

**For discussion
on 19 January 2000**

EC(1999-2000)34

ITEM FOR ESTABLISHMENT SUBCOMMITTEE OF FINANCE COMMITTEE

HEAD 94 - LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT Subhead 001 Salaries

Members are invited to recommend to Finance Committee the creation of the following supernumerary post in the Policy and Administration Division of the Legal Aid Department for a period of 15 months from 1 April 2000 to 30 June 2001 -

1 Assistant Principal Legal Aid Counsel
(DL 1) (\$98,250 - \$104,250)

PROBLEM

The Legal Aid Department (LAD) needs a dedicated officer at the directorate level to plan and co-ordinate the implementation of an Information System Strategy (ISS).

PROPOSAL

2. The Director of Legal Aid (DLA) proposes to create a supernumerary post of Assistant Principal Legal Aid Counsel (APLAC) (DL1) in the Policy and Administration Division for a period of 15 months from 1 April 2000 to 30 June 2001 to oversee the implementation of the ISS.

/JUSTIFICATION

JUSTIFICATION

Implementation of ISS

3. LAD is currently implementing an ISS to replace its outdated and fragmented computer systems with an integrated information system comprising a case management system, cost and resource management systems and infrastructure applications. The new system will significantly improve the Department's service and efficiency in processing legal aid applications, managing cases and resources, information generation and communication. We summarise at Encl. 1 Enclosure 1 the major benefits of the new system. In addition, the new system will bring about a substantial annual net saving of \$19,014,000 mainly in staff costs from 2002-03 onwards.

4. The schedule for implementation of the ISS is very tight. We shall invite tenders for delivery of the new integrated system in January 2000 and award the contract in April 2000. We expect that live run in the first phase of the integrated system will take place in November 2000 and the whole system will be in place by June 2001. Having regard to the magnitude and complexity of the ISS and the tight schedule for implementation, we consider that there is a functional need for a dedicated officer to be appointed in LAD as Project Director (PD) to oversee the implementation of the project during the core period from April 2000 to June 2001.

The Project Director

5. The PD will have the overall responsibility to supervise and monitor the progress of the ISS, exercise control over expenditure, and to ensure that the new system will meet departmental needs and be completed on time and within budget. He will also have the specific responsibilities of -

- (a) co-ordinating the functional requirements of various Sections and Divisions in the Department in relation to data capture, screen display, and reports to be generated;
- (b) identifying and co-ordinating between Sections and Divisions business re-engineering processes in application assessment, case monitoring and payment in order to maximise advantage of the system;
- (c) liaising with other Government departments on information interchange and communication;

/(d)

- (d) developing departmental policy on data capture, storage, security and destruction and right of access to data; and
- (e) supervising the performance of the contractor in the development, testing and operation of the new system.

6. To accomplish these tasks, the PD should be a legal professional who is conversant with the operation and information needs of the LAD so as to provide overall leadership, guidance, supervision and, in particular, effective co-ordination between the contractor and staff of various Sections and Divisions in the Department. He should also have sufficient knowledge and experience to develop departmental data policies and to make prompt and sound decisions independently in dealing with the contractor. In addition, the PD has to liaise and work in collaboration with directorate and senior staff in user Sections and Divisions with a view to identifying clearly their information technology needs to meet their operational objectives. He will also advise on how the business processes of Sections and Divisions could be re-engineered to improve service delivery and has to lead the various business re-engineering processes. Given the scale of the project, the speciality of the work involved and the level of responsibilities to be undertaken by the incumbent, DLA considers that the PD post should be pitched at the APLAC (DL1) level so as to ensure timely delivery of the project within budget and according to specification.

Need for a Supernumerary APLAC Post

7. DLA has reviewed the directorate establishment of LAD to ascertain if the work of the PD could be absorbed within the existing staff complement. At present, there are a total of seven permanent APLAC posts in LAD. They each take charge of a functional section and are responsible for the management of their respective sections including staff training and supervision. As these section heads already carry a very heavy caseload and having regard to the substantial input and the level of responsibilities required of the PD, DLA finds it not practicable for the duties of the PD to be absorbed by the existing APLACs. Moreover, LAD is committed to introducing new performance pledges on processing time and payments to aided persons and lawyers, as well as new measures to improve the monitoring of assigned-out cases. In the circumstances, DLA concludes that the responsibility of the PD cannot be absorbed within his existing establishment without affecting the normal operation of LAD and the implementation of new performance pledges.

