

For information  
on 17 June 2004

## **LegCo Panel on Manpower**

### **Enhancements of Labour Department's Telephone Enquiry Service**

#### **Purpose**

This paper outlines the Administration's initiative to enhance the Labour Department's Telephone Enquiry Service (TES).

#### **Background**

2. In 1999, the Labour Department (LD) set up the first Intelligent Call Centre in the Government to provide a more convenient, user-friendly and versatile telephone enquiry service to the public on labour matters. The operation of the Centre – accessed through the telephone number 2717 1771 – was supported by a computer-telephony integration (CTI) system to provide callers with –

- pre-recorded messages and fax information on various labour laws and LD's services well-structured to facilitate callers' navigation among different topics;
- a choice to speak with TES officers during office hours;
- information about their queuing position, thus enabling them to decide whether to make use of other service options;
- voice mail facility for callers to leave messages for LD's follow-up; and
- call transfer to the relevant LD offices through TES officers, as necessary.

3. Up to 2001, 65 topics of pre-recorded voice messages and 72 forms and printed messages on labour matters were available through the interactive voice response system (IVRS) of the call centre for access by the public round-the-clock. The number of calls answered by TES officers increased from 386 644 in 1999 to 416 990 in 2001.

4. In early 2002, to meet the increasing demand for telephone enquiry service, LD recruited 10 contract staff to boost the manpower of TES. LD also extended the service hours of its operator service by one hour to 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays. In 2002, TES officers answered a total of 489 694 calls, an increase of 17% over 2001.

5. Currently, members of the public have round-the-clock access to 80 topics of pre-recorded messages in Cantonese, Putonghua or English on labour legislation and LD's services through the call centre. They can also obtain 84 forms and printed messages in Chinese or English by fax. They may also choose to speak to TES officers during office hours<sup>1</sup>. In 2003, the system handled 1 187 809 telephone calls. Of these, 532 944 calls were answered by TES officers, an increase of 9% over 2002.

### **Areas for improvement**

#### ***Better connection rate***

6. The great service demand has exerted considerable pressure on the TES. The number of calls seeking connection to TES officers reached 830 000 last year. While LD succeeded in raising the connection rate from 42% in 2001 to 64% in 2003, some 300 000 calls could still not be connected last year. To improve the situation, we need to increase the number of both TES officers and work-stations. However, the existing limited accommodation of the call centre hampers any such expansion.

#### ***Need for more updated equipment and facilities***

7. The existing CTI system is approaching the end of its 5-year normal life span. To ensure the long-term stability in service provision, we need to upgrade or replace the system.

### **Enhancement Initiative**

8. Against this background, the Administration has decided to fuse the TES into the Integrated Call Centre (ICC) currently operated by the

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<sup>1</sup> The office hours are from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. from Monday to Friday and from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturday.

Efficiency Unit (EU). The ICC was launched in July 2001 to implement the government's policy objective of providing a single telephone number for the public to enquire on government services. At present, the ICC is handling enquiries of 12 departments<sup>2</sup> on their services and relevant legislation. It offers multi-channels of contact, including telephone, email, web, fax and letter for the public to make enquiries and to lodge complaints. It provides a 24-hour service through the "1823" Citizen's Easy Link with a strength of 142 call centre agents. In 2003, the ICC answered 1 101 329 calls and handled 116 963 enquiries/complaints through email/fax/web/letter. Some 82% of the calls were answered within 12 seconds and only 2% of calls were abandoned by callers before being connected to agents. Altogether, 90% of enquiries were resolved at the first time of call and for the remaining 10%, the agents will call back the callers with the answers.

9. With a larger pool of call centre agents and more updated equipment to be provided by EU, there will be substantial enhancements to the TES. The fusion will take effect in the latter half of July this year. Callers seeking connection to call centre agents will enjoy the immediate benefits of a shorter connection time and higher connection rate as the number of agents assigned to answer calls on labour matters will rise to 30, a 36% increase as compared to 22 at the TES at present. The service hours of call centre agents will initially be extended by half an hour to 6:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday and to 1:30 p.m. on Saturday. To facilitate a smooth transition, the current TES telephone number of 2717 1771 will be retained for a period of time.

10. Once the fusion is fully in place, further enhancements will come on stream towards the end of this year. These include -

- Call centre agents will answer calls round-the-clock and throughout the year;
- More than 80% of calls seeking connection to call centre agents will be answered within 12 seconds as compared to the average

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<sup>2</sup> The 12 government departments are Architectural Services Department; Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department; Buildings Department; Civil Engineering Department; Electrical and Mechanical Services Department; Food and Environmental Hygiene Department; Highways Department; Leisure and Cultural Services Department; Marine Department; Hongkong Post; Rating and Valuation Department and Transport Department.

- waiting time of around 60 seconds at present;
- The successful rate of connection to call centre agents will significantly increase to 90% from 64% at present;
  - Members of the public can make enquiries on labour matters with an easier-to-remember telephone number “1823”; and
  - The capacity of the ICC is scalable to meet changing service demand.

### **Measures to ensure service standards**

11. LD has been working closely with EU to ensure a smooth transition. Action is completed to build a comprehensive knowledge base for EU’s call centre agents to handle enquiries on labour matters. These agents have received intensive training on handling labour-related enquiries and continuous training will be provided to further enhance their telephone skills. LD and EU have entered into a Service Level Agreement and will liaise closely to review the service levels. On-going customer satisfaction surveys will also be conducted by EU to identify room for further improvements.

### **Redeployment of TES staff to focus on labour inspection**

12. At present, 17 labour inspectors and two senior labour inspectors are deployed to the TES to provide and manage the current telephone enquiry service. Following the fusion, these staff will be redeployed to field offices to reinforce LD’s workplace inspections to better safeguard the rights and benefits of our workforce, to step up enforcement against illegal employment and to detect wage offences.

13. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Economic Development and Labour Bureau/Labour Department  
Efficiency Unit

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