Ms Gracie FOO
Principal Assistant Secretary for Information
Technology and Broadcasting (E)

Mr HA YUNG Kuen
Assistant Director (Support), Office of
Telecommunications Authority

Clerk in attendance : Miss Polly YEUNG
Chief Assistant Secretary (1)3

Staff in attendance : Ms Anita SIT
Senior Assistant Secretary (1)8

I Confirmation of minutes and matters arising
(LC Paper No. CB(1)776/00-01)

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2001 were confirmed.

II Date and items for discussion for next meeting

2. The Chairman informed members that as he would pay an overseas duty visit to the United Kingdom and the United States in the capacity of the Chairman of the Bills Committee on Securities and of Futures Bill from 4 April to 13 April 2001, he would not be able to chair the next Panel meeting scheduled for 9 April 2001. Members agreed that subject to the availability of the Deputy Chairman to chair the meeting, the next meeting would be held on 9 April 2001 as originally scheduled.

3. The Chairman said that as some individuals and organizations had forwarded views to the Panel on the issue of "web access by disabled persons" which would be discussed under item IV of this meeting, he consulted members on whether relevant organizations and individuals should be invited to give views on the issue at the next Panel meeting. Mr LAW Chi-kwong suggested that the Panel should consider the matter after discussion of item IV.

4. In response to Mr LAW Chi-kwong's enquiry, the Chairman said that the Administration had indicated that it would not be ready to brief the Panel on the outcome of the consultation exercise on digital terrestrial broadcasting in April 2001.

5. The Chairman requested members to inform the Clerk after the meeting of any items which they would like to discuss at the next meeting and asked the Clerk to also liaise with the Administration in this regard.

(Post-meeting note: As neither the Administration nor Panel members had proposed any item for discussion for the April meeting by 30 March 2001, the Chairman instructed thereafter that the April meeting of the Panel would not be held.)

III Information paper issued since last meeting
(LC Paper No. CB(1)768/00-01)

6. Members noted the above paper issued since last meeting.

IV Web access by disabled persons
(LC Paper No. CB(1)774/00-01(02))

7. The Principal Assistant Secretary for Information Technology and Broadcasting(D) (PAS(ITB)D) said that the discussion paper for this item sought to brief members on Government's initiatives to facilitate access to websites by people with disabilities. The Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs (PAS(HA)) supplemented the information contained in the discussion paper by making the following points -

- (a) The four departments which had initially indicated that they would complete the exercise to revamp their websites to make them more accessible to the blind and visually-impaired had subsequently agreed to advance the completion dates from 2002 to late 2001.
- (b) Although all Government bureaux/departments had agreed to complete the revamping exercise by end 2001, the Administration would maintain the existing target schedule of revamping at least half of all Government websites by the end of 2001 and the remainder by the end of 2002. This arrangement was to take into account the time required to obtain feedback from the Hong Kong Blind Union and other non-government organizations to confirm the usability and accessibility of the revamped websites to persons with disabilities. In this connection, the Administration had recently written to 10 non-government organizations representing disabled persons to invite their feedback on revamped Government websites.
- (c) The Administration recognized that one major technical problem yet to be resolved was how to make complicated statistical tables more comprehensible to the visually impaired. The Administration would continue to study the matter and liaise with relevant organizations to seek improvement in this regard.

8. Noting that the measures set out in the discussion paper mainly focused on improving web accessibility for the blind and visually-impaired, Mr LAW Chi-kwong enquired whether there were other measures aimed at facilitating web access by people suffering from other disabilities.

9. In response, PAS(HA) advised that problems with web access were mainly encountered by the blind and visually-impaired. There were relatively fewer problems encountered by users with impaired hearing as few websites provided only audio information without complementary texts and images. For people with other forms of disabilities, most of the problems they encountered related to the physical arrangement of computer equipment rather than web access as such.

10. Mr LAW Chi-kwong enquired about the monitoring mechanism within the Administration to ensure the accessibility of Government websites for people with disabilities. The Chairman sought information on the channel(s) for the public to forward complaints or views about Government websites and the mechanism for handling these complaints or views.

11. In reply, PAS(HA) and the Principal Information Officer, Information Services Department (PIO/ISD) advised that the Information Services Department (ISD) was responsible for monitoring the compliance of Government websites with the Guidelines for Setting Up Home Pages. ISD conducted a comprehensive checking of all Government websites annually as well as random checking on particular websites during the year. The public might forward views and enquires to the E-mail addresses provided at the Government Information Centre's (GIC) home page or homepages of individual bureau and department. ISD would handle the views or enquiries sent to the GIC homepage. Where necessary, ISD would refer them to relevant bureaux/departments for follow-up action.

