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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 14 March 2011

Updated background brief on digital inclusion

Purpose

This paper summarizes the views and concerns expressed by Members on issues relating to digital inclusion in Hong Kong during previous discussions.

Background

2. Digital 21 Strategy provides a blueprint for the development of information and communication technology (ICT)¹ in Hong Kong. Building a digitally inclusive, knowledge-based society is one of the five key action areas promulgated by the Government in its latest version of the 2008 Digital 21 Strategy. One of the Government's priority work focus in this action area is to provide Internet connections to needy groups in the community, thereby bridging the digital divide of the under-privileged groups. A Task Force on Digital Inclusion (the Task Force) was established in July 2008 under the Digital 21 Strategy Advisory Committee to advise the Government on the formulation of relevant strategies and initiatives on digital inclusion to improve access to ICT facilities and connectivity, ICT skills, and facilitate the development of useful content for the needy groups. The Task Force agreed that priority should be given to three needy groups, namely the elderly, low-income families with children and people with disabilities and/or chronic illness. A number of digital inclusion initiatives were commissioned with the advice and support of the Task Force through tripartite collaboration between the community, the business sector and the Government. Highlights of the initiatives include:

¹ ICT refers to all technologies and applications that involve information processing and/or exchange over communication networks, including the internet.

- (a) the District Cyber Centres (DCC) pilot scheme to enable young people from poor families and other needy members of the community to access and use ICT and online services helping them integrate into the information society;
- (b) the one-year "Be NetWise" Internet education campaign to educate Internet users, especially young students, on the appropriate and safe use of the Internet;
- (c) the dedicated portal for the elderly providing one-stop information and service to address the interests and needs of the elderly;
- (d) the Central Fund for Personal Computer set up by the Social Welfare Department to assist people with disabilities (PwD) to acquire personal computer facilities for self-employment or receiving supported employment service at home;
- (e) the Computer Recycling Programme coordinated by the Education Bureau and the Environment Protection Department to provide refurbished computer with one-year free Internet access service to needy students of primary and secondary schools;
- (f) installing public computers with Internet connection at various places including public libraries and youth and social centres for free public access;
- (g) the Digital Solidarity Fund administered by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service to sponsor digital inclusion projects by non-government organizations (NGOs) for different needy groups; and
- (h) the grant of subsidy for Internet access charges to primary and secondary school students from low-income families.

Previous discussions

Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

3. The Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting (the ITB Panel) received regular updates from the Administration on the digital inclusion initiatives undertaken by the Government, NGOs and the private

sector in the context of the implementation of the Digital 21 Strategy. Panel members considered that more resources should be allocated to drive up ICT adoption and help integrate the needy groups, such as the low-income families with children, PwD, and the elderly in the digital society. Members called on the Administration to draw up quantifiable performance indicators and benchmark to measure the progress and effectiveness of the digital inclusion initiatives.

4. At the ITB Panel meeting on 12 April 2010, members noted that while the various digital inclusion initiatives had improved the ICT accessibility among children in low-income families, not much progress had been made among PwD. They urged the Administration to expeditiously draw up specific policy strategy and implement targeted measures to help integrate PwD into the information society.

5. The Administration advised that to address the accessibility requirements of PwD, a set of accessibility guidelines and best practice for the design of web pages and electronic services had been developed and updated with reference to international standards and input from disabled groups. All government websites were required to comply fully with the guidelines. In addition, workshops had been organized by the Task Force with community organizations and representatives of the PwD sub-groups, with a view to drawing up relevant plans and initiatives to address their specific needs in ICT adoption.

6. Some ITB Panel members opined that to increase the elderly's ability to use digital services in the digital environment, computer and ICT facilities should be installed in elderly centres to provide on-line platform for the elderly to stay connected with their families and friends. Panel members also asked about the number of sessions conducted by NGOs for teaching the elderly digital techniques for use in daily life.

7. The Administration advised that to provide the elderly with more convenient access to the relevant contents and services on the Internet, a dedicated elderly portal would be launched to provide one-stop information service on elderly services, pooling together information around their interests, such as those related to their daily lives, medical and health, housing and care, social and recreational activities, as well as silver hair market information. The various computer courses offered by the Elder Academies would also help enhance their computer knowledge and ability to use digital services, as well as expand their social circle through the Internet.

8. Some ITB Panel members urged that more resources should be provided to help the grass-root working class parents to enhance their ICT connectivity and improve ICT skills. They suggested that the Commerce

and Economic Development Bureau should coordinate with the Education Bureau to make use of the five-year programme in order to provide holistic assistance to some 300 000 low-income families in need. A 24-hour hotline should also be set up to provide technical support to these families, pending the implementation of the five-year programme.

Panel on Education

9. At its meeting on 12 April 2010, the Panel on Education examined the two-pronged approach proposed by the Administration for the provision of convenient and suitable Internet learning opportunities to needy students. These opportunities included the introduction of a household-based cash subsidy scheme for Internet access charges from the 2010-2011 school year and the provision by a non-profit-making organization of economical Internet access services, suitable computers and softwares as well as the necessary complementary services, such as training and technical support, to facilitate these students and their parents to gain access to the Internet for learning. Members expressed support in general for the Administration's proposal. The relevant funding proposal was subsequently approved by the Finance Committee on 28 May 2010.

Council meeting

10. At the Legislative Council meeting on 3 November 2010, Hon Abraham SHEK raised a question on the effectiveness of the "Be NetWise" Internet education campaign, and the progress in setting up the non-profit-making organization for the implementation of the Internet Learning Support Programme (ILSP) to enhance the technical know-how of parents and students in using the Internet. The Administration advised that the campaign had been well received by the community. The Administration would strive to launch the ILSP before the commencement of the 2011-2012 school year.

Recent developments

11. In November 2010, Hon Cyd HO and Hon LEE Wing-tat wrote to the Chairman of the ITB Panel respectively expressing concern about the tendering exercise for ILSP. The Administration subsequently provided an update on the progress of the ILSP which was issued to members vide LC Paper No. CB(1)1023/10-11(01) on 10 January 2011.

Latest position

12. The Administration will report to the Panel on 14 March 2011 the latest development of various major digital inclusion initiatives and the progress of the implementation of ILSP.

Relevant papers

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/itb0412cb1-1520-3-e.pdf>

Background brief on digital inclusion prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/itb/papers/itb0412cb1-1520-4-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>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Education Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ed/papers/ed0412cb2-1233-1-e.pdf>

Background brief entitled "Development of e-Learning and provision of Internet access charges" prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the Education Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ed/papers/ed0412cb2-1233-2-e.pdf>

Minutes of Education Panel meeting on 12 April 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ed/minutes/ed20100412.pdf>

Council question on the "Be NetWise" Internet education campaign raised by Hon Abraham SHEK on 3 November 2010

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/counmtg/hansard/cm1103-translate-e.pdf>

Information paper provided by the Administration for the Information Technology and Broadcasting Panel on Internet Learning Support Programme
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/itb/papers/itbcb1-1023-1-e.pdf>

Paper for meeting of Finance Committee on 28 May 2010: FCR(2010-11)15
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/fc/fc/papers/f10-15e.pdf>

Minutes of Finance Committee meeting on 28 May 2010
<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/fc/fc/minutes/fc20100528.pdf>

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