

For discussion
13 February 2003

LegCo Panel on Security
Rationalisation of Immigration Office Network

Introduction

This paper explains the Immigration Department (ImmD)'s efforts to rationalise its network of offices to achieve efficient use of resources. As a direct result of these efforts, a total of 10 offices will be closed, (but a new regional office to serve East New Territories (NT) will be opened in Fo Tan) and an estimated savings of \$39.01 million per year can be achieved upon implementation. ImmD's existing operations in Tai Po will also be relocated to the new regional office in Fo Tan.

Background and Arguments

2. In view of the current fiscal deficit, the Government needs to implement effective measures to contain the level of expenditure so as to help restore fiscal balance. As we briefed Members at the Panel Meeting on 7 November 2002, the Security Bureau and departments under our purview are committed to achieving the efficiency saving targets as set by the Financial Secretary without affecting the provision of essential services to the public.

3. As an on-going effort to ensure efficient and effective use of its resources, and in the light of the Audit Commission's recommendations to look into the feasibility of closing down a number of births, deaths and marriage registries¹, ImmD will rationalise and reorganise its office network in respect of immigration (Imm), registration of persons (ROP), births, deaths and marriage (BDM) registration services on a regional basis. In future, the

¹ The Audit Commission conducted a review on the operation of the Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration Sub-division of the ImmD in 2001 and recommended in the report, among other things, that ImmD should critically look into the feasibility of closing down a number of registries in view of their low utilisation rate. They are the Eastern Marriage Registry in Hong Kong Island, the Fanling District Births Registry / Fanling District Marriage Registry in the North District and the Mobile Registry serving Sai Kung and the outlying islands.

network of ImmD's offices will be operated on the basis of five regions, i.e. Hong Kong Island, East Kowloon, West Kowloon, East New Territories and West New Territories. As set out in paragraph 1, 11 offices in individual districts as listed in **Annex A**, which are in general under-utilised², will be closed by end May 2003.

4. Pursuant to the above, ImmD has taken full account of the following factors -

- (a) the demand of services of the offices concerned;
- (b) the availability of alternative office in the same region;
- (c) the ability of alternative office(s) to fully absorb the displaced workload; and
- (d) the accessibility of alternative office(s) to residents affected.

5. As a result of the above efforts, the other 20 offices, two of which are joint offices, as listed in **Annex B** will be reinforced where appropriate with additional resources to ensure that they can fully absorb the displaced workload from the closed offices. Sufficient Imm, ROP and BDM registration services will be provided in each of the five regions. Though some members of the public may have to travel a longer distance to obtain the service, all regional offices are easily accessible and are well connected by mass transit systems. Existing performance pledges in respect of all categories of services provided will remain *unchanged*.

6. There are also measures that can help to reduce any inconvenience caused by the closure of the above 11 offices. For example, applications for various BDM certificates / search of BDM records may be submitted by post or through electronic transactions on the Internet. Postal applications for HKSAR passports are available. Appointments for giving marriage notices and registering identity cards can also be made via Electronic Service Delivery on the Internet or the Interactive Voice Response

² The only exception is the Immigration Office at Fanling which is a small office handling on average 61 immigration-related applications per day in 2002. It will be combined into the new office in Fo Tan which serves the entire East New Territories region.

System.

7. The rationalisation efforts will bring forth an estimated annual savings of about \$39.01 million including staff cost (\$27.89 million), departmental expenditure (\$4.17 million) and office rental (\$6.96 million) for the Government.

Legislative Amendments

8. The births and deaths registries and the districts they serve are designated in the First Schedule to the Births and Deaths Registration Ordinance (Cap. 174). We need to update the First Schedule in due course.

