立法會
Legislative Council

Ref : CB2/PL/SE

Panel on Security

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 10 April 2015

Police Operational Nominal Index Computer System and Criminal Intelligence Computer System

Purpose

This paper provides background information and gives an account of the past discussions by the Panel on Security ("the Panel") and the Finance Committee ("FC") on the last replacement project of the Police Operational Nominal Index Computer System ("PONICS") and the Criminal Intelligence Computer System ("CICS").

Background

2.   According to the Administration, both PONICS and CICS are operation support systems in the Police Force and are running on the same mainframe computer system.   CCIS is used for assisting the Police in gathering and analysis of criminal intelligence.   It was developed in two phases, completed in April 1989 and August 1993 respectively.   The system is mainly used by the Criminal Intelligence Bureau, Narcotics Bureau, Commercial Crime Bureau and the Organised Crime and Triad Bureau of the Police Force.   Restricted access to CICS has been extended to the Regional Intelligence Units and District Intelligence Squads since the end of 1999.

3.   PONICS was installed in 1991 for the Police's Criminal Records Bureau. It maintains the central repository of criminal records in Hong Kong and details of all persons who are classified by the Police as "Missing Persons" or "Wanted Persons".   The system is also used by other law enforcement agencies such as the Customs and Excise Department, Immigration Department, Independent Commission Against Corruption.

4. In 2000, the Administration sought funding approval from the Finance Committee ("FC") for a new commitment of $66,170,000 to replace the above two systems with a new CICS and PONICS that could better meet the Police's operational requirements. When submitting the funding proposal, the Administration estimated that the core system replacement for the new CICS and PONICS would be completed during 2003-2004, with the roll-out of the new CICS to be completed by November 2004 and the roll-out of the new PONICS to other formations to be completed by November 2005.

Members' deliberations

5. The Panel was consulted on the Administration's proposed replacement of PONICS and CICS at its meeting on 28 January 2000. The funding proposal for the replacement project was considered and approved by FC at its meeting on 10 March 2000. The deliberations and concerns of Members are summarised below.

Criminal intelligence operations

6. In response to the enquiry as to how the intelligence analysis was conducted by the two new systems, the Administration advised that they were able to process Chinese text and capture graphical data such as maps which were very useful for Police operations. Specifically, searches could be conducted in Chinese mixed with English. Data collected would be analysed by the two systems and graded according to their intelligence value. With the analysed results, the Police would be able to identify the time and location where most crimes occurred, the weapon used and the premises involved. The Police could then mobilise police officers to combat such crimes. Officers of the Crime Prevention Bureau could also provide suggestions to premises which were more prone to be associated with crimes, such as banks, on measures to strengthen security.

7. Some Members were concerned about a lack of transparency of the criminal intelligence operations of the Police. Specifically, some Members expressed concern as to whether the two new systems, with their enhanced capacities, would enable the Police to collect and analyse non-criminal intelligence, such as information on political activists. The Administration advised that the planned increase in the capacity of the two systems was for the purpose of storing or processing a greater number of criminal records and intelligence. While data storage could be increased by two-fold upon the commissioning of the new systems, the processing capacity was still limited as they were relatively small in scale.

8.   The Administration further advised that due to the long response time of the old systems, the more complex searches required in investigating serious crimes could not be efficiently performed. For instance, the new CICS could enable the Police to adopt an intelligence-led operation mode under which district commanders could deploy manpower resources according to the distribution of crimes. Furthermore, it could facilitate the formulation of long-term crime-fighting strategies by performing data analysis so as to provide a quick overview of complicated crimes such as computer crimes, and any redistribution of crimes as a result of population movements. The Administration assured Members that the maintenance of information in the two systems was governed by the laws, and the Police would not indiscriminately keep records on individuals unless they had been convicted of criminal offences in the courts of Hong Kong.

9.   Members also expressed concern about the reliability of the analyses produced by the two new systems. Given that the data stored in CICS would be exempted from the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap. 486), some Members were concerned that a person could not find out the data on him being held by the Police and hence would not be able to correct any inaccurate details. The Administration explained that criminal intelligence is provided by users from various bureaux and units of Crime Wing of Police Headquarters and from regional and district intelligence units. The types of data maintained by CICS included records of criminal cases containing details on the time, location, victims, if any, and persons arrested. Information would also be captured from various open sources such as newspapers. However, newspapers were only one of the many open sources of information for CICS, and would not be used as intelligence until classification, reliability assessment and analysis had been conducted by intelligence officers. The Administration stressed that Police investigation formations receiving such intelligence would be advised of the reliability of such intelligence. While no analysis would be 100% reliable, the analysed information maintained by the two systems could enable the Police to better utilise its resources in combating crimes. Members were assured that CICS was a key mission-critical system of the Police which would only keep carefully screened intelligence on individuals believed to be involved in criminal activities.

Access to the systems

10.   Another area of concern of Members was the access to the two systems. The Administration advised that access to CICS would be restricted and Police formations not responsible for criminal intelligence work could not access the system. Similarly, access to PONICS would be restricted although it was used by other law enforcement agencies. The new PONCIS was available to the Judiciary only in so far that the processing of arrest documents, such as

fingerprint reports and conviction summary reports, would be automated.

Relevant papers

11.   A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
31 March 2015

Relevant papers on the Police Operational Nominal Index Computer System and Criminal Intelligence Computer System

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Security	28.1.2000 (Item VI)	Agenda Minutes
Finance Committee	10.3.2000 (Item No. 5)	Agenda Minutes

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