

Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services

List of outstanding items for discussion

(position as at 19 April 2007)

**Proposed
timing for
discussion**

1. Applicability of HKSAR laws to offices set up by the Central People's Government in HKSAR

The item was discussed at a number of meetings of the Panel since 1998. When the item was last discussed by the Panel on 26 June 2001, the Administration advised the Panel on the following -

To be confirmed
by the Admin

- (a) 15 Ordinances which expressly apply to the Government but are silent on their applicability to the Central People's Government (CPG) offices - the relevant policy bureaux and departments would study and follow up on the legislative work;
- (b) Personal Data Privacy Ordinance (PDPO) - Hong Kong and Macau Affairs Office needed time to assess whether and if so how the operation of CPG offices would be affected if PDPO were to apply to them; and
- (c) 35 Ordinances which contain express references to the "Crown" - the relevant policy bureaux would proceed with the legislative amendments once they had dealt with the policy considerations.

In response to the Panel's request for an update on the item and advice on the timing for reverting to the Panel, the Secretary for Constitutional Affairs advised on 26 November 2004, 30 September 2005 and 26 October 2006 that the relevant policy bureaux and departments would introduce the legislative amendments in due course, having regard to competing legislative priorities. The Administration would consult the Legislative Council (LegCo) when concrete legislative proposals were formulated.

At the meeting on 27 November 2006, members expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of progress of the item. The Panel has requested the Administration to provide a progress report by mid January 2007. The Administration has advised that it is co-ordinating the response of the relevant departments and will provide a report in due course.

2. Review of provision of legal aid services

In October 2001, the Panel formed a Working Group to examine the relevant ordinances and subsidiary legislation concerning the provision of legal aid services in order to identify issues for the purpose of review and to make recommendations where appropriate. For details on the Panel's suggestions and the Administration's response, members are requested to refer to the background brief prepared by the LegCo Secretariat (LC Paper No. CB(2)904/05-06(01)).

To be confirmed
by the Admin

The Panel was consulted on the findings of the annual (2002 – 2006) and biennial (2002, 2004 and 2006) reviews of financial eligibility limits of legal aid applicants and the five-yearly review of the criteria for assessing financial eligibility of legal aid applicants completed in May 2003.

The Director of Administration (D of Adm) consulted the Panel on the approach of the next five-yearly review of the criteria for assessing financial eligibility of legal aid applicants in March 2007. The Administration would formulate more specific proposals in the later half of 2007. At the same meeting, the Panel received views from the public on issues related to legal aid.

3. Criminal legal aid fees system

The issue of criminal legal aid fees system was raised by the Bar Association and Law Society at the Panel meetings on 23 June and 29 July 2003 when the item on "Review of provision of legal aid services" was discussed. The two legal professional bodies were of the view that the existing system was outdated and should be reviewed.

To be confirmed
by the Admin

The request for a comprehensive review of the current remuneration system for lawyer engaging in criminal legal aid work is supported by the Panel. The Legal Aid Services has considered the issues raised by the professional bodies and supports such a review. In relaying the two legal professional bodies' concerns, the Chief Justice (CJ) has suggested that the Administration should undertake a review on the subject with an appropriate representation.

The Panel discussed the item at the meetings in December 2005, May 2006 and February 2007. At the last meeting, D of Adm advised that the Administration had reached broad consensus with the legal professional bodies on the proposed fee structure for criminal legal aid. The Administration undertook to discuss the outstanding issues with the legal professional bodies, including the rates for the various payment items under the proposed structure, and report to the Panel in due course.

4. Budgetary arrangement for the Judiciary

The Research Report on "Budgetary arrangements for overseas judiciaries" prepared by Research and Library Services Division and the Administration's paper explaining the budgetary arrangements for the Judiciary were discussed at the meeting on 24 November 2003. May 2007

The Panel considered that the Judiciary's budgetary arrangement should be reviewed to build in clearer institutional safeguards to ensure that judicial independence was not subject to executive influence, and that the Judiciary was provided with adequate resources for the proper administration of justice. The Panel had made a number of suggestions for the consideration of the Administration and the Judiciary, such as there should be a general rule against reduction of the Judiciary budgetary provision and the Judiciary should have autonomy to determine its budget based on objective yardsticks.

