

**Opening Statement of the Director of Administration
at the Meeting of the Panel on
Administration of Justice and Legal Services
to be held on 29 October 2001**

I am pleased to present to this Panel the 2001 Policy Objective booklet of the Administration Wing. The Administration Wing is responsible for a wide spectrum of policy areas. In pursuing our Policy Objectives in the coming year, we have set for ourselves a total of four overall targets, among which “to ensure high degree of public satisfaction in respect of avenues for administrative redress and legal aid services” should be the subject area of most relevance to the work of this Panel.

2. I am pleased to report to Members that among the 9 targets we have set for the aforesaid policy area, 5 have been completed and 4 are proceeding on schedule.

3. I shall briefly report on our progress in the past year and the way forward in the coming twelve months in respect of our work on administrative redress and legal aid services.

Provide efficient legal aid services

4. Our legal aid policy is to ensure that no one with reasonable grounds for taking a legal action in the Hong Kong courts is prevented from seeking justice because of the lack of means. While we strive to provide more efficient legal aid services, we also attach importance to enhancing the quality of our services.

5. To fulfil our commitment, front-line staff of the Legal Aid Department (LAD) have all been given relevant training to enhance their skills in handling enquiries and complaints. LAD has also enhanced the efficiency in processing legal aid applications and achieved the new target of processing 85% of civil legal aid applications within three months from the date of application. At the same time, we will further enhance the efficiency in processing criminal legal aid applications. LAD has already achieved the target of processing 80% of applications in respect of appeals against sentence and appeals against conviction within two months and three months respectively. We will raise the target to 85% to further enhance efficiency.

6. Furthermore, in order to enable the public to have easier access to free legal advice service, the Duty Lawyer Service has opened a new free legal advice centre in the Eastern District in August and is planning to open another new centre in Wong Tai Sin later this year to enhance its services to the public.

Maintain public confidence in independent redress

7. On the maintenance of public confidence in independent redress, we will continue to provide fair, open and accessible avenues for members of the public to lodge appeals and complaints against administrative decisions and measures. The channels of redress include The Ombudsman, the Administrative Appeals Board and the Municipal Services Appeals Board, as well as the Justices of the Peace (JP) visit system.

8. In the past year, we worked with the Office of The Ombudsman (the Office) to further enhance its operational efficiency and independence image. In May this year, we introduced The Ombudsman (Amendment) Bill 2001 to this Council, with a view to further enhancing the operational efficiency of the Office and reinforcing public confidence in its independence through the relevant legislative amendments and other administrative measures. We have also obtained agreement to include the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data under the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman. We will continue to assist The Ombudsman in effectively discharging her duties.

9. The Administrative Appeals Board and the Municipal Services Appeals Board are other important channels of administrative redress. The increase in the number of appeals filed with the two Boards in the past year indicates further enhancement in the public's awareness of their right to appeal against administrative decisions. We will continue to ensure that the appeals filed will be processed expeditiously and efficiently.

10. On the JP visit system, we had in the past year effected legislative amendments to provide pairing flexibility for Non-official JPs during JP visits, i.e. a Non-official JP may opt to pair up with a Non-official JP or an Official JP. Non-official JPs may also visit particular institutions of their choice on a more regular basis. We have therefore built in maximum flexibility, within the statutory framework of the JP visit system, to better accommodate the views of Non-official JPs. We will continue to improve the JP visit system by trying to expand its scope to cover more types of institutions.

Conclusion

11. To help us continue to strive for improvements, I welcome Members' views regarding the areas of work falling within the purview of the Administration Wing.