8. DLA has also considered the possibility of appointing an officer at a lower level [that is, Senior Legal Aid Counsel (MPS 45 - 49)] as the PD. Given the scale and complexity of the project as well as the importance and the

/responsibilities

responsibilities of the PD, DLA is of the view that an officer at the lower level would not have the sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge and experience to independently handle the duties involved. In this respect, he points out that any delay in implementation of the ISS would procrastinate the realisation of the expected benefits, and may also disrupt the financial and resource planning of LAD. He therefore considers it essential to have an additional APLAC to oversee the project and proposes that a supernumerary APLAC post be created for 15 months from April 2000 for the purpose. Incumbent of the post will be supported by a Senior Law Clerk II (MPS 27 - 33) to be redeployed internally within LAD. We set out the job description of the proposed PD post and the proposed organisation chart of LAD at Enclosures 2 and 3 respectively.

Encl. 2&3

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9. The additional notional annual salary cost of this proposal at MID-POINT is -

| | \$ | No. of Post |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Proposed supernumerary post | 1,213,200 | 1 |

The additional full annual average staff costs of the proposal, including salaries and staff on-cost is \$2,135,000. Subject to Members’ approval of the proposal, we shall include the necessary provision in the 2000-01 draft Estimates.

10. This proposal has no direct consequence on the non-directorate establishment of LAD.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

11. On 2 July 1999, the Finance Committee (FC) approved (vide FCR(1999-2000)29) a new commitment of \$44,366,000 for implementing an ISS in LAD. At the FC meeting, we informed Members of our manpower plan for implementation of the project, i.e. while most of the additional work arising from the project will be absorbed by LAD within its existing resources, we shall pursue the creation of a supernumerary APLAC post as the PD through the Establishment Subcommittee.

12. We consulted the Legislative Council Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services on the staffing proposal at its meeting on 16 November 1999. Members supported the proposal.

CIVIL SERVICE BUREAU COMMENTS

13. Having regard to the magnitude of the ISS and the tight schedule for its implementation, the Civil Service Bureau supports the creation of the proposed supernumerary directorate post in the Policy and Administration Division. The grading and ranking of the proposed post are considered appropriate having regard to its duties and level of responsibilities.

ADVICE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON DIRECTORATE SALARIES AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

14. As the post is proposed on a supernumerary basis, we will report its creation, if approved, to the Standing Committee on Directorate Salaries and Conditions of Service in accordance with the agreed procedure.

Offices of the Chief Secretary for Administration
and the Financial Secretary
January 2000

Benefits of the Integrated Information System

(a) *Speedier response to enquiries*

Annually LAD handles over 30 000 enquiries on the progress of individual cases. With case information being available on-line, the time taken to respond to complex questions can be reduced from 15 to five minutes. Over 90% of the enquiries could be handled at first call without having to locate the files.

(b) *Speedier processing of application*

LAD received over 30 000 legal aid applications in 1998. The new system which processes applications electronically will shorten the time taken for means testing. The new system will provide automatic search of records and connected cases and will eliminate the time and effort required for locating files. Together with automatic document generation capability, we expect that the system can effectively reduce the target processing time by two weeks.

(c) *Strengthen case management*

At present, LAD has to manage over 20 000 active cases at any one time. The new system captures major events for each case such as court dates, and keeps track of the progress of cases and the costs incurred. The system will enable LAD to manage these cases more effectively.

(d) *Speedier processing of payment*

The Accounts Section of LAD handles over 200 000 transactions a year. Electronic transmission of instructions can expedite processing of receipt and payment. With an integrated system, re-entry of payment information will no longer be required. Together with automatic calculations and computerised accounting records, we anticipate that the processing time for payment to legal aid clients can be shortened by two weeks.

