

Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services

Portfolio and Objectives of the Judiciary Administration and Initiatives on Efficiency Savings

Introduction

The Judiciary Administrator assists the Chief Justice in the overall administration of the Judiciary. He discharges his responsibilities through providing effective administrative and technical support for the conduct of court proceedings and execution of court orders, and improving access by simplifying registry procedures, disseminating information and removing language barriers. He is the controlling officer for all public funds expended by the Judiciary.

2. The functions of the Judiciary, in terms of Estimates of Expenditure, are organised into two major programme areas :

- (a) courts and tribunals; and
- (b) support services for courts' operations.

Courts and Tribunals

3. The aim of this programme area is to maintain an independent and competent judicial system which upholds the rule of law, safeguards the rights and freedom of individuals and commands domestic and international confidence. Taking this aim into account, the following operational objectives have been set down :-

- (a) to ensure that cases are disposed of fairly and expeditiously;
- (b) to enhance professional standards;
- (c) to ensure that the Judiciary is kept abreast of changing times;
and
- (d) to develop a bilingual court system in Hong Kong.

Support Services for Courts' Operations

4. This programme area aims at providing efficient and effective services to support the operations of courts and to carry out court orders. The operational objectives are :

- (a) to provide effective court reporting services for court proceedings and produce transcripts for these proceedings;
- (b) to ensure that both the Chinese and English languages can be used in the courts;
- (c) to provide efficient and effective bailiff services;
- (d) to keep the best legal reference books and research materials for the use of judges and the legal profession; and
- (e) to introduce information technology to enhance the efficiency of court support services.

Recurrent Expenditure

5. For services under these two programme areas, the Judiciary Administrator has been allocated \$1013 million for recurrent expenditure in 2002-03. Personal emoluments account for 76% (\$775 million) of such provision, the rest being departmental expenses and other charges.

6. The Judiciary has been asked to achieve a saving of 1.8% in the recurrent expenditure in 2003-04, and an additional saving of 1% each year from 2004-05 to 2006-07. Against this background, Members of this Panel would like to know how the Judiciary would achieve these savings, and whether the planning and implementation of existing and new services would be adversely affected.

Efficiency Initiatives

7. The Judiciary Administrator is engaging management and frontline staff extensively in the process of formulating viable proposals for achieving savings. The approaches being adopted are re-engineering, organisational restructuring, re-prioritising and outsourcing. The process is a continuous one and many proposals are at the formulation stage. However, we would like to set out below some examples of our recent efforts in achieving productivity gains to illustrate the way forward.

Mobile Summons Service System

8. To improve work efficiency, the Bailiff Office introduced in June 2001 a Mobile Summons Service System whereby the Bailiff's Assistants use mobile computing devices for inputting case information, routing of service and service results. The information is synchronised with the data-base in the existing case management system, thereby reducing manual efforts in data extraction and updating and enhancing their accuracy.

Redeployment of Court Reporters

9. After the introduction of the Digital Audio Recording and Transcription System (DARTS), a redeployment programme has begun for Court Reporters to perform other functions in the Judiciary Administration. Two Senior Court Reporters and nine Court Reporters have been successfully redeployed to other functions such as Legal Reference, Complaints, Labour Tribunal, Human Resources and Management Review. Three more Court Reporters will be further redeployed early next year. The remainder (nine) will continue to be responsible for supervising the DARTS service.

Business Process Re-engineering in Bailiff Office

10. The Court Order section has recently re-engineered the process of work assignment. Each Bailiff is now responsible for the planning and execution of whole process of an enforcement order, unlike previous arrangements in which tasks were assigned and different Bailiffs might be involved in the same case. Improvements to waiting times have been significant.

Outsourcing Information Technology Services

11. In response to Government's overall plan to outsource information technology (IT) support services, the Judiciary awarded a five-year contract to a private company for a comprehensive scope of IT support services in February 2001. We are saving about \$1.6 million a year as a result.

Streamlining judicial processes

12. The Judiciary is doing a review of the civil jurisdictional limit of the District Court, with a view to considering whether it should be further increased. The implications for the caseload of the High Court, hence resources required, will be taken into account.

13. The Civil Justice Reform has just completed the consultation stage. The Working Party is now considering views and opinions collected. Any recommendations with resource implications would be for the longer term.

Conclusion

14. The Judiciary Administrator is of the view that the required efficiency savings, implemented after the Enhanced Productivity Programme during 2000 - 2003, will pose difficult challenges for the Judiciary. Provided that the court caseloads remain stable at around present levels, it may be possible to achieve the target set by the Financial Secretary without adversely affecting the waiting time.

Judiciary Administration
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