

**For discussion on
12 February 2001**

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services

**INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
IN THE SOCIAL WELFARE SECTOR**

PURPOSE

The welfare sector needs to catch up in the use of information technology (IT), especially in anticipation of greater emphasis on efficiency and responsiveness in the provision of services. We consider it necessary for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) to take a lead on this in partnership with other relevant bodies. This paper informs Members of SWD's proposed role together with an initial IT strategy for the social welfare sector.

ROLE OF SWD

2. This involves –
 - (a) promoting an IT strategy for the welfare sector;
 - (b) undertaking (a) above by working in partnership with other government departments and welfare organisations;
 - (c) undertaking specific welfare IT projects, independently and in partnership; and
 - (d) resourcing the IT strategy, mainly from the Lotteries Fund (LF).

IT STRATEGY FOR THE WELFARE SECTOR

3. The objective of the initial IT strategy is to encourage –
- (a) the management and staff of all social welfare organisations to expand and improve their use of IT in managing their organisations, communicating and delivering services; and
 - (b) welfare service clients and “disadvantaged” individuals to use IT by making IT accessible and ensuring that they have the skills to use IT.

4. Over the years, the Government has provided some IT support to the welfare sector. Annex I sets out the IT initiatives undertaken for the sector, including those of SWD, since 1995-96. In respect of SWD, Members are requested to note that Phase I of the Department’s Information Systems Strategy (ISS), namely a Computerised Social Security System, has been successfully implemented in October 2000 as scheduled with data conversion underway. Funding has been earmarked for Phase II of the ISS for developing a Client Information System and the Technical Infrastructure. We intend to seek Finance Committee’s approval of these projects before the summer and will consult the LegCo Welfare Panel in due course.

5. The Strategy Framework, drawn up in consultation with the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) and other major stakeholders, is meant to be a road-map to help welfare organisations/clients understand what we mean by IT; how to identify what IT they need; how to obtain funding; and how government and its partners are developing IT in the welfare sector. The framework is set out below –

A. IT Components

- (a) Infrastructure
- (b) Communications
- (c) System Applications

- (d) Accessibility
- (e) Humanware

B. Funding of IT

C. Management and Promotion of IT

Each of these areas together with proposed SWD action is explained briefly below.

IT Components

6. The following paragraphs describe the five components and initial SWD action.

Infrastructure

7. IT Infrastructure includes hardware, software and networking. Surveys of non-government organisations (NGOs) show that IT usage is dominated by End User Computing Systems run on a personal computer (PC) platform, a situation we have helped develop since 1997 through the Lotteries Fund phased PC programme and the Y2K project. These PCs totalling over 3 500 will in due course need to be replaced. We are also informed by HKCSS and NGOs that not only are more PCs needed but also to increase efficiency more Local Area Networks (LANs) should be established.

8. It is proposed that :-

- (a) we provide one-off funding to replace those PCs provided in previous LF PC Programmes in order to encourage NGOs to update basic IT infrastructure. This would help ensure that all welfare administration and service units have updated basic hardware/software to administer the activities under their Funding and Service Agreements;
- (b) we consider providing procurement assistance to NGOs by asking the Government Supplies Department to allow NGOs

to tap into a list of selected suppliers who offer discounted prices for IT products; and

- (c) at this stage priority should be accorded to SWD-agency as well as inter-agency communication. That said, we fully recognize the importance of establishing connectivity within an agency to support internal and external communications. We therefore would encourage NGOs to carry out their own practical assessment of their PC needs and use their own resources to improve internal communications. We do not rule out the provision of some public resources to an agency's internal communication needs subject to the availability of funds and cost-effective solutions.

Communications

9. Communications include intranets and internet. At this stage and owing to resource and management capability constraints, we need to concentrate on the internet due to the implementation of Digital 21 policy, e-government, and subvention review, in order to firmly establish electronic communication between SWD and NGOs.

