Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY
FOR THE SOCIAL WELFARE SECTOR

PURPOSE

This paper informs Members of the progress on the implementation of the information technology (IT) strategy for the social welfare sector in the past two years.

BACKGROUND

2.	At its meeting of 12 February 2001, Members discussed and supported the IT Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector (the IT Strategy) proposed by the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

3.	The objective of the IT Strategy for the social welfare sector is to encourage 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, to enhance their competence in using IT for their business through training, and to assist welfare service recipients and disadvantaged individuals to use IT by making IT accessible and ensuring that they have the skills to use IT. The IT Strategy covers five components, namely infrastructure, communications, system applications, accessibility and humanware. In respect of funding, it is proposed that the Lotteries Fund (LF) should continue to be the main source of funds for IT developments for the social welfare sector.

4.	In order to steer the implementation of the IT Strategy and oversee the IT development in the sector, a Joint Committee on Information Technology for the Social Welfare Sector (JCIT) was set up in May 2001 under the chairmanship of the

Director of Social Welfare. Its membership includes representatives from the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS), welfare non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the Information Technology Services Department (ITSD), and independent IT experts. In June 2001, with the support of SWD, an Information Technology Resource Centre (ITRC) was set up within HKCSS with funds from LF for a period of three years to provide a range of IT services to NGOs in the sector. ITRC is expected to become self-financing after three years' operation by providing fee-based services to NGOs. By the end of 2002, ITRC has assisted 229 NGOs in their IT procurement (including installation of broadband and local area networks), the total transaction of which amounts to about $33 million. It has also prepared 46 system consultation reports and attended to 5 368 telephone hotline calls from NGOs for technical consultation and support. From a customer feedback survey conducted by SWD on ITRC's services, general satisfaction was expressed by most NGO users in the sector.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY

5.   Since March 2001, we have been implementing IT initiatives in accordance with the IT Strategy with funding support from LF. Up to present, total grants of about **$189 million** have been committed from LF for implementing 20 IT projects in the social welfare sector. A table showing the IT initiatives and the amount of funds approved is at the Annex. A highlight of the major projects classified by the five components under the IT Strategy described in paragraph 3 above is given below.

Infrastructure

PC Replacement Programme

6.   In March 2001, SWD initiated and the former Subventions and Lotteries Fund Advisory Committee [now renamed as the Lotteries Fund Advisory Committee (LFAC)] approved a grant of $26,136,000 from LF to 172 subvented NGOs to replace 1 584 personal computers (PCs) supported under the previous LF computerisation programme. The main purpose of this one-off funding is to encourage NGOs to update their basic IT infrastructure to administer the activities under their Funding and Service Agreements.

7.   Under this initiative, NGOs were given the flexibility to purchase in the open market computers of any brand and specification which best suited their needs, provided that the basic specifications were met.   NGOs had the flexibility to deploy the surplus for the purpose of improving their basic IT infrastructure.   This initiative has been successfully completed.

Procurement of IT Products and Services

8.   One of the recommendations made in the IT Strategy is to 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.   In August 2001, nine contractors who supplied microcomputer systems and related services to the Government under the Standing Offer Agreements (SOAs) consented to extend their services to subvented NGOs in the welfare sector under the same rates, terms and conditions.   We have informed NGOs of the SOA extension arrangement as an additional option to making purchase in the open market.   In addition, procurement assistance is also available to NGOs through ITRC.   At the end of 2002, a total value of $26.6 million on hardware and software transactions were done through ITRC.

Communications

Internet Access and E-Cert Provision for NGOs

9.   The IT Strategy for the social welfare sector recommends that Internet access be provided for all NGO headquarters and service units so that they can communicate and exchange information through e-mail.   To this end, SWD has obtained a LF grant of $73.34 million for disbursement to non-profit-making NGOs providing social welfare services upon application to help meet the cost of providing broadband Internet access and digital certificates for a period of three years starting from December 2001.

10.   To date, we have approved grants totaling $44.1 million to 2 210 units operated by 204 welfare NGOs (subvented sector: 138 and non-subvented sector: 66) for broadband Internet access and digital certificates.   Over 80% of our target NGO service units have applied and benefited from this initiative.