12. PAS(HA) further advised that an Inter-departmental Committee was established in 1999 to review the aforesaid Guidelines and oversee implementation. The committee comprised representatives from the Home Affairs Bureau, Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau, Information Technology Services Department, ISD and the Business Promotion Unit. It was a standing committee and held bi-monthly regular meetings. At each meeting, ISD would report the findings of its audit of Government websites and the committee would advise on the appropriate follow-up action. Where necessary, the committee might draw the attention of the senior directorate of relevant bureaux/departments to the improvements required of their websites.

13. Regarding the number of complaints, if any, about the accessibility of Government websites received in the past, PIO/ISD advised that ISD had received a few submissions from organizations but not any views from individuals on this issue. Although individual bureaux/departments were not required to report to ISD the complaints or views they had received about their websites, these views and complaints could be brought up for discussion during the seminars held for webmasters of all Government websites.

14. On Mr LAW Chi-kwong's concern about the level of participation of the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) in the Inter-departmental Committee, PAS(HA) advised that it had been agreed with EOC that EOC would be invited to attend future meetings of the Committee for discussion of a regular item regarding the accessibility of Government websites. To facilitate EOC's attendance, the Committee would schedule this item as the first discussion item of each meeting.

15. Mr LAW opined that as the design and management of Government websites should take into account the need for equal opportunities, EOC should

be given a more active role in the deliberation of the Inter-departmental Committee. He suggested that EOC should decide on its own accord which discussion items of the committee it would attend. In response, PAS(HA) said that if EOC saw the need to participate in the discussion of any other items, he did not envisage any problem.

16. Members noted that currently, there were about 75 000 people with disabilities in the community and there were 28 computers equipped with special design facilities at dedicated community cyberpoints for use by the blind and visually-impaired free of charge. The Chairman considered that the number of such computers should be increased and suggested that the computers should be installed at service centres frequently visited by people with disabilities. Moreover, he pointed out that other specially-designed computer facilities should also be provided to cater for the needs of disabled persons apart from the blind and the visually-impaired.

17. Mr David CHU concurred with the Chairman that the computer facilities for disabled persons should be installed at locations easily accessible and frequently visited by these persons. He asked the Administration to monitor the utilization situation and make flexible arrangements in this regard. In response, PAS(ITB) advised that the Administration planned to increase the provision of computer facilities for use by the general public at community centres, post offices and public libraries free-of-charge from 2 200 to 3 000 by end 2001. The Administration would look into the possibility of increasing the provision of computers with special design facilities for use by disabled persons.

18. Mr LAW Chi-kwong expressed concern about the development of software products to facilitate web access by people with disabilities and enquired about the Administration's work in this regard. In reply, PAS(ITB) advised that in addressing the issue of "digital divide", the Administration kept abreast of the development of both hardware and software computer products for people with disabilities. Under the "IT Hong Kong" campaign, IT awareness programmes had been organized for people with disabilities and the elderly since September 2000 with the objective of raising their awareness on the use and benefits of information technology (IT). The Assistant Director of Information Technology Services agreed that performance of Chinese software products currently available in the market for the blind and visually-impaired persons was yet to be improved. He informed members that in 2000, the Government had provided funds through the Innovation and Technology Fund for the development of a Chinese software product "Access with Speech and Braille" by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

19. The Chairman consulted members as to whether the Panel should invite organizations and individuals to provide views on web access by people with disabilities and other related issues. Mr LAW Chi-kwong considered it more appropriate for the Panel to examine the broader subject of "digital divide",

including issues relating to web accessibility, difficulties in the use of IT, availability of equipment and software etc. Members agreed that the Panel would examine the problem of digital divide faced by socially disadvantaged groups, such as disabled persons, the elderly and low-income earners. In this connection, Mr LAW informed members that a Joint Committee on Information Technology for the Welfare Sector would be set up shortly under the chairmanship of the Director of Social Welfare and would examine, inter alia, the subject of "digital divide". To tie in with the development in this regard, he suggested that the relevant Panel meeting be scheduled for May 2001.

20. Members agreed to meet with deputations to discuss the subject of "digital divide" at the Panel meeting scheduled for 14 May 2001. The Chairman instructed the Clerk to post an advertisement on the Legislative Council's website to invite views from interested organizations and individuals on the subject. He also invited the Administration to attend the meeting and provide its response at or after the meeting, as it considered appropriate. PAS(ITB) undertook to provide a background paper on "digital divide" for the Panel and the Chairman requested that the paper be provided as early as possible, say by end April 2001, so that it would be uploaded onto the Legislative Council's website before the meeting.

V Administration of Internet domain names in Hong Kong
(LC Paper No. CB(1) 774/00-01(03))

21. Members noted that a new non-profit making and non-statutory corporation would be set up in late 2001 to take up the administration of Internet domain names and Internet protocol addresses in Hong Kong from the Joint Universities Computer Centre (JUCC), the current administrator of ".hk" domain names.

22. Mr LAW Chi-kwong sought elaboration on the institutional arrangements being pursued. In response, PAS(ITB) advised that basically, the institutional arrangements being pursued would mainly be as proposed in the "Consultation paper on the review on administration and assignment of Internet domain names and Internet protocol addresses in Hong Kong" published in June 2000. In brief, the aforesaid new corporation would be a non-profit making organization to be registered under the Companies Ordinance (Cap. 32), with membership open on a subscription basis to organizations and individuals with an interest in the development of the Internet. The corporation would operate on a self-financing basis and might derive income from fees collected from its members and domain name registration. These proposed institutional arrangements were generally supported by the public. The consultation period ended on 16 July 2000 and the Administration had briefed the Panel on the results of the consultation on 11 December 2000.

23. In reply to the Chairman's and Mr LAW Chi-kwong's enquiry about the working relationship between the Administration and the provisional board for the aforesaid new corporation, PAS(ITB) advised that the Administration had all along worked closely with the provisional board with one representative from the Administration sitting on the board. The objective of the provisional board was to draw up the implementation details for the proposals endorsed by the Information Infrastructure Advisory Committee following the aforesaid consultation exercise. Hence, in considering the relevant issues, the provisional board had followed the overall direction and principles which were supported by the community at large.

24. On the Chairman's concern about the unproportionately high representation of university representatives in the provisional board, PAS(ITB) and the Assistant Director of Information Technology Services advised that representatives of the eight UGC-funded institutions were enlisted to sit on the provisional board to enable a smooth transition, as the Computer Centres of the UGC-funded institutions had all along been actively involved in the administration of Internet domain names. In fact, apart from the academia, the board membership covered a wide spectrum of other community sectors as set out in the Annex to the information paper. They also informed members that the current plan was to include only one or two representatives from the UGC-funded institutions in the future Board of Directors of the new corporation.

25. On the Chairman's concern about the status of the new non-statutory corporation, PAS(ITB) advised that currently, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in the United States recognized JUCC as the current administrator of ".hk" domain names. The new corporation would be formally endorsed by the Hong Kong SAR Government to take up the existing functions of the JUCC. The formal endorsement would provide a clear mandate for the new corporation to exercise its designated functions and to represent Hong Kong in the international Internet community.

26. Regarding the number of registry and registrar under the future domain name administration regime, PAS(ITB) advised that the current plan was to maintain the existing arrangement for a single registry in Hong Kong maintaining a centralized database, but the domain name registration business would be opened up progressively to become a multiple-registrar market. He remarked that the issue of multiple registrars would be further examined by the provisional board.

27. Members noted that at present, the Hong Kong Network Information Centre (HKNIC) of the JUCC charged a one-off fee of \$200 for each application for registration of new domain names or modification of existing domain names. HKNIC did not charge any annual fee or renewal fee. In reply to Mr CHAN Kwok-keung's enquiry, PAS(ITB) advised that there were currently over 40 000 domain names registered under ".hk". The current

thinking of the provisional board was to set both the registration fee and the annual fee at \$200, on the consideration that this fee level would enable the new corporation to operate on a self-financing basis and would be widely accepted by the local Internet community.

28. Mr CHAN Kwok-keung remarked that the Administration should make reference to the relevant fees charged in the Mainland which, according to his understanding, were much lower.

29. Mr Kenneth TING urged the Administration to set the registration and annual fees at a low level initially and make incremental adjustment as necessary to maintain the financial viability of the new corporation.

30. In response, PAS(ITB) reiterated that a registration fee of \$200 and an annual fee of the same amount were set on a non-profit making basis but were estimated to be adequate to enable the new corporation to operate on a self-financing basis. He added that the corporation would be at liberty to adjust the fee level from time to time having regard to its financial position.

31. The Chairman remarked that with a sound financial position, the new corporation would be able to improve its services both for registered entities and the general public who might require information about the registered domain-name holders.

32. The Chairman further said that the industry was very concerned about the institutional arrangements for domain name registration. He urged the Administration to closely monitor the deliberation of the provisional board and report to this Panel when there was any major development. PAS(ITB) agreed to revert to the Panel in due course.

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VI Putonghua broadcasting (LC Paper No. CB(1) 774/00-01(04))

33. The Deputy Secretary for Information Technology and Broadcasting (DS/ITB) briefed members on the existing broadcasting arrangements in respect of Putonghua programmes on the English channels of the two existing domestic free television programme (Domestic Free) services.