10. It is proposed that we establish programmes to :-

- (a) ensure that all subvented NGOs headquarters and their service units can communicate and provide information through e-mail. The hardware will be covered by the infrastructure programme. Internet accounts for Internet access will be provided for all subvented headquarters and service units; and
- (b) make good use of web-based technologies to provide services (e.g. e-parenting, e-volunteerism, etc.). While we recognize that NGOs should have their corporate websites, NGOs should use their own resources to develop and improve these websites.

System Applications

11. This includes systems to facilitate the management of organisations and service delivery. From surveys of NGOs, this appears to be a relatively under-developed area although a statistical data system for selected welfare services has been put in place for some years. The statistical data system is developed by the HKCSS and captures client data and services rendered by service agencies with the use of data sheets. SWD has been providing an annual lump sum grant to the HKCSS since 1979-80 for the operation of the system under recurrent subvention to the Council.

12. Current feedback from NGOs is that the priority for system development is management systems because of the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) environment, especially for human resource management and financial management.

13. It is proposed that :-

- (a) the Help Centre to be set up to assist agencies in the implementation of LSG should accord priority to develop a system application programme. This does not mean that such systems should all be developed by SWD; as far as possible, the role of the Help Centre is a broker and a funder. The Help Centre may entrust such system application designs to individual NGOs as long as the end-results are shared within the entire sector; and
- (b) in view of the recent Management Service Agency consultant's criticism of the collection, analysis and use of NGO statistics, a priority project be established to quickly improve the existing Statistical Information System and the Service Performance Monitoring System.

Accessibility

14. In a knowledge-based economy, knowing how to access and

use IT is becoming essential. During the last year there have been IT initiatives in the community involving, for example, the Information Technology Services Department (ITSD) and the Home Affairs Department. SWD has started to work in this area, commonly known as the Digital Divide, where the disadvantaged are in greatest danger of suffering from not knowing IT. As the Government and the community generally are increasingly using IT and e-commerce in service provision and business transaction, the disadvantaged will be quickly marginalized if the technology is not available to them because of inaccessibility or lack of training. Efforts need to be maintained and expanded.

15. It is proposed that :-

- (a) initiatives in this area should avoid the big bang approach and start small scale, fast and deliver value;
- (b) the initiatives continue to focus on awareness, training and accessibility;
- (c) the elders and the disabled, where initiatives are underway, should be the focus of future efforts. In respect of the disabled, we recognize the potential of IT to increasing their employability and would support technology-assisted devices to increase the disabled's accessibility and use of IT; and
- (d) SWD should continue to take the lead in increasing IT accessibility to the disadvantaged, especially for the elders and the disabled.

16. In the service area for the elderly, SWD has worked with ITSD to launch an IT awareness programme for the period from November 2000 to March 2001. The programme is targeted at a total of 3 000 aged persons with an aim to provide the participants with hands-on experience in basic computer operation and surfing on the net. In 2001-02, we will continue to provide IT awareness training for another 5 000 elders, and install PCs with internet facilities in all multi-service centres and social centres for the elders.

17. Together with the Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau, NGOs directly serving disabled persons and the HKCSS, we have recently introduced an IT awareness programme for the disabled which is part of the "IT Hong Kong Campaign". More than 100 trainers are trained up to help different disability groups to acquire basic skills in the use of IT, and a total of 2 600 disabled persons are involved in the programme. We will expand training opportunities in this area.

Humanware

18. This means IT awareness/training for management and staff plus the availability of IT professionals. Experience indicates that many IT initiatives fail or are not as successful as planned because of the human factor, i.e. lack of specific IT skills and/or not seeing IT literacy as an integral part of managerial skills.

19. It is proposed that :-

- (a) IT training should be permanent working themes of the Social Work Training Fund Committee and the SWD Staff Training and Development Committee. The role of the Advisory Committee on Social Work Training and Manpower Planning in this aspect would need to be further considered. As the overall IT literacy level in the social welfare sector improves, the training will move beyond sheer IT literacy;
- (b) IT professionals be encouraged to serve as volunteers and take up honorary positions as IT advisers in NGO management boards along the lines of many accountants serving as honorary treasurers on those boards;
- (c) IT training be included within the ambit of the proposed Help Centre; and
- (d) a pool of IT expertise within the social welfare sector be developed and retained to take forward the IT initiatives.