Use of Web-based Technologies

11.   On the use of web-based technologies to provide services, we have supported applications by NGOs for developing portal sites on specific subject matters or target groups.   These included an application by the Association for Engineering and Medical Volunteer Services for an allocation of $599,500 of LF to develop an interactive computer training net for mentally handicapped persons.   This is the first training web site tailored-made for the persons with disabilities in Hong Kong. There is an increasing trend in the use of the Internet technology in service provision in the social welfare sector in meeting the changing needs of the community.   We have also supported an application by the Cyber Seniors to the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust to enhance a portal site for the elderly.   LF grant was also made to the St. James' Settlement to develop a homepage for care-givers, to the Hong Kong Red Cross to re-vamp the agency web site with on-line functions for course enrollment and volunteer management, and to SWD to develop a portal site for people with disabilities.   Except the portal site for people with disabilities which has already been completed satisfactorily, all these initiatives are being developed smoothly and on schedule.

System Applications

12.   The IT Strategy has pointed out the need for developing management systems especially for human resource management (HRM) and financial management (FM) under the Lump Sum Grant environment.   In the first call for applications under the Business Improvement Project (BIP) Scheme[1], we have received 20 applications involving 43 NGOs related to the use of IT in improving HRM and/or FM.

13.   In view of the NGOs' common IT needs in association with HRM and FM functions, it is possible to achieve synergy effect by developing core applications on HRM and FM (Core Applications) for common use by NGOs.   Both the Lump Sum Grant Steering Committee (LSGSC) and JCIT endorsed the proposal to pursue the option of developing the Core Applications.   JCIT further endorsed that a consultancy study be conducted to ascertain the feasibility and financial viability of

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[1] The Business Improvement Project Scheme is to invite NGOs' business initiatives in supporting them to undergo the transition to Lump Sum Grant

developing the Core Applications.   On 26 March 2002, LFAC approved a grant of $1.5 million to HKCSS to take up the consultancy study.

14.   Upon the completion of the feasibility study, JCIT Members deliberated the recommendations of the study at its meeting on 9 October 2002 and supported the development of the Core Applications by adopting a Project Implementation and Contracting Model[2].   A briefing session was held on 5 November 2002 to introduce the implementation plan and the range of recurrent costs to be borne by the 40 NGOs[3]. Eventually, a total of 26 NGOs have decided to join the Core Applications while the other 14 NGOs either opted for other HRM and FM packages or indicated that they would revisit their needs for such system applications.   On 26 November 2002, LFAC approved an allocation of $25.066 million to HKCSS to develop the Core Applications, which will be rolled out by February 2004.

15.   The use of IT has also featured prominently in NGOs' business improvement in meeting the challenges under Lump Sum Grant (LSG).   Excluding the proposals purely on the development of HRM and/or FM applications, SWD has supported a total allocation of LF grant of $8.24 million for developing IT system applications to eight NGOs under the first round of funding applications to carry out BIP projects. The scope of these applications include development of management information system for corporate management and service planning, knowledge management system for sharing of service wisdom of the sector, agency's web site with on-line functions of course enrollment and volunteer management, portal site for disabled children and their carers, and digital library for the blind and visually impaired.   In the second round invitation ending December 2002, 22 BIP applications received are related to business improvement with the use of IT.   While ten of these sought to join the core applications on the development of HRM and/or FM applications, 12 applications are seeking to use IT in other areas of activities.   These applications are being considered.

Accessibility

Promoting Wider Use of IT by Elders and Disabled People

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[2] To set up a contract team and project implementation team simultaneously to provide support at the system and application development stage with ongoing support and maintenance to be provided by appropriate suppliers in the market to be selected by NGOs themselves.

[3] During the consultancy study period, three NGOs have withdrawn their applications and thereby reducing the total number of applicant NGOs from 43 to 40.

16.   There has been growing demand for effective measures to address issues relating to digital divide (e.g. web accessibility, IT awareness training for the disadvantaged, and availability of Internet access to the disadvantaged). The IT Strategy has identified the elders and the disabled as the priority targets for which future efforts on increasing the accessibility and use of IT should be made. On this front, Members may wish to note that LF grants totaling $40.722 million were approved in May 2001 to promote wider use of IT by elders and the disabled through -

    (a)   installing 284 PCs at 35 multi-service centres for the elderly and 214 social centres for the elderly and providing Internet connection for those PCs for two years (the installation has been completed and the Internet connection is already available);

    (b)   providing IT awareness training programme for 5 000 elders and IT training programme for 500 trainers of elders in 2001-02 (this initiative has been completed);

    (c)   installing 538 PCs at 462 rehabilitation service units and providing Internet connection for those PCs for three years (the installation has been completed and the Internet connection is already available);

    (d)   providing IT awareness training programme for 15 000 people with disabilities and 600 trainers in three years (this initiative is being implemented); and

    (e)   setting up a portal web site for people with disabilities (this portal web site was launched on 6 December 2002 and there will be regular update on its contents).

