

**Legislative Council Panel on Public Service
Meeting on 18 December 2000**

**Corporatisation of the Survey and Mapping Office of the Lands Department
Impacts on the staff concerned**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the progress of the corporatisation of the Survey and Mapping Office (SMO) of the Lands Department and addresses the concerns raised by staff associations.

Progress of the Corporatisation of SMO

2. We issued an information note to this Panel in June 2000 informing Members of the progress of corporatisation of the SMO. Over the past few months, we have been working on the detailed proposals to take forward the matter. We are preparing the draft legislation which provides for the establishment of the proposed corporation. We intend to introduce the bill into the Legislative Council in 2001. We are preparing a business plan for the corporation, along with an associated proposed employment package for corporation staff and the conversion arrangement for existing staff. We aim to be able to finalise these proposals in a few weeks' time. Once ready, we would explain the proposals to staff and consult them on the staffing arrangements.

Impact on Staff Concerned

3. Corporatisation of the SMO will not have any adverse impact on staff. We have assured staff that corporatisation of SMO will not lead to any forced redundancy. Rather corporatisation offers an opportunity for staff to work in a more dynamic environment and have more flexible career advancement opportunities.

4. The SMO has about 1200 departmental grades staff including 110 professional staff, and 1090 technical and support staff. In addition, there are some 120 general grades staff in SMO. There are six staff associations in SMO which represent a majority of the staff.

Addressing Staff's Main Concerns

5. We understand that staff are primarily concerned about job security, the rationale and benefits of corporatisation, the financial viability and business potential of the corporation, and promotion prospects. We have carefully considered the staff views, including those who have argued against the corporatisation of SMO. We have taken on board their views and have put in place necessary measures to address their concerns. As regards the specific points raised by the five staff associations at their meeting with Duty Roster Members of the Legislative Council on 10 November 2000, our response is set out below.

Job security

6. The Administration has assured staff that the corporatisation proposal will not result in any of them being forced to lose their job or have their existing terms and conditions of service changed involuntarily. We will give all SMO departmental grades staff two options. They can either retain their civil servant status and be seconded to the corporation; or retire voluntarily, and take up employment with the corporation. For staff who choose to retire voluntarily, we propose to grant them a compensation package similar to the service-wide voluntary retirement package. Which option staff choose is entirely a personal choice having regard to their own circumstances. Those opting to retain their civil servant status will remain on the civil service establishment until they leave the service. The responsibility for the grade management and deployment of these civil servants will remain with the Government.

Corporatisation

7. One of the Government's prime objectives is to improve the efficiency, quality and cost-effectiveness of public services. Corporatisation is

one of the means available to do so. We consider the SMO a prime candidate for corporatisation.

8. With the rapid development of information technology and electronic business, the survey and mapping industry is facing a lot of new opportunities and challenges. Demands for products and services, particularly in the areas of geodetic and spatial data, and Geographical Information System are increasing and ever-changing. To better meet such demands, the SMO has to operate with maximum flexibility and to react quickly to address the needs of various sectors of the community. In operating as part of the Government, the SMO has to abide by government rules and procedures. These rules and procedures are necessary for government operation, but in the context of SMO's fast-moving operating environment, these pose constraints to its ability to fully utilise its assets, which include the valuable digital map database and staff expertise and skills. Through corporatisation which will impose a different set of rules on the organisation, we believe the SMO will be better positioned to provide more efficient, value-added and qualitative services to the community. With more flexibility, more focus on customer needs, and coupled with increased financial and management accountability, the corporation will have the necessary infrastructure and incentive to strive to enhance its cost effectiveness and quality of services.

9. The Government has no intention to use corporatisation to monopolise any private sector business. The main function of the corporation would be the provision of essential survey and mapping services to the community on behalf of Government, and this should not adversely affect those services provided by land surveyors in the private practice. Rather we would see the corporation working closer with the private sector so that each party can focus on those areas which could best serve the public. As a statutory public body, the corporation will be in a good position to help promote the use of advanced information technology which will benefit the whole survey and mapping industry.

Financial viability of the corporation

10. We understand the concerns of staff on the financial viability of the corporation and its impact on staff's future job prospect. To have a more detailed assessment of the market potential of the future corporation, we are

drawing up a business plan for the corporation. Current findings re-affirm the viability of the corporation and there are strong indications that the corporation will be well placed to exploit the growth potential of this particular sector. We will shortly explain the details to staff.

Promotion prospects

11. The success of the corporation will depend a lot on its staff. We believe the corporation will devise a comprehensive human resources strategy to enhance the skill and status of its staff, and offer them more flexible career advancement opportunities than can be available in the civil service. The objective is to provide them a better sense of achievement and job satisfaction. We will work out necessary measures to ensure that both civil servants and corporation staff will have equitable opportunities for promotion. We can assure staff that the promotion prospect of civil servants will not be jeopardised in any way as a result of corporatisation.

Staff consultation

12. We are committed to maintaining effective communication with staff associations and every staff member of the SMO. We respect the role of staff associations in the consultation process. We can assure Members that all views expressed by them will be carefully considered. Lands Department maintains close contact with staff associations through both the regular liaison meetings and special meetings to discuss issues of common concern to staff. The last regular meeting with the Association of Government Technical and Survey Officers was held on 25 October 2000. The Department also communicates direct to all staff on matters of general concern through channels such as letters from the Head of Department and staff meetings to ensure that everyone concerned is properly informed. We will continue to maintain a close dialogue with the staff on any proposals that will affect them.

Planning and Lands Bureau
Lands Department
Efficiency Unit

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