Funding of IT

20. It is proposed that :-
- (a) funding support should mainly be non-recurrent in nature and on a project-by-project basis. It is hoped that ongoing recurrent expenses could be met by NGOs through enhanced efficiency and productivity from the use of IT;
 - (b) LF should continue to be the main source of funds for IT in the welfare sector. We have included an initial estimate of \$60 million for IT development in the welfare sector in the forecast of LF expenditure. Other sources of funding such as the Jockey Club Trust be tapped where appropriate ;
 - (c) the financial planning and funding arrangements be revamped as follows –
 - (i) an IT programme to be included in the LF estimates;
 - (ii) to be in line with the IT strategy framework and within the centrally pre-set parameters, funding applications will be invited and processed annually. Exceptionally justified proposals may be considered in the course of the year to ensure that opportunities and innovation would not be lost;
 - (iii) all IT projects to be funded on a deliverable basis i.e. payment made upon satisfactory completion of specified tasks at different stages of the projects and a post-implementation review to be introduced to assess the cost-effectiveness and practical benefits of the initial phases of the funded IT projects ; and
 - (iv) more systematic arrangements be put in place for the processing of IT applications from the sector with the

Information Systems and Technology Branch (ISTB) and the Lady Trench Training Centre of SWD being responsible for assessing the development and training aspects respectively. ISTB together with the SWD's Service Branch support (to ensure alignment of business with IT) will work closely with NGOs on the initial project ideas so that the formal request will be of a standard acceptable for rapid processing and implementation.

Management and Promotion of IT

21. It is proposed that :-
- (a) DSW should chair a Joint Committee on IT in the Welfare Sector. Annex II sets out the proposed terms of reference and membership;
 - (b) initially the Joint Committee be served by SWD's ISTB;
 - (c) further consideration be given to :-
 - (i) the involvement of the HKCSS in the promotion of IT in the welfare sector; and
 - (ii) developing the concept of a separate Executive Arm to support the Joint Committee which could provide, in competition with commercial IT firms, fee based services to NGOs.

CONSULTATION

22. We consulted the Social Welfare Advisory Committee on the proposed IT strategy for the social welfare sector on 18 January 2001. Members were supportive of the direction laid down in the proposals and were of the view that flexibility should be allowed to foster creativity and innovation in implementing the strategy.

ADVICE SOUGHT

23. Members are invited to comment on the above proposals.

Social Welfare Department
February 2001

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IT INITIATIVES FOR THE WELFARE SECTOR
1995-96 – 2000-01

IT-related Projects Funded

Financial Year of Funding Approval	Project Description	Amount of Funds (HK\$)	Source of Funds
1995-96	Operation of the HKCSS statistical Clientele Information System for 1996-97	667,000	SWD Subvention
	Purchase of computer software for 84 subvented central administration units	284,000	Lotteries Fund
1996-97	Operation of the HKCSS statistical Clientele Information System for 1997-98	842,000	SWD Subvention
	Computer training courses organized by SWD for SWD staff	197,539	SWD Funding
1997-98	Operation of the HKCSS statistical Clientele Information System for 1998-99	985,000	SWD Subvention
	Purchase of 597 computers for 14 NGOs	10,005,700	Lotteries Fund
	Purchase of 668 PCs for 153 NGOs	11,194,500	Lotteries Fund