17.   In respect of the IT awareness training programmes for elders, SWD has supported an application by the Internet Professional Association for undertaking a one-year Internet training programme for the elderly in December 2001 under the 'Web Care Campaign' initiative for an allocation of $579,600 from the Tang Shiu Kin and Ho Tim Charitable Fund. The training programme has three levels, namely elementary, intermediate and advanced levels and together has provided a total of 4 200 training places for elders in 2002.

18.	In addition, SWD has set up a Central Fund for Personal Computers to provide financial assistance to the disabled for the purchase of PCs to enable them to work independently.	In March 2001, LF injected $3 million to the Central Fund to benefit more disabled persons.	To date, 125 applicants have been supported with a total amount of $1.83 million from the Central Fund.	Recently, another round of invitation for application of the Central Fund for Personal Computers has been made.

Enhancing the Accessibility of NGOs' Web Sites

19.	In a knowledge-based economy with emphasis on the use of IT, there has been growing demand for more efforts to enhance web accessibility for disadvantaged individuals such as the visually impaired so that they can have equal access to the wealth of information on web sites.	In March 2001, SWD issued to all subvented NGOs a set of guidelines on improving web accessibility.	In September 2001, SWD and ITSD co-organised a seminar for welfare NGOs to introduce the design concepts and techniques to make web sites accessible to people with disabilities, in particular the visually impaired.	More than 100 participants from welfare NGOs attended the seminar.

20.	At its second meeting held on 4 October 2001, the JCIT tasked the LF-financed ITRC with providing assistance to NGOs to add alternative text (alt-text) to the graphics, links and multi-media contents of NGOs' web pages to suit the needs of the visually impaired.	On the other hand, SWD has appealed to NGOs for their involvement in the project.	It turned out that 26 NGOs have pledged that they would add alternative text at their own resources and some have already completed their action.	In addition, 39 NGOs requested alt-text tailoring service from ITRC, this project has been satisfactorily completed in June 2002.

Humanware

21.	Humanware as a component of the IT Strategy 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 human factor, i.e. lack of specific IT skills and/or not seeing IT literacy as an integral part of managerial skills.	Over the past years, efforts have been made in this area to boost up the sector's IT awareness/training and managerial skills for IT

projects.

Seminar on Computer Security

22.   In March 2001, SWD in collaboration with ITSD and the Hong Kong Productivity Council organised a half-day seminar on computer security and protection against virus attack for the welfare sector.   Feedback of 350 participants from NGOs and SWD was encouraging.

IT Advisers Scheme

23.   The IT Strategy recommends that 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.   To take this recommendation forward, SWD has matched 11 volunteer IT advisers nominated by the Hong Kong Computer Society, the British Computer Society and the Hong Kong Institution of Engineers with eight NGOs who would like to benefit from this IT advisers scheme.   All of these volunteers are well qualified personnel with considerable experience in the IT industry and readiness to take up an IT adviser role for welfare NGOs.   Extension of coverage to more NGOs may be considered after a review of the effectiveness of this scheme in the near future.

IT Training for the Social Welfare Sector

24.   To strengthen IT training and promote the use of IT in the sector, the Social Work Training Fund has launched an initiative to fund NGOs to organise IT training for their staff.   The Social Work Training Fund has approved a total of $910,000 for NGOs to organise 50 customised IT training programmes for their staff. In addition, LFAC approved a grant of $1.812 million and 1.803 million in August 2001 and September 2002 respectively to HKCSS to provide 150 computer training courses for NGOs in 2001-02 and 160 courses in 2002-03.   These 310 courses include 168 basic computer courses, 126 advanced computer courses and 16 computer application courses.   A total of 6 230 training places for NGO staff are provided.

Seminar on Information Technology Project Management for the Social Welfare Sector

25. As more and more IT projects are being launched in the sector, NGOs' capability to manage such projects becomes increasingly important. In January 2002, SWD held a seminar on IT project management with a view to arousing the sector's awareness of its importance. The seminar covers topics on formulation of a project proposal, management of IT projects, contract administration, LF applications, sharing of practical experience as well as demonstration of some IT applications used by social welfare agencies. The seminar was well received with a total of 398 participants from the sector.