(e) *Comprehensive management information*

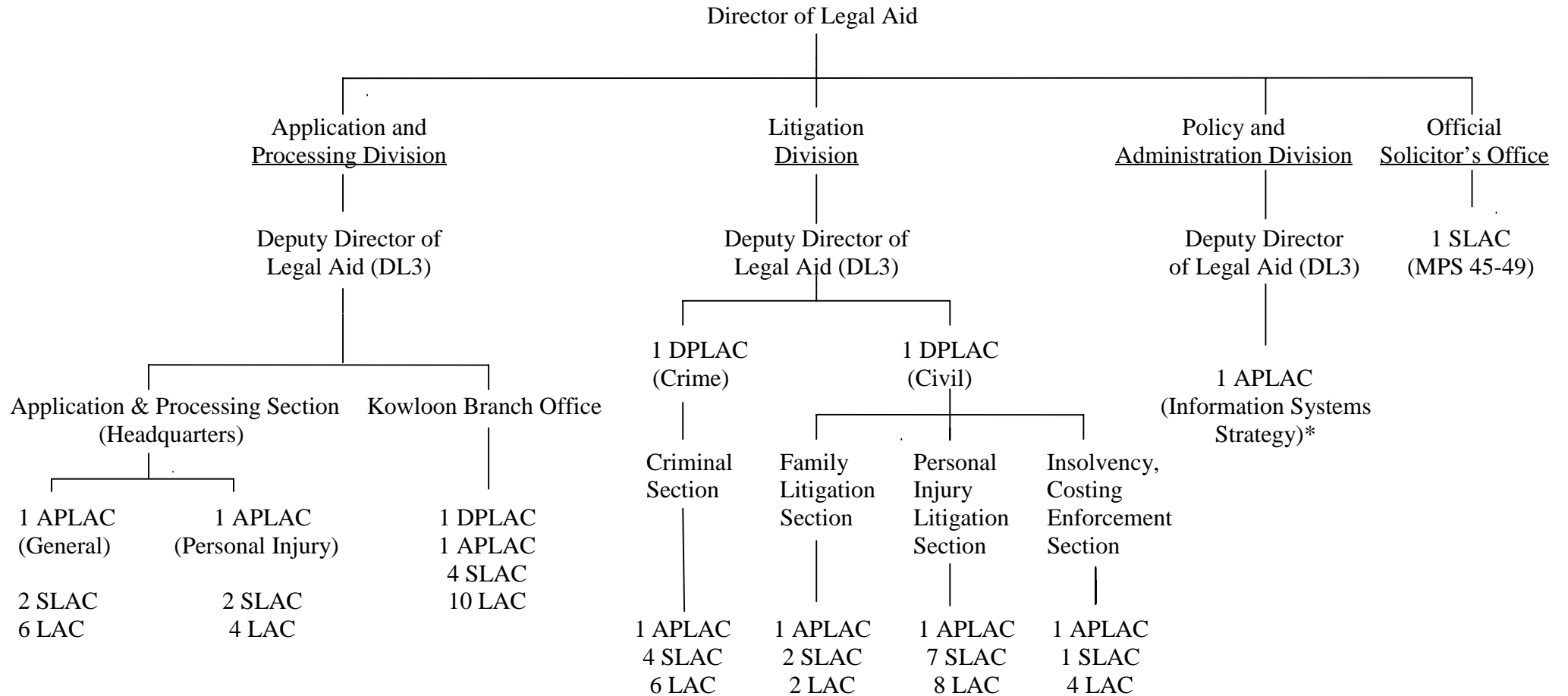
With the availability of detailed information on the work of all sections of LAD, the system can provide comprehensive and timely information to facilitate management, cost control and strategic planning.

**Job Description of Project Director
(APLAC) (DL1)
Legal Aid Department**

Responsible to the Deputy Director of Legal Aid (Policy and Administration) for overseeing the implementation of Information Systems Strategy (ISS). The major duties and responsibilities include -

- (a) to lead an ISS Team in planning, monitoring and co-ordinating the implementation of the ISS in the Department and to control its expenditure;
- (b) to co-ordinate with Divisions/Sections/Units and to consult their Heads on the specific information and functional requirements of the new system including data capture, screen display, reports to be generated and business rules to be set up;
- (c) to identify and manage business process re-engineering actions arising from the ISS implementation including examining possible areas of improvement in workflow, co-ordinating the changes and resolving problems and conflicts arising from such implementation;
- (d) to work closely with the contractors to map out the framework for development, testing and installation of the new system and to supervise their performance;
- (e) to liