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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 9 January 2006

**Background Brief on
E-government Programme**

Purpose

This paper summarizes the background of the e-government programme and the major views and concerns raised by members of the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting.

Background

Development of the e-government programme

2. The first phase of the e-government programme was launched in 2001. The focus at that time was on "publishing information online" and "enabling e-transactions". According to the Administration, e-government programmes typically pass through several stages of sophistication, each one becoming progressively more complex and involving more stakeholders, both from the public and private sectors. The implementation of the e-government programme in Hong Kong has also progressed through the following phases :

- (a) Internet as an additional information channel;
- (b) Provision of departmental electronic services;
- (c) Joined-up Government; and
- (d) Re-defined Government

3. According to the Administration's report submitted to the Panel on 14 March 2005, Hong Kong is now relatively mature in e-government development. The next wave of e-government will focus on "integrating and transforming

e-services". This requires bureaux and departments (B/Ds) to move from a government-centric way to a "whole-of-government" and customer-oriented approach in providing e-services so as to better meet the specific needs of different customer segments. Accordingly, the Administration will adopt a "service clustering approach" for the future delivery of e-government services. Under this approach, related e-government services will be grouped into a number of clusters. In addition to e-government services, each cluster will provide, where appropriate, related commercial services so as to enhance the customer and commercial value of the cluster.

4. On the timeframe for implementation, the Administration has informed the Panel that Expression of Interest would be invited by May 2005 while the business and implementation plans for individual service clusters would be drawn up before end 2005. The first batch of service clusters is expected to be in place by early/mid 2007.

Institutional support

5. On 1 July 2004, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) was established within the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau (CITB) by merging the IT-related divisions of the Communications and Technology Branch of CITB and the Information Technology Services Department. The OGCIO seeks to, among other things, provide leadership for the Government to drive the development of e-government. The Government Chief Information Officer was recruited after a global search and assumed duty on 1 February 2005.

6. An E-government Steering Committee chaired by the Financial Secretary was set up in September 2004 to provide high-level steer for the further development of the e-government programme and to approve measures to facilitate its implementation.

Consideration by the Panel

7. Over the years, the Panel has received progress reports periodically on the implementation of the e-government programme. Members are generally supportive of the development of e-government in Hong Kong and in the course of deliberation, have raised a number of concerns for the Administration's consideration.

Concerns about the new service clustering approach

8. The Panel notes the Administration's new strategy of adopting a service clustering approach for the future delivery of services in the next wave of e-government. Some members are worried that if the service clusters are not ready when the contract with the existing operator of the Electronic Service

Delivery (ESD) scheme expires in January 2006, there will be a gap in the delivery of e-government services.

9. On the interfacing arrangement, the Administration has advised that under the existing contract with the ESD service provider, the contract may be extended on the same terms and conditions for two more years at the Government's option. At the Panel meeting held on 14 March 2005, members were advised that the Government will consider whether to exercise this option, taking into account the need to maintain service continuity during the transitional period. The Administration has also explained that in the unlikely event that the incumbent ESD operator is unable to provide services after the expiry of the contract, it will still be obliged under existing contract terms to ensure a smooth transition in the delivery of e-government services to the Government and/or the future operator to take up the services.

10. Question has also been raised about the mode and extent of private sector participation in the delivery of e-government services through the service clusters. The Administration has informed the Panel that it has an open mind and is prepared to consider different models of public-private sector partnership, such as the development of a single service cluster or a combination of clusters by an operator. The Administration also believes that since many e-services under the new clusters are outside the existing scope of services available in the ESD portal, they will present new business opportunities to both the incumbent ESD service provider (which can also tender for the project on an equal footing with other bidders) and other interested parties. On measures to facilitate private sector participation, the Administration has referred to the adoption of an open and interoperable standard for the Government's technology infrastructure, which supports easy interfacing within the Government and with the private sector, and the provision of common infrastructural services.

Other concerns

Utilization of e-government services

11. The Panel is pleased to note that the promulgated target of providing an e-option for 90% of the public services amenable to the electronic mode of service delivery by the end of 2003 has been achieved. Nevertheless, members consider that apart from providing e-options, it is equally important to promote the utilization of such options.

12. Some members have pointed out that the provision of e-options in parallel with the conventional channels (e.g. at the counter, by phone or fax etc) is indeed most costly in delivering government services. The Administration has been urged to take appropriate measures to scale down or phase out some conventional modes of service delivery, but at the same time ensuring that persons who lack the means or knowledge to make use of e-options will not be deprived of the government services they need.

Benefits of e-government initiatives

13. In considering the productivity gains of e-government initiatives, members are particularly concerned about details of the resultant benefits/savings. In this connection, the Panel notes that with a view to better assessing the benefits of individual e-government initiatives, the Administration intends to commission a study within 2005 to review the e-government programme funding mechanism and recommend methodologies and tools to identify, quantify and measure the benefits attributable to e-government initiatives. This will enable B/Ds to focus their investments and resources on the high impact areas that can benefit both the community and the Government.

Proposals to improve services

14. With a view to seeking some tangible improvement to existing services, some Panel members have pursued with the Administration the feasibility of introducing on-line booking of facilities in community halls/centres operated by the Home Affairs Department (HAD), and converting existing District Offices of the HAD into e-government service centres. While advising the Panel that these options are not practicable for the time being, HAD has undertaken to further explore the feasibility of online booking of facilities in community halls/centres and of delivering some public enquiry services through electronic means in the context of the Information System Strategy Study scheduled to commence in mid 2005.

The way forward

15. The Administration has advised that at the Panel meeting to be held on 9 January 2006, it will update members specifically on the progress of implementing the new strategy of a service clustering approach (which was last discussed on 14 March 2005), and to seek the Panel's support for the proposed funding required for implementing the new strategy under CWRP Head 710 Computerization.

16. As regards other concerns about the development of the e-government programme, the Administration has indicated that it will provide the next regular update and progress report to the Panel in mid-2006.