34. Mr David CHU expressed his concern that since there was limited demand for English programme services in Hong Kong, the operation of the two English channels was not profitable, and thus the licensees concerned lacked the incentives to raise the quality of their English programme services. He suggested that instead of maintaining the two channels of Domestic Free services for English programmes, the Administration should consider designating one of these two channels for Putonghua programmes, so as to increase the audience base for both channels, which in turn would enable more

profitable operation for the licensees and provide them with more incentives to raise programme quality.

35. Members noted that according to the information provided by the two Domestic Free service licensees, the audience size of the two English channels was about 200 000 on average during the prime time (i.e. 7:00 pm - 11:30 pm).

36. In response, DS/ITB advised that the two Domestic Free service licensees were each required under their licences to broadcast programmes in two languages, one in the Cantonese dialect and the other in English. Changes to this arrangement would therefore involve changes to the relevant licence conditions. As the two Domestic Free service licences were due to expire on 30 November 2003 and a review on the licences was scheduled to commence in mid-2002, the Administration considered it more appropriate to review the English programming requirement in the context of the aforesaid review. DS/ITB added that the review exercise would also take into account the proposed introduction of digital terrestrial television broadcasting (DTT) in Hong Kong.

37. DS/ITB further advised that the two Domestic Free service licensees were provided with a degree of programming flexibility under the existing broadcasting arrangements. The two licensees were allowed to broadcast outside the prime time (7:00 pm - 11:30 pm) up to 20% of their total daily transmission time in languages/dialects other than English and Cantonese on their English channels. The licensees might also seek approval from the Broadcasting Authority (BA) to broadcast programmes in non-designated language during the prime time or to exceed the 20% limit for the broadcast of non-designated language outside the prime time. Such applications would be considered by the BA on the merits of each case. A recent review of the broadcasting arrangements undertaken by the Television and Entertaining Licensing Authority revealed that the two licensees had not utilized fully the aforesaid 20% limit outside the prime time. Moreover, among the applications submitted by the two licensees from 1998 to 2000 for deviation from the 20% requirement and for the broadcast of non-designated language programmes during the prime time, only a very small proportion of the applications involved Putonghua programmes. Members noted that during these three years, none of the five applications for deviation from the 20% requirement and 12 out of the 96 approved programmes broadcasted in a non-designated language during the prime time were for the broadcast of Putonghua programmes.

38. Mr David CHU remarked that according to the two Domestic Free service licensees, the application procedures for deviation from the 20% requirement and for the broadcast of non-designated language programmes during the prime time were quite onerous. He reiterated his view that based on the relevant viewership ratings, the demand for English programmes would not justify designating two channels of Domestic Free services for English

programming services. The present arrangements had also resulted in a lack of Putonghua programming services targeted at local audience. While he appreciated that there might be practical difficulties in changing the existing broadcasting arrangements before the expiry of the existing Domestic Free service licences, he urged the Administration to seriously consider designating a channel of Domestic Free services for Putonghua programmes.

39. In response, DS/ITB advised that the English programming requirement was one of the subjects for public consultation during the 1998 Review of Television Policy. While diverse views on this requirement were received during the consultation, it was generally agreed that maintaining the English programming requirement on the Domestic Free service licensees would be conducive to maintaining Hong Kong as a cosmopolitan city and an international business centre. DS/ITB however pointed out that the Administration held an open position on the matter. It would take into account the needs and views of the community in the forthcoming review of the Domestic Free services licences before deciding the way forward.

40. In this connection, the Chairman commented that as the Government had issued new Domestic Pay Television Programme Service Licences early this year, local consumers would have more choices of television programmes upon the launch of services by the new licensees in the near future. Moreover, the proposed introduction of DTT in Hong Kong would further widen consumers' choice of television programmes. He agreed that the future development of Domestic Free services should be considered in conjunction with the proposed introduction of DTT in Hong Kong. In reply to his enquiry, DS/ITB advised that as proposed in the consultation paper on DTT, the regulatory framework for DTT should be established by end-2001 and the roll out of DTT services should commence in late 2002/early 2003. The Administration would review this timetable having regard to the results of the consultation exercise for DTT.

VII Proposal to enhance the directorate structure of the Office of Telecommunications Authority
(LC Paper No. CB(1) 774/00-01(05))

41. DS/ITB briefed members on the proposal to enhance the directorate structure of the Office of Telecommunications Authority as set out in the information paper.

42. Members did not raise any query on the proposal. The Chairman said that the Administration could state in the relevant paper for the Establishment Subcommittee that this Panel had been consulted and the Panel did not raise objection to the proposal.

43. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 3:55 pm.

Legislative Council Secretariat

8 June 2001