Consultation with District Councils (DCs)

9. Following the issue of consultation papers to the relevant District Councils³ (DCs) in early December 2002 representatives of ImmD and the Government Property Agency had upon invitation attended meetings of seven DCs in December 2002 and January 2003 to explain in detail the rationalisation efforts. We stressed that while these efforts would cause inconvenience to some members of the public as they may have to travel a longer distance to obtain the services, it represented the best use of limited resources without causing any significant impact on the community. Comments of DC members and the Government's responses are summarized at **Annexes C** and **D** respectively for reference.

Security Bureau

February 2003

³ The relevant districts are Eastern, Wong Tai Sin, North, Tai Po, Tsuen Wan, Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, Islands, and Sai Kung.

**The Offices to be Closed / Relocated and
their Utilisation Rate⁵ in the Past Few Years**

Immigration Offices¹

	1997	2002	% change
Tsuen Wan Office	72%	63%	-12.5%
Tuen Mun Office [^]	81%	85%	+4.9%
Fanling Office [*]	138%	122%	- 11.6%
Tai Po Office ⁺	70%	75%	+7.1%

[^] The actual workload of Tuen Mun Office was relatively small. The number of average daily applications at Tuen Mun Office was below 100 in the past few years.

^{*} A small office with daily quota of 50.

⁺ The Tai Po Office to be relocated to Fo Tan is a joint office also providing both immigration and ROP services.

Births, Deaths and Marriage Registries^{2,4}

	1997	2002	% change
Eastern Marriage Registry (in Sai Wan Ho)	- Notice of marriage: 29% - Ceremony: 39%	- Notice of marriage: 20% - Ceremony: 24%	- Notice of marriage: -31% - Ceremony: -38.5%
East Kowloon Marriage Registry (in Wong Tai Sin)	- Notice of marriage: 39% - Ceremony: 62%	- Notice of marriage: 38% - Ceremony: 57%	- Notice of marriage: -2.6% - Ceremony: -8%
Tsuen Wan Births, Deaths and Marriage Registry	- Notice of marriage: 33% - Ceremony: 55%	- Notice of marriage: 27% - Ceremony: 44%	- Notice of marriage: -18.2% - Ceremony: -20%
Fanling District Births and Marriage Registry	- Notice of marriage: 49% - Ceremony: 47%	- Notice of marriage: 33% - Ceremony: 30%	- Notice of marriage: -32.7% - Ceremony: -36.1%
Yuen Long Births and Marriage Registry	- Notice of marriage: 50% - Ceremony: 48%	- Notice of marriage: 27% - Ceremony: 25%	- Notice of marriage: -46% - Ceremony: -47.9%

Registration of Persons Office³

	1997	2002	% change
Tsuen Wan Office	91%	84%	-7.7%
Tai Po Office +	92%	91%	-1%

+ The Tai Po Office is a joint office providing both immigration and ROP services

Mobile Office

(providing immigration, births and marriage registrations services for remote areas in Sai Kung and Outlying Islands)

	1997	2002	% change
Re-entry permit applications #	11%	13%	+18.2%
Other travel documents applications	32%	26%	-18.8%
Births registration	1%	0%	-100%
Marriage registration	15%	7%	-53.3%

The actual number of Re-entry permit applications handled by the Mobile Office was very small. Only 255 and 319 re-entry permit applications were processed per year in 1997 and 2002 respectively.

Notes:

1. The main functions of an immigration office are:
 - to accept and process applications for and issue of HKSAR Passport, Re-entry Permits, Document of Identity, etc.
 - to accept and process applications for extension of stay and transfer of endorsement; and
 - to provide services relating to applications for unconditional stay from Mainland entrants.

2. The main functions of BDM registries are:
 - to provide services for current births registration, alteration and addition of names, adoption registration and re-registration under law;
 - to provide services for death registration and to issue permits for removal of dead body from Hong Kong;

- to accept application for marriage notices and provide services for marriage registration/celebration;
- to provide services for applications of Certificate of Absence of Marriage Record; and
- to provide services for search and application for old records of birth, death and marriage certificates and death registration of coroner cases.

