

For information

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL
ON PLANNING, LANDS AND WORKS**

**Implementation of Central Registration Service by the
Land Registry**

Purpose

This paper informs Members of the Administration's intention to gazette a commencement notice for the remaining parts of the Land Registration (Amendment) Ordinance 2002 ("the Ordinance") and to gazette the Land Registration Fees (Amendment) Regulations 2004 to reduce certain Land Registry fees and charges.

Background

2. The Land Registry has been planning to restructure its organization and introduce new information systems in order to improve its services. Members were briefed on the plans on 12 November 1998 via LC Paper No. CB(1)279/98-99 prior to consultation with various parties. Members were subsequently advised on 4 December 2000 of the outcome of the consultation via LC Paper No. CB(1) 52/00-01 before the introduction of the Land Registration(Amendment)(2000) Bill. The Bill was enacted in mid 2002, providing the legal basis for:

- (a) search of stopped deeds, tighter control over personal data and registration of certified copies of documents; and
- (b) the reorganization of the department from its current structure of nine separate registries into a single registry serving the whole territory, i.e. introduction of a "Central Registration System".

3. Sections of the Amendment Ordinance related to (a) above came into effect on 12th December 2002. Commencement of the remaining sections of the Ordinance in relation to (b) above has been awaiting the completion of the development of the IT system that will support the Central Registration System.

4. The Land Registry now proposes to set 12th February 2005 as the date for commencement of service. The remaining parts of the Amendment Ordinance need to commence on this date to allow central registration to be put into operation.

5. As a related issue, the introduction of the Integrated Registration Information System (IRIS) will enable information and copying services to be provided more efficiently to clients. The Land Registry therefore proposes to reduce its fees for search and copying services on the same date that IRIS is put into service.

Central Registration

6. Upon implementation of central registration, the staff deployed to registration work in the New Territories districts will be redeployed to the Land Registry headquarters in the Queensway Government Offices. The reorganization, together with improved IT systems, will enable the department to provide services more efficiently.

7. Although the district registration offices will close, public service centres will be maintained where district land registries are currently located (except in Tai Po where a more convenient office is being established). Consequently, while registration work will be done centrally, enquiries can be handled and search services provided direct to the public in each district.

8. As set out in the Paper No. CB(1) 52/00-01, there has been extensive consultation on these proposals and the changes are welcomed by those using the Land Registry services. Following enactment of the Amendment Ordinance the Land Registry has conducted further briefings for District Councils in the New Territories in 2003 on the impending changes and has provided regular updates to customers through various channels on the progress towards introduction of central registration.

Integrated Registration Information System

9. IT support for Land Registry services is currently provided by three separate systems, the Land Registration System (LRS), Direct Access System (DAS) and Document Imaging System (DIS). These systems are old and were designed around the existing practice of separate registration districts. Both the LRS and DIS are based on old technology that is increasingly difficult to maintain. While the DAS allows external customers to access information from their offices, they cannot use the Internet but have to hire a private network provider, imposing additional costs on them. To support central registration, the Land Registry is replacing all three systems with IRIS. This provides up-to-date IT infrastructure that will support more efficient working practices within the registry; provides internet based services to customers and can be developed over time to meet new services and changing workload or organizational requirements.

10. A contract for development of IRIS was let in 2002 after passage of the Land Registration (Amendment) Ordinance, at a total cost of \$66.7 million. This cost is being met by the Land Registry Trading Fund.

11. Phase I of IRIS – the system needed to support central registration – is now in the final stage of preparation for service.* IRIS will completely replace the three old systems mentioned in paragraph 9 above. Final conversion of data from the old systems needs to be carried out after they cease to be used and before IRIS is put into service. Parallel running of the old and new systems is not feasible. This final conversion process requires about 72 hours. To avoid any disruption of public services, the conversion has to take place over a period where a combination of weekends and public holidays provides such a time window. The public holidays between 9th and 11th February 2005 (Chinese New Year) provide the first practicable time at which the change over can be made. Saturday 12th February would then be the first day on which IRIS is used for public services and central registration comes into effect.

* Phase II of IRIS will deal with developments needed to support title registration following passage of the Land Titles Ordinance. Work on this will commence after implementation of phase I.

Fee Revision

12. Over 75% of transactions with the Land Registry are requests for search and copying services. The IRIS system will allow public search services and document copying services to be provided more cost efficiently than under our present operating systems due to the adoption of internet service delivery and reduced need for counter staff. Accordingly, the Land Registry proposes to reduce search and copying charges as set out in the table at the Annex. It is proposed that these revisions will come into effect on the same day that IRIS is put into service.

13. Based on business volume in 2003-04, the effect of the proposed fee revisions would have been to reduce the Land Registry Trading Fund's annual income by \$23.7 million (equivalent to a 6.5% reduction).

Proposed Implementation

14. We propose the following legislative timetable in respect of the commencement notice for the Land Registration (Amendment) Ordinance and the Land Registration Fees (Amendment) Regulations :

Publication in the Gazette	3 December 2004
Tabling at the Legislative Council for negative vetting	8 December 2004
End of vetting period	26 January 2005
Commencement	12 February 2005

15. The main customers of the Land Registry – Solicitors, Estate Agents, Surveyors, Banks and Government Departments have been informed of the intention to implement central registration shortly and of the main changes that will be involved. They are also being notified of the training that is available before the change-over. After Members' consideration of this paper, all main customers will be advised directly of the specific commencement date to be gazetted and will receive further notices in the run

up to that date. Press releases will be issued and press briefings will be given to ensure that the public are informed. The Land Registry will maintain close liaison with customer representatives to ensure that all concerned are ready for the operation of the system on the commencement day. Special assistance will be provided for persons coming to Land Registry offices for services in the initial change-over period to help them familiarize themselves with the new procedures. On-line guidance and customer help-desks will be provided for users of electronic services.

Land Registry
November 2004

Annex

The Land Registry Trading Fund

Fee Reduction Proposals :

	Existing Fee \$	Revised Fee \$
Supplying information in the form of a computer printout or any other form indicating-		
(a) current particulars of a property	15	10
(b) historical and current particulars of a property	30	25
Supplying a copy, imaged copy, or a hard copy from a microfilm, or in any form by any method, of the whole document of any instrument, memorial or Government lease-		
(a) for each memorial and any instrument annexed thereto supplied	120	100
(b) for each Government lease supplied	190	120