The Administration agreed to adopt a revised budgetary arrangement for the Judiciary's draft Estimates for 2006-2007 and to extend the revised arrangement as a standing practice for the coming Estimates.

However, the Administration did not agree to members' suggestion that there should be a general rule or practice against reduction of the Judiciary's budgetary provision, as the Administration could not rule out the need for downward adjustments to the Judiciary's funding provision having regard to overall economic constraints. As regards the suggestion that the Judiciary should have autonomy to determine its budget on the basis of some objective yardsticks or predetermined formulae, both the Administration and the Judiciary advised that they would adopt an open mind on any suggested measures within the parameters of the Basic Law. However, as the revised budgetary arrangement had just been in place and had worked satisfactorily, the situation would be closely monitored before they would consider whether any further measures were necessary.

The Judiciary Administration advised in September 2006 that it would submit a paper to the Panel in the second quarter of 2007.

5. Professional Indemnity Scheme of the Law Society

In response to the request of the Subcommittee on Solicitors (Professional Indemnity) (Amendment) Rules 2001, the Law Society agreed to conduct an independent review of the insurance arrangement under its Professional Indemnity Scheme (PIS). The purpose of the review was to consider whether at the end of the five-year reinsurance contract (expiring on 30 September 2005) the Law Society should maintain the existing mutual scheme with or without amendment, or to To be confirmed by the Law Society at the beginning of the 2007-08 session

demutualise the scheme and put into effect such other options as might be proposed as a result of the review. In its report to the House Committee on 26 October 2001, the Subcommittee recommended that this Panel should follow up the progress of the review.

Since then, the Panel has monitored the review of the PIS and received progress reports from the Law Society.

In November 2004, members of the Law Society voted for a Qualifying Insurers Scheme (QIS) to replace the existing scheme. The Law Society proceeded with the drafting of the relevant rules to implement the new scheme. In June 2005, the Panel was advised that a more realistic date for implementing a QIS would be 1 October 2006.

In May 2006, the Law Society informed the Panel that its members had voted by a large majority not to replace the existing PIS by a QIS at its Extraordinary General Meeting on 27 April 2006. The Law Society had set up a Professional Indemnity Scheme Review Working Party to identify any deficiencies in the existing scheme, consider how they might be remedied, and make appropriate recommendations.

At the Panel meeting in February 2007, the Law Society gave a report on the progress of work of the Review Working Party. The Working Party would proceed to consider a number of outstanding issues in the next few months and submit a report with recommendations to the Council in due course. The Panel noted that the reinsurance contract was renewed w.e.f. 1 October 2006 for a period of three years, with an option to terminate after two years.

6. Development of Hong Kong as a legal services centre

The item was discussed by the Panel at its meeting on 22 March 2004.

To be confirmed
by DoJ

At the Panel meeting on 12 December 2006, the Department of Justice (DoJ) briefed members on the measures taken and progress made during the last two years in building Hong Kong as a regional centre for legal services and dispute resolution and informed members of the way forward.

The Panel was advised that the consultancy study on the demand for, and supply of, legal and related services in Hong Kong commissioned by DoJ in July 2004 was progressing well and a report was expected to be published in early 2007.

DoJ was requested to provide more information on measures to develop Hong Kong as a legal services centre to the Panel (paragraphs 7, 12 and 19 of the minutes of meeting on 12 December 2006 refer).

7. Juvenile justice system

On the recommendation of this Panel and the Panel on Security, a Subcommittee was formed by the House Committee on 7 November 2003 to follow up the policy issues arising from the review on juvenile justice system. April 2007

The Subcommittee's report was endorsed by the House Committee at its meeting on 25 June 2004 (LC Paper No. CB(2)2895/03-04). The Subcommittee recommended that the Administration should report to the relevant Panels on the following issues in the new LegCo term –

- (a) the effectiveness of the enhanced support measures introduced by the Administration since October 2003; and
- (b) the outcome of the review on the development of a new juvenile justice system incorporating the principles and practices of restorative justice.

