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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 14 March 2011

Updated background brief on New initiatives of Radio Television Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper gives a brief summary on the previous discussions by Members on issues related to the future operation of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK).

Background

2. Public service broadcasting (PSB) and the future of RTHK has been a matter of public concern for over 20 years. Following the deliberations of the Executive Council on 22 September 2009, the Administration announced its decision on the way forward in respect of PSB and the future of RTHK. In gist, RTHK would remain as a Government department and be tasked to take up the mission to serve as the public service broadcaster for Hong Kong. The Government committed that appropriate resources would be provided for service enhancement to enable RTHK to expand its scope of service to fulfil its role and mission and better serve the community. A three-month consultation was subsequently launched by the Government to gauge public views on how best RTHK should operate to achieve its mission as a public service broadcaster. The Administration announced the outcome of the public consultation exercise in March 2010, details of which are given in the Government's consultation report issued vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1520/09-10(05) on 1 April 2010.

Previous discussions

Discussions at the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

3. At the meetings of the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting (the Panel) on 5 October and 19 November 2009, 12 April, 31 May and 10 December 2010, members discussed and received views from deputations on the development of PSB in Hong Kong and related issues on the future of RTHK.

Digital Audio Broadcasting and Digital Terrestrial Television

4. At the Panel meetings on 19 November 2009, 31 May and 10 December 2010, members shared the views of deputations that RTHK should be provided with sufficient resources and manpower to enhance its digital audio broadcasting (DAB) and digital terrestrial television (DTT) services to fulfil its role and mission of a public service broadcaster for Hong Kong. The Administration was urged to provide additional resources to enable RTHK to increase its production of High Definition TV programmes and to draw up a comprehensive plan on the development of DTT services, including the resource allocation for the launch of DTT and the timetable for establishing the DTT transmission network.

5. According to the Administration, RTHK would be allocated spectrum frequencies to launch five DAB programme channels in mid-2012. Four of the new DAB programme channels would mainly be used for improving the reception of AM broadcasting (including sound quality) and enhancing existing programme content. The other DAB programme channel would be used for relaying national programmes. RTHK would also provide value-added data services to the audience, such as the screening of news highlights, weather information and traffic reports on DAB receivers.

6. The Administration further advised that RTHK would be committed to establishing the DTT transmission network, including discussing with the two free-to-air TV broadcasters on the rental of suitable hilltop sites, purchasing transmitters and equipment, and conducting technical trials. The Government had allocated the required resources to RTHK, and agreed to provide additional resources to enable RTHK to increase its production of HDTV programmes from about 50 hours to not less than 200 hours per year as from 2011-2012.

Community Involvement Broadcasting

7. Panel members generally supported the establishment of the Community Broadcasting Involvement Fund, as proposed by the Administration in the consultation paper in October 2009, to facilitate community participation in broadcasting. Some members shared the deputations' view that instead of RTHK devoting part of its airtime and resources within the development of its digital service to provide a platform for community participation in broadcasting, the Administration should open up airwaves for independent community groups, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies and ethnic minorities to participate in public access broadcasting and produce their own programmes so as to encourage a plurality of voices. These members also urged the Administration to draw up long-term policy, detailed plan and timetable for opening up airwaves for community broadcasting. The Administration advised that the Government had earmarked \$45 million for a three-year trial under the proposed Fund. RTHK would work out the details in consultation with the Board of Advisors.

Development of New RTHK Broadcasting House in Tseung Kwan O

8. At the Panel meeting on 10 December 2010, members noted that the Government had decided that Tseung Kwan O Area 85 would be the site for the development of the new RTHK Broadcasting House. The Panel called on the Administration to expedite the reprovisioning of the new headquarters and the acquisition of related facilities and equipment to enhance programme production. The Administration advised that the Government planned to complete the technical feasibility study around the first half of 2011, and would complete the town planning procedures and application for funding as soon as possible.