3. The main functions of a registration of persons office are:

- to provide registration of identity card service to the residents of Hong Kong and new arrivals and new immigrants from the Mainland;
- to provide registration of identity card including registration for imported workers admitted under the Importation of Workers Scheme;
- to accept applications for replacement of identity cards due to loss, defacement damages and change of the registered particulars; and
- to accept applications for Certificate of Registered Particulars.

4. Only a selection of major services offered by the BDM registries are listed to illustrate the decreasing trend of utilisation rate recorded. Other services provided include e.g. marriage search, issue of certified copy of marriage certificate, application for certificate of absence of marriage record and issue of such record, correction of clerical error, etc. A downward trend is also recorded for the utilisation rate of these other services.

5. "Utilisation rate" refers to the number of applications as a percentage of the maximum handling capacity.

List of Regional Offices in Operation
Upon Full Implementation of the Rationalisation Efforts

Region	Immigration Office	Registration of Persons Office	Births, deaths and marriage registries
Hong Kong Island	Hong Kong Island Travel Documents Issuing Office (in Sheung Wan)	Hong Kong Office (in Wan Chai)	(a) The Births and Deaths General Register Office (in Admiralty) (b) Marriage Registration and Records Office (in Admiralty) ¹ (c) Cotton Tree Drive Marriage Registry ¹ (d) City Hall Marriage Registry ¹ (e) The Births and Deaths General Register Office (Hong Kong Island Deaths Registry)
East Kowloon	East Kowloon Office (in Lam Tin)	Kwun Tong Office	
West Kowloon	West Kowloon Office (in Yaumatei)	Kowloon Office (in Cheung Sha Wan)	(a) Kowloon Births Registry (in Yaumatei) (b) Tsim Sha Tsui Marriage Registry (c) The Births and Deaths General Register Office (Kowloon Deaths Registry)
East NT	(a) Sha Tin Office ² (b) Fo Tan Office ³	Fo Tan Office ³	(a) Sha Tin Marriage Registry (b) Sha Tin District Births Registry
West NT	Yuen Long Office ⁴	Yuen Long Office ⁴	Tuen Mun District Births Registry / Tuen Mun

			Marriage Registry
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Notes:

1. More than one marriage registries will remain on the Hong Kong Island in view of huge demand for services at these registries.
2. The Sha Tin Office is planned for closure as soon as practicable. The Fo Tan office will be the only office providing both immigration and ROP services for the East NT Region in the future.
3. The reason for relocating the existing Tai Po Office is that it is too small to accommodate the new computer system and ancillary facilities for the issue of the Smart Identity Cards and that a larger office could not be identified in time within the same District. As there is also a need to rationalise the network of offices of the ImmD in East NT, the eventual decision is to establish a new joint office providing immigration and ROP related services in Fo Tan in June 2003. The Fo Tan office will serve the entire East NT region.
4. The office in Yuen Long is a joint office providing both immigration and ROP services.

Summary of Major Comments from District Councils Consulted

1. It is not reasonable to close offices due to fiscal deficit.
2. Closure of office will cause inconvenience to the residents especially the aged and the rural residents.
3. The consultation period is too short and too late.
4. ImmD should consider downsizing instead of complete closure.
5. ImmD should consider cutting services by phases.
6. The rationalisation efforts will increase social costs in terms of transportation expenses and time to obtain services.

**Summary of Government's Responses
to Comments made by Relevant District Councils**

1. The rationalisation of office network needs to be implemented quickly in order to achieve efficiency savings in a timely manner.
2. The existing performance pledges in respect of all categories of services will not be affected by the rationalisation efforts. Staff will be deployed flexibly to cope with demand, if necessary.
3. The remaining offices are located at locations which are easily accessible by mass transit systems.
4. Further downsizing of some offices will not be cost-efficient and will adversely affect the flexible deployment of manpower.
5. The Government recognizes that the rationalisation efforts may cause some inconvenience to some members of the public. However, these efforts represent the best use of limited resources without causing any significant impact on the community.