Where appropriate, the Panel(s) might recommend to the House Committee the setting up of a subcommittee to follow up the relevant issues.

On (a) above, the Administration provided a paper setting out the progress and effectiveness of the enhanced support measures targeting at unruly children and young offenders (issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2508/04-05(01) on 31 August 2005).

On (b) above, the Administration provided a paper to report progress of the matter (issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)765/06-07(01) on 3 January 2007).

8. Limited liability for professional practices

At its meeting on 31 March 2005, the Panel considered the Research Report on "Limited Liability Partnership and Liability Capping Legislation for the Practice of Law in Selected Places" (RP04/04-05) and a submission made by the Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants (HKICPA) on professional liability reform in Hong Kong.

To be decided by the Panel

The Panel continued discussion on the relevant issues at its meeting on 23 May 2005, with particular reference to the report prepared by the Law Society's Working Party on Limited Liability Partnership. DoJ advised the Panel that it would prepare a paper on the subject matter for the consideration of the Policy Committee in about six months' time.

The Consumer Council, which was represented at the Panel meeting on 31 March 2005, submitted its preliminary views on the issue of limited

liability partnership to the Panel in a letter dated 24 June 2005 (circulated vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2210/04-05(01)).

At the meeting on 27 March 2006, the Administration informed members that it had decided that no further studies would be carried out into proposals on limitation of liability to pay compensation during the remainder of the Chief Executive (CE)'s term of office. Members, the Law Society and the HKICPA were disappointed at the Administration's decision and agreed to relay members' views to the Financial Secretary for consideration (LC Paper No. CB(2)1645/05-06(01)). On 16 May 2006, the Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury replied on behalf of the Financial Secretary, reiterating that the Administration had already taken account of all the arguments put forth by the relevant professional organizations as well as views expressed by the Panel in arriving at the decision that no further studies would be carried out into the proposals for limiting liability during the remainder of CE's term of office (LC paper No. CB(2)2061/05-06(01)).

9. Solicitors' rights of audience

The item was proposed by the Law Society.

To be confirmed
by JA

In June 2004, CJ appointed the Working Party on Solicitors' Rights of Audience to consider whether solicitors' existing rights of audience should be extended and if so, the mechanism for dealing with the grant of extended rights of audience to solicitors.

On 9 June 2006, the Working Party issued a Consultation Paper on Solicitors' Rights of Audience to solicit public views on whether solicitors should be granted extended rights of audience in the higher courts of Hong Kong (issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)2312/05-06(01)). The consultation period originally ran until 31 August 2006 but was extended until the end of September 2006 at the request of relevant parties.

The Secretary to the Working Party advised on 7 December 2006 that given the large number of responses, the Working Party has yet to decide on its methodology for the next stage of work and it was too early to predict when its final recommendations would be formulated.

10. Reform of the law of arbitration

At its meeting on 27 June 2005, the Panel discussed the proposal made in the Report issued by the Committee on Hong Kong Arbitration Law of The Hong Kong Institute of Arbitrators to apply the Model Law of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law to both domestic and international arbitrations in Hong Kong. The

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implementation of the proposal would result in a unitary regime whereby the distinction between the two types of arbitrations in the Arbitration Ordinance would be abolished.

A working group was established by the Administration in September 2005 to consider and take forward this reform proposal. Representatives of the legal profession, arbitration experts and others have been appointed to the working group to prepare a draft Bill and consultation paper.

11. Enforcement of judgment in civil cases

The issue of enforcement of Labour Tribunal awards, among other things, was examined by the Judiciary's Working Party on the Review of the Labour Tribunal. The Report issued by the Working Party in June 2004 was considered at a number of joint meetings of this Panel and the Panel on Manpower.

To be decided by
the Panel

The Panel decided to follow up issues relating to enforcement of judgments in civil cases. The Chairman wrote to D of Adm on 11 March 2005 to seek the Administration's views on, inter alia, how the existing mechanism of enforcement of court judgments in civil cases in general, and in labour and matrimonial cases in particular, could be improved. In its reply dated 19 September 2006, the Administration advised that problems identified by the Panel in enforcing judgments in specific areas should be referred to Principal Officials concerned for consideration of the need to introduce appropriate measures to address the specific problems, taking account of policy and resources consideration.