IMPLEMENTATION OF CLIENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

26. On 4 February 2002, Members were informed of SWD's plan on implementation of Phase II of the Information Systems Strategy (ISS), which comprises a Technical Infrastructure (TI) and a Client Information System. TI provides a communication backbone for SWD to deploy department-wide information systems. As for CIS, it is a system that facilitates client-focused and automated case management process, and features standardised and streamlined case screening, case assignment, needs assessment, care plan development and management, and case closure. The system also provides management and statistical information for service planning. At its meeting held on 12 April 2002, the Legislative Council Finance Committee approved $241.053 million for SWD to implement TI and CIS. The original plan was to roll out TI and CIS in February 2004 and December 2004 respectively. However, longer time has been taken to prepare the tender document in order to reflect the changes that have taken place in the organisation of SWD and service re-engineering since completion of the feasibility studies on TI and CIS in 1999. It is now anticipated that TI and CIS would be completed in mid 2005.

27. We have also informed Members of our intention to explore the feasibility of extending CIS to a total of 30 Family Services Centres (FSCs) run by 12 NGOs. For this purpose, we have commissioned a mini-feasibility study (mini-FS) to assess the options and cost implications on setting up CIS in NGO FSCs. The mini-FS was completed on 29 November 2002. The findings of mini-FS indicate that it is technically viable to implement the proposed system, which will be ready three months after rolling out SWD CIS.

28.   During the mini-FS, NGOs paid particular attention to the access to and sharing of clients' personal data with the future computerised system.   SWD had sought advice from the Department of Justice in July 2002 and the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data (PCO) in August 2002 on this issue.   As agreed with NGOs, we will draw up guidelines on access to client's basic data through CIS. The basic principle is that access to personal data should only be made on a need-to-know basis and with client's verbal or written consent.   In addition, data security measures will be embedded in the CIS application to guard against unauthorised access.   To implement CIS for NGOs, SWD will apply for LF grant to cover the capital cost whereas NGOs have to bear the recurrent cost in the same manner as the other IT initiatives under the IT Strategy.

29.   SWD is considering the possibility of service rationalisation in NGO FSCs in near future in accordance with the findings of the Consultancy Study on the Review of Family Services in Hong Kong.   This might affect the scope of the proposed CIS for NGOs.   We will revisit the estimated recurrent cost at appropriate time and seek the commitment of NGOs concerned in order to take forward CIS for NGOs.

ADVICE SOUGHT

30.   Members are invited to note and advise on the progress in implementing the IT Strategy for the social welfare sector as set out in this paper.

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Social Welfare Department
March 2003

**Lotteries Fund Commitments since 2001
for Implementing the IT Strategy for the Welfare Sector**

Project	LF Approved Amount (HK$)
To implement a personal computer replacement programme for NGOs in the subvented sector	26,136,000
To set up a functional unit within the HKCSS to provide a range of IT services to NGOs	9,065,000
To develop an interactive computer training net for mentally handicapped persons managed by the Association for Engineering and Medical Volunteers Services	599,500
To install 284 PCs with Internet facilities at 35 multi-service centres for the elderly and 214 social centres for the elderly, and providing IT awareness training programme for 5 000 elders and IT training programme for 500 trainers of elders in 2001-02	10,938,500
To install 538 PCs with Internet facilities at 462 rehabilitation service units, setting up a portal site for people with disabilities, and providing IT awareness training programme for 15 000 people with disabilities and 600 trainers in three years	29,783,700
To implement a web-based Social Welfare Information Kit (SWIK) by Hong Kong Council of Social Service	666,000
To set up a homepage for care-givers by St. James' Settlement	90,000

Project	LF Approved Amount (HK$)
To implement Computer Training Programmes by the HKCSS for NGOs for 2001-02	1,811,816
To provide Internet access and digital certificates for NGOs in the social welfare sector	73,340,000
To implement Phase One of Core Applications Development on Human Resources Management and Financial Management for Non-governmental Organisations	1,500,000
To implement a Business Improvement Project entitled "Continuous Improvements through Knowledge Management"	2,100,000
To implement a Business Improvement Project entitled "Enhancing Productivity and Performance in Heep Hong Society by using Information Technology as an Enabler"	1,819,000
To implement a Business Improvement Project proposed by the Hong Kong Society for the Aged	291,400
To implement a Business Improvement Project of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council	1,768,432
To implement a Business Improvement Project proposed by the Hong Kong Red Cross	151,510
To implement a Business Improvement Project proposed by the Hong Kong Society for the Blind	1,385,560
To implement In-service Computer Training Programme for Welfare NGOs	1,803,122

Project	LF Approved Amount (HK$)
To implement a Business Improvement Project proposed by the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation	612,800
To implement a Business Improvement Project proposed by the Haven of Hope Christian Service	111,754
To implement the Core Applications Development on Human Resources Management and Financial Management for Non-governmental Organisations	25,066,000
Total:	**189,040,094**