The Audit Commission ("Audit") conducted a review to examine the Judiciary Administration's work in implementing projects under an Information Technology Strategy Plan ("ITSP").

2.   The Judiciary, headed by the Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal, is responsible for the administration of justice in Hong Kong.   It hears all criminal cases and civil disputes.   The Judiciary Administration is headed by the Judiciary Administrator, who assists the Chief Justice in the overall administration of the Judiciary.   It provides support to the courts in the administration of justice and their operations.   The Judiciary uses information technology extensively to support its operations and services to the public.   In 2011 and 2012, the Judiciary conducted an Information System Strategy Study which formulated ITSP on the application of information technology in support of its operations for the coming ten years and beyond.

3.   In May 2013, the Judiciary obtained the Legislative Council Finance Committee ("FC")'s funding approval of $682.4 million for the implementation of ITSP Phase 1, which mainly included implementing an integrated court case management system ("iCMS") at different court levels by two stages, with Stage 1 scheduled to be completed by June 2016 and Stage 2 by December 2019.   Timely implementation of ITSP would bring about improvement in access to justice, workflow automation, operational efficiency, and improve services to court users and the community.

4.   The Committee noted the following findings from the Director of Audit's Report:

Progress in project implementation and problems encountered

-       as of June 2019, there had been slippages (ranging from 6 to 57 months) in all four activities of ITSP Phase 1, with the overall target completion date deferred by 33 months from December 2019 to September 2022.   The following key issues were encountered during project implementation:

(a)   significant shortage of contract Analysts/Programmers and considerable contract staff turnover rates (e.g. 24.2% in 2018-2019);

(b)   inadequate planning and over-optimistic work schedule involving the Government Logistics Department and the Department of Justice in tendering work resulted in a 13-month delay in the award of the tender;

(c)   significant number of change requests (i.e. about 1 400 as of December 2017) raised during user acceptance tests for the development of Stage 1 iCMS resulting in a delay of about two years; and

(d)   unresolved issues since 2016 between the Transport Department and the Hong Kong Police Force on the setting up of interface with iCMS at the Summons Courts of the Magistrates' Courts;

Project governance

-    revisions to governance structure not properly endorsed by the ITSP Steering Committee.[1] No record was available showing that the grouping of the three project steering committees and their respective project assurance teams under ITSP Delivery and Assurance Team[2] had been endorsed by the Committee on Information Technology;

-    of the 65 monthly highlight reports, 46 (71%) were not timely submitted to the ITSP Steering Committee. In particular, 17 monthly highlight reports for February 2018 to June 2019 were only submitted in one go in August 2019;

-    reporting of over-optimistic project progress and omission of project issues and change requests in monthly highlight reports might mislead the ITSP Steering Committee or ITSP Delivery and Assurance Team;

-    target ITSP completion date was not updated in the annual progress report submitted to FC in October 2018. The failure to update the completion date in the annual progress report could possibly be due to the delays in reporting the revised completion dates in the monthly

---

[1]   The ITSP Steering Committee is the dedicated administrative committee set up to oversee the detailed implementation of ITSP and ensure that ITSP aligns with the Judiciary's long-term strategy. It was chaired by the Judiciary Administrator and comprised the Government Chief Information Officer and four other members.

[2]   The ITSP Delivery and Assurance Team provides steer and oversees the progress and quality assurance areas of key delivery work under ITSP.

progress reports by the Judiciary Administration to the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer ("OGCIO");

- inadequacies, including omissions and delays in reporting revised/actual completion dates, approval for changes not included in progress reports, analysis on project slippage not documented, and inaccurate completion dates reported, were found in preparing progress reports submitted to OGCIO;

Other related issues

- means of disseminating information about schedules of court hearings on the Judiciary's Website (e.g. e-hearing date enquiry services) were less user-friendly than similar websites in other jurisdictions;

- limited search functions were provided, i.e. search parameters to be used in a conjunctive manner, date range for search by date of judgment, and options for sorting the list of judgments, at the Legal Reference System on the Judiciary's Website;

- according to a review conducted by the Judiciary Administration in 2016, about 47% of audio-visual presentation systems had been installed for over 10 years with outdated/obsolete devices. The outdated/obsolete audio-visual presentation systems did not support signals inputted from notebook computers or portable equipment brought in by court users and their display resolution was far behind the current audio-visual technology; and

- the utilization of electronic bundles in Portable Document Format in the High Court and the District Court was very low from 2011 to 2018. Wider use of electronic bundles at all levels of courts should be encouraged for improving operational efficiency and achieving environmental friendliness in the long run.

5.   The Committee did not hold any public hearing on this subject.   Instead, it asked for written responses regarding progress in project implementation, project governance and other related issues.   The replies from **Judiciary Administrator** are in *Appendix 38*.

6.   The Committee wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various recommendations made by Audit.