The Panel followed up the matter at its meeting on 23 October 2006. Members agreed that a further meeting with the participation of the relevant Panels and relevant bureaux would be held in due course. To facilitate further consideration of the Panel, the Administration was requested to provide relevant information to the Panel (paragraphs 17, 19 and 23 of the minutes of meeting on 23 October 2006 refer). The legal professional bodies had also been requested to provide information such as problems encountered in enforcement of civil judgments and measures to improve the situation. The response of the Law Society and a solicitor's firm were issued to members (LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1100/06-07(01) and (02)) and the Administration.

12. Recovery agents

An Executive Summary and a report from the Special Committee on April 2007

Recovery Agents of the Bar Association was circulated to the Panel vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1516/04-05(01) on 10 May 2005 (Appendix I to the report was issued vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1646/04-05 on 23 May 2005). A circular on "Recovery Agents" issued by the Law Society to its members was circulated to the Panel vide LC Paper No. CB(2)1609/04-05(01) on 19 May 2005.

The Panel discussed this item at its meetings on 28 November 2005 and 22 January 2007. The Administration was requested to revert to the Panel in April 2007 on the outcome of the cases under investigation and related issues.

13. Pilot scheme on legal aid for mediation in matrimonial cases

At the special meeting of the Panel on 17 October 2005 when members received a briefing on CE's Policy Address 2005/2006 by D of Adm, some members expressed concern about the small number of cases referred to the Legal Aid Department (LAD)'s Pilot Scheme and proceeded to mediation since the Scheme was launched on 15 March 2005. June 2007

The Panel considered the Administration's interim progress report on the Pilot Scheme at the meeting on 22 May 2006. The Administration aimed to conduct a final evaluation of the Pilot Scheme in around mid 2007 and to report to the Panel before the end of the 2006-2007 session. The Administration also agreed to provide information on the relevant schemes of the Administration and Judiciary to the Panel (paragraphs 30 and 39 of the minutes of meeting on 22 May 2006 refer).

14. Policy relating to recruitment of law draftsmen

At the meeting on 24 April 2006, the Panel expressed concern about the recruitment of draftsmen with experience and competency in drafting legislation in English. It requested DoJ to review its policy relating to recruitment of law draftsmen to the Law Drafting Division of DoJ e.g. to consider, inter alia, relaxing the requirement in respect of Chinese language proficiency for appointment. DoJ agreed to conduct a review on the present arrangements and would let the Panel know its conclusions as soon as possible. June 2007

The Panel also requested DoJ to provide other relevant information (paragraph 64 of the minutes of meeting on 24 April 2006 refers).

15. Review of the jurisdiction of the Office of the Ombudsman

Noting that the Ombudsman was conducting a review of the jurisdiction To be confirmed

of the Office of the Ombudsman, the Panel agreed that a research be conducted on the purviews of ombudsmen in overseas jurisdictions at the meeting on 15 December 2005. The Research Report on "Jurisdiction of Ombudsman Systems in Selected Places" was presented to the Panel on its meeting on 26 June 2006. by the Admin

At the same meeting, the Ombudsman informed members that the review of the jurisdiction of the Office of the Ombudsman would consist of two parts : Part I would be an "operational" review of the Ombudsman Ordinance (Cap. 397), and Part II a more generalized review of developments in ombudsmanship. The Ombudsman would complete her review for submission to the Administration in a few months' time.

In response to the Panel's request for a copy of the review report when it is available, the Administration has advised that if the Ombudsman's proposals involve policy or legislative changes, it will consult the relevant parties on a need basis. As regards the Panel's request that a consultation document be issued to seek public views on the report, the Administration is of the view that the course of actions to be taken will depend on the content of the report and what aspects of the report the public will be interested in.

The Ombudsman submitted Part I of the Review to the Administration in November 2006. The Panel decided at its meeting on 22 January 2007 that the item should be discussed at the meeting in March 2007, subject to the Administration's agreement. The Administration advised on 23 January 2007 that it would notify the Panel on the timing for discussion when it was in a position to do so.