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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 10 June 2008

Background brief on Digital 21 Strategy

Purpose

This paper gives an account of the development of the Digital 21 Strategy and summarizes the views and concerns of Members on the subject matter from 2007 onwards.

Development of the Digital 21 Strategy

2. The Digital 21 Strategy is a blueprint for the development of information and communication technology (ICT) in Hong Kong. The focus of the Strategy is to advance Hong Kong's achievements, seize new opportunities and harness its advantage so as to strengthen its position as a leading digital city. The ultimate aim is to promote Hong Kong's economic development and to provide better services to citizens.

3. Efforts of the Administration in implementing the Digital 21 Strategy in the past year are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Promoting adoption of new technologies

4. The Administration has obtained the approval of the Finance Committee in May 2007 to create a new commitment of \$217.6 million to provide Wi-Fi facilities in some 350 Government venues for free use by the public. These venues include public libraries, major cultural and recreational centres, community halls, large parks and Government offices frequently visited by the public. After the service rollout in early 2008, the Administration has approved applications from operators for installing Wi-Fi equipment at public housing estates and public payphone kiosks. Currently, there are some 900 public Wi-Fi hotspots set up at the lobbies on the ground floor of these estates and kiosks respectively. Applications from operators have also been received by the

Highways Department for installing Wi-Fi equipment on lamp posts. The Office of the Telecommunications Authority (OFTA) has been coordinating with the relevant departments to actively discuss electricity supply arrangements with operators concerned in this respect.

Technological cooperation with the Mainland

5. On 21 May 2007, the Administration signed a co-operation agreement on the "Shenzhen-Hong Kong Innovation Circle" with the Shenzhen Municipal Government. The objective of the agreement was to promote and enhance ICT collaboration between Shenzhen and Hong Kong, including the exchange of talent and sharing of resources, with a view to creating synergy between and upgrading innovative resources and activities in the two places.

6. Since the signing of the agreement, the Shenzhen Municipal Government and the HKSAR Government have taken forward a number of initiatives, including jointly supporting R&D projects under the "Shenzhen/Hong Kong Technology Cooperation Funding Scheme" newly introduced in 2007 and setting up the "Shenzhen/Hong Kong Productivity Foundation" in Shenzhen. A "Shenzhen/Hong Kong Innovation Circle Pavilion" was also set up at the China Hi-Tech Fair 2007 to introduce the latest state of technology cooperation between Hong Kong and Shenzhen and the vision of the two cities in consolidating their strengths to become a region with innovative capabilities. In addition, the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation and the Shenzhen Hi-Tech Park have agreed to set up "Interactive Bases" at each other's park to promote more cooperation between technology enterprises in the two parks.

Building an inclusive, knowledge-based society

7. In February 2007, a research team of the University of Hong Kong (HKU) was commissioned by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officers (OGCIO) to conduct a study to identify the barriers to ICT adoption amongst different disadvantaged groups in Hong Kong. Six such groups i.e. the elderly, children of low-income families, female homemakers, new arrivals, single parents, and persons with disabilities and/or chronic illness, have been identified. In this connection, the Administration has been implementing a number of initiatives to help the needy people to access and adopt IT. These include the implementation of a computer recycling scheme under which students from low-income and indigent families are provided with recycled computers after refurbishment and with one-year free Internet connection, and the setting up of the Central Fund for personal computers to assist people with disabilities having financial difficulty in acquiring personal computer and required facilities to enable them to lead a more independent life. Free IT awareness and basic training courses including PC usage, Internet surfing and information security have also been organized for all sectors of the community, including the elderly, female homemakers, new arrivals and people with disabilities. In addition, the Administration has joined hands with non-government organizations to set up

district cyber centres to enhance accessibility of ICT and to provide training opportunities for the public, in particular the under-privileged groups.

8. As for the promotion of the wider use of ICT amongst small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the Administration has conducted sector-specific e-business programme (SSP) since 2004 to enhance awareness and ICT capabilities of SMEs by means of disseminating best practices, rendering technical support and assisting in the development of industry portals for knowledge-sharing and collaboration. In February 2007, a new round of SSP was launched to sponsor e-business promotion in five business sectors i.e. (i) watches and clocks, (ii) beauty services, (iii) medical and health, (iv) social services and (v) trade. Pilot e-business applications have been developed and training courses have been conducted for firms and practitioners in the targeted sectors. In addition, the Administration has been exploring with the ICT industry on the possibility of offering all-in-one packages to SMEs, including computer hardware and software, Internet connection and support services at affordable prices.

Members' views and concerns

9. The Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting (the Panel) received regular reports from the Administration on the implementation of the Digital 21 Strategy. Panel members generally supported the development of the Digital 21 Strategy. Nevertheless, they raised the following concerns at meetings of the Panel, the Finance Committee, and the Council.

Discussion by the Panel

Digital inclusion for disadvantaged groups

10. Members noted that while the Administration had identified a host of problems for the elderly and children of low-income groups, no solutions had been proposed to actively tackle these problems, such as insufficient training classes at community centres and the lack of a ready enquiry channel for the elderly, and financial difficulties facing students in paying the monthly Internet service charge, cost of software, and computer maintenance and repairs etc. Members also raised queries as to what ICT adoption barriers had been identified for these disadvantaged groups and sought the Administration's measures and time-table for the enhancement of digital inclusion of these groups.

11. The Administration advised that more than \$200 million dollars had been spent in 2006-2007 to step up training and strengthen measures for digital inclusion. The HKU research team was consolidating the findings of the concerned disadvantaged group and recommendations would be passed to the Administration for consideration. To ensure that a holistic approach was taken in tackling the digital divide, a task force comprising representatives from relevant departments as well as industry and community stakeholders would be

set up in late 2007 to formulate a strategy for digital inclusion.

Support for small and medium-sized enterprises

12. Members considered that with the promotion of wider use of ICT amongst the SMEs, the Administration should devise IT security policies and guidelines as well as technical measures to assist SMEs in overcoming IT crisis such as network outage caused by earthquake damage to undersea cables.

13. The Administration assured members that OGCIO had all along attached importance to assisting SMEs in pursuing measures to enhance information security. In collaboration with the IT sector, OGCIO had published the SME Information Security Guideline for SMEs' reference via its website. The Guideline provided guidance to SMEs on how to manage information security threats by providing information on areas such as incident response to minimize the impact of network outages and business continuity planning, backup and recovery.

Concerns raised at the Finance Committee meeting

14. At the Finance Committee meeting held on 25 May 2007, a funding proposal amounting to \$217.6 million for the provision of Wi-Fi facilities at Government premises was approved. While most members welcomed the project as a means to bridge the digital divide, they raised the following concerns:

- (a) the Administration should refrain from competing with the commercial sector in the provision of Wi-Fi facilities to avoid unfair competition and adverse impact on the trades;
- (b) a mechanism should be introduced to assess the cost-effectiveness and utilization rate of the Wi-Fi programme; and
- (c) there was a need to protect the security of the information in the use of Wi-Fi facilities to prevent unauthorized access to the system.

Questions raised at Council meetings

15. Four Council questions were raised at the meetings on 24 October 2007, 16 January, 20 February and 16 April 2008. Members expressed concern about the progress of the provision of Wi-Fi facilities in Government premises and public streets. They also urged the Administration to speed up the implementation of the Wi-Fi programme so as to facilitate the provision and expansion of wireless services and network coverage in Hong Kong.

Issues to be followed up at the Panel meeting on 10 June 2008

16. The Administration has published the "2008 Digital 21 Strategy" in December 2007 highlighting five key action areas:

- (a) facilitating a digital economy;
- (b) promoting advanced technology and innovation;
- (c) developing Hong Kong as a hub for technological cooperation and trade;
- (d) enabling the next generation of public service; and
- (e) building an inclusive, knowledge-based society.

17. The Administration will brief the Panel on the latest position of the matter at the Panel meeting to be held on 10 June 2008.

Reference

18. A list of relevant papers is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Appendix

List of relevant papers

Committee	Paper	LC Paper No.
Meeting of Panel on Information, Technology and Broadcasting (ITB) on 15 January 2007	✧ Administration's paper : Report of the Progress Made in Implementation of Previous Digital 21 Strategies	CB(1)670/06-07(03)
	✧ Minutes of meeting	CB(1)1063/06-07
Meeting of Finance Committee held on 25 May 2007	✧ Item for Finance Committee – New Subhead "Provision of Wi-Fi facilities at Government premises	FCR(2007-08)13
	✧ Minutes of meeting	FC124/06-07
Meeting of ITB Panel on 9 July 2007	✧ Administration's paper : Update on implementation of Digital 21 Strategy and the E-government Programme	CB(1)2043/06-07(03)
	✧ Minutes of meeting	CB(1)2396/06-07
Meeting of the Legislative Council on 24 October 2007	✧ Question No. 15 on "Electronic Service Delivery Scheme"	Hansard
Meeting of the Legislative Council on 16 January 2008	✧ Question No. 16 on "Making available public facilities for installation of Wi-Fi antennas"	Hansard
Meeting of the Legislative Council on 20 February 2008	✧ Question No. 18 on "Promotion of wireless Internet access"	Hansard
Meeting of the Legislative Council on 16 April 2008	✧ Question No. 15 on "Installation of Wi-Fi antennas on lamp posts"	Hansard