Financial Year of Funding Approval	Project Description	Amount of Funds (HK\$)	Source of Funds
	Purchase of 69 PCs for 27 NGOs	1,157,600	Lotteries Fund
	Basic computer training courses for NGO staff organized by HKCSS	501,600	Lotteries Fund
	Computer training courses organized by SWD for SWD staff	301,820	SWD Funding
1998-99	Operation of the HKCSS statistical Clientele Information System for 1999-2000	1,063,000	SWD Subvention
	To set up an Information Technology Resource Team (ITRT) for NGOs (30 months) [HKCSS has changed the name of ITRT to Information Technology Resource Centre]	3,933,400	Lotteries Fund
	Basic computer training courses for NGO staff organized by HKCSS	802,600	Lotteries Fund
	Purchase of 262 PCs for 179 NGOs	6,157,000	Lotteries Fund
	On-site technical assistance and assessment under the Y2K Project managed by HKCSS	1,342,700	Lotteries Fund
	On-site technical assistance and assessment under the Y2K Project managed by SWD	1,943,500	Lotteries Fund

Financial Year of Funding Approval	Project Description	Amount of Funds (HK\$)	Source of Funds
	District-based Network Employment Support Programme operated by HKCSS	3,601,900	Lotteries Fund
	District-based Network Employment Support Programme of SWD – 38 sets of PCs to social security field units	893,000	Lotteries Fund
	Purchase of 526 PCs (with software and accessories) for 205 Children and Youth Centres under the “Modernisation of Children and Youth Centres” exercise	14,199,264	Lotteries Fund
	Purchase of 1,000 PCs (with software and accessories) for 125 young people service units under the “Enhancement Use of Information Technology in Community Facilities” project	27,531,000	EMB Funding
	Computer training courses organized by SWD for SWD staff	338,130	SWD Funding
1999-2000	Operation of the HKCSS statistical Clientele Information System for 2000-01	1,173,091	SWD Subvention
	Purchase of computer facilities (604 PCs) for training use for 391 service units of 16 subvented NGOs	13,348,400	Lotteries Fund
	Purchase of 507 PCs for 88 NGOs	11,204,700	Lotteries Fund

Financial Year of Funding Approval	Project Description	Amount of Funds (HK\$)	Source of Funds
	Additional grant for the Y2K Project managed by HKCSS for on-site technical assistance and assessment	691,200	Lotteries Fund
	Additional grant for the Y2K Project managed by SWD for on-site technical assistance and assessment	1,662,500	Lotteries Fund
	Computer training courses for NGO staff organized by HKCSS	912,501	Lotteries Fund
	To carry out Y2K rectification work for the HK Society for the Blind	502,100	Lotteries Fund
	Y2K rectification work for 144 NGOs	12,167,700	Lotteries Fund
	Computer training courses organized by SWD for SWD staff	309,460	SWD Funding
2000-01	Procurement of computer software for the implementation of the gate-keeping mechanism for elderly services	487,000	Lotteries Fund
	Computer Training Programme organized by HKCSS	1,295,464	Lotteries Fund
	Computer training courses organized by SWD for SWD staff	205,740	SWD Funding
	Total	131,902,109	

Note: Funding approval for the operation of the HKCSS statistical Clientele Information System for 2001-02 to be considered.

Information Systems Strategy Study

In 1996-1997, a study was conducted in respect of the information systems strategy of the Social Welfare Department (SWD). The study assesses the SWD information technology requirements and develops a departmental strategic plan covering the information systems development and implementation.

The information systems strategy recommended in the study consists of a total of seven applications, including -

- (a) **Computerised Social Security System** – this supports the processing of social security cases and automates key activities, thereby ensuring prompt payment to clients;
- (b) **Client Information System** – this provides a centralized database for SWD clients, thereby facilitating the sharing of client information, case monitoring and service planning by various levels of SWD staff;
- (c) **Technical Infrastructure** – this consists of networking and workstation facilities to enable individuals and groups to exchange key documents electronically, thereby facilitating person-to-person communication, access to other applications, etc.;
- (d) **Service Provider Information System** – this is a centralized database with detailed information about the services and staffing of all SWD and non-government organisation service units, thereby facilitating better service coordination, monitoring and planning;
- (e) **Human Resource Management System** – this is a centralized database of SWD staff, thereby facilitating staff

management and training;

- (f) **Project and Service Planning System** – the system contains updated and accurate information on all existing and new projects, thereby facilitating project monitoring, control and service planning; and
- (g) **Management Information System** – this system extracts information from the above applications and provides reports, thereby enabling better access and more accurate data to be made available for management and policy planning.

Of the seven applications recommended in SWD ISSS, the Computerised Social Security System was brought into operation on 3 October 2000. Feasibility studies in respect of the Client Information System and the Technical Infrastructure were completed in July 1999 and identified their high significance in supporting SWD to meet the future challenges and work demands.

Central Fund for Personal Computers

A Central Fund for Personal Computers was set up in 1997 under the Director of Social Welfare Incorporated Account with an allocation of HK\$1 million from the Special Coin Suspense Account. The purpose of the Central Fund is to assist people with disabilities to set up a PC workstation at home so as to facilitate them to find and sustain an income generating job. To date, 63 applicants have been supported with a total sum of HK\$979,000. We are planning to inject new money into the Central Fund through seeking a grant from the Lotteries Fund.

IT Awareness Programme for the Disabled

The Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau, the Information Technology Services Department, the Home Affairs Department and the Social Welfare Department, in collaboration with several non-government organisations providing rehabilitation services and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, have launched an “IT Awareness Programme for the Disabled” as part of the “IT Hong Kong” campaign to promote wider use of information technology in the community. The programme is held from mid-November 2000 to mid-March 2001, and is aimed at promoting an understanding of computers and information technology among disabled persons including the visually impaired, the mentally handicapped, the physically handicapped, the ex-mentally ill and the chronically ill.

A “Train the Trainers” approach is adopted in the programme. Training courses are being run whereby more than 100 trainers learn to develop an understanding of the special needs of different disability groups and acquire better skills in providing IT training for the disabled. It is estimated that a total of 2,600 disabled persons will benefit from the IT awareness training under this programme.

IT Awareness Programme for the Elderly

An “IT Awareness Programme for the Elderly” has been jointly organized by the Information Technology Services Department and the Social Welfare Department to provide people aged 60 or above with free IT awareness courses with hands-on experience on basic computer operations and surfing on the Internet. The programme is held between November 2000 and March 2001, and the courses are held at 15 venues convenient to the elders. There are one instructor and several assistants, equipped with audio and

visual training equipment, in each class of the course. It is estimated that 3,000 elders will benefit from the IT awareness courses.

In 2001-02, IT awareness training will be provided for another 5,000 elders. Personal computers with Internet facilities will also be installed in all Multi-service Centres and Social Centres for Elders.

Promotion of Training in Application of Information Technology in NGOs

In 2000-01, the Social Work Training Fund Committee has launched a one-off funding exercise to encourage non-government organisations in the welfare sector to strengthen the training of their registered social workers in IT applications for better delivery of their services and communication within the sector. Generally, the Fund will approve grants to cover not more than 50% of the approved training cost. Organisations are expected to launch the projects in the first quarter of Year 2001. Upon the expiry of the deadline in end November 2000, a total of 17 organisations has submitted their applications which are now under processing.

**JOINT COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)
FOR THE WELFARE SECTOR**

Terms of reference

- (1) To promote the use of IT in the welfare sector for better management and delivery of services to meet service objectives.
- (2) To formulate strategy and oversee the implementation plan for IT investment and development in the sector, including infrastructure, communications, system applications, accessibility and humanware.
- (3) To formulate strategy and oversee the implementation plan for enabling service recipients to access IT to improve their quality of living.
- (4) To co-ordinate the use of Lotteries Fund for IT investment and IT projects in the welfare sector.

Membership

Director of Social Welfare (Chairperson)

Representative of Director of Information Technology Services

Representative of Health and Welfare Bureau

Other representatives of SWD

Director of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)

3 members from non-government organisations including 1 non-HKCSS member

2 other members

Secretariat

Information Systems & Technology Branch of Social Welfare
Department