Digitization of programme archives

9. At the Panel meeting on 10 December 2010, members noted that RTHK would establish a Media Asset Management project starting from 2011-2012 to restore archive materials at risk, digitize the most valuable portion (about 25%) of RTHK's archives, and provide specialized storage for the archive materials to facilitate easy access and retrieval. Panel members generally supported the project and urged the Administration to provide the necessary manpower and funding to expedite the preservation of the programme archive which was of great historical value to avoid the loss of records due to ageing. Some members questioned the basis and the rationale for setting 25% of the total pool of materials as the target of digitization, and expressed grave concern whether assets which reflected the social and political development of Hong Kong would be selectively

screened out in the process of digitization. They urged RTHK to draw up a long-term policy in respect of the safekeeping and disposal of the original copy of the digitized files and to enlist the assistance of historians and archive expertise in determining the materials to be digitized and to advise on proper storage. There was also a suggestion that instead of keeping the original copies for an indefinite period of time, selected items of public interest should be donated to museums for display for public enjoyment.

10. Panel members shared some deputations' views that RTHK archive materials (including RTHK's own work and works contributed by others), which were commissioned by public money, should be made readily accessible to the general public and the industry. Some members also urged RTHK to step up co-operation with the media and communications centre of the universities to make good use of the archive materials for academic studies and historical research. Suggestion was made to compile a comprehensive archive index/catalogue for easy reference, access and retrieval by the public, professional media producers, universities and researchers.

Council meeting

11. At the Legislative Council meeting on 5 January 2011, Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po raised a question on manpower arrangement of RTHK. According to the Administration's reply, RTHK would create a number of additional posts in 2011-2012, including a permanent D1 post of Controller (Broadcasting Services) and a supernumerary post of Deputy Director of Broadcasting for three years for the launch of new initiatives undertaken by RTHK. RTHK would also resume internal promotion for staff at various ranks and the recruitment of civil servants for vacancies in the Assistant Programme Officer rank.

Recent developments

12. At the Panel meeting on 14 February 2011, the Administration briefed members on the new initiatives to support the development of RTHK as the public service broadcaster in the next few years and the strengthening of the directorate support for RTHK. The Panel discussed the manpower resources of RTHK, the development of DTT and DAB services and the new Broadcasting House in Tseung Kwan O, community involvement in broadcasting and the editorial independence of RTHK.

13. On manpower resources of RTHK, Panel members requested the Administration to provide information on the recruitment or promotion

exercise for civil service posts in the Programme Officer (PO) grade to be carried out by RTHK, including the selection procedure, the requisite in-rank service requirement, and how discretion would be granted to serving non-civil service contract staff to fill the civil service posts at promotion ranks of the PO grade. The Administration was also requested to provide information on the consultation mechanism between the RTHK management and its staff union, as well as the latest progress of the consultation and discussion conducted on manpower arrangement of RTHK.

Latest position

14. The Panel will receive views from the RTHK Programme Staff Union on manpower arrangement of RTHK on 14 March 2011.

Relevant papers

Legislative Council Brief on public service broadcasting and the future of Radio Television Hong Kong issued on 22 September 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/itb/papers/itb1005-ctbcr9179-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 5 October 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20091005.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 19 November 2009

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20091119.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0412cb1-1520-5-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20100412.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 31 May 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20100531.pdf>

The Administration's letter of 3 December 2010 on the proposal to allocate new resources to RTHK as from 2011-2012 for launching various services to fulfil its role and mission as the public service broadcaster of Hong Kong.

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itbcb1-682-1-e.pdf>

Minutes of Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 10 December 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/minutes/itb20101210.pdf>

Hon Paul CHAN Mo-po's question on manpower arrangement of Radio Television Hong Kong at the Council meeting on 5 January 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0105-confirm-ec.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 14 February 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0214cb1-1224-5-e.pdf>

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 14 February 2011

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0214cb1-1224-6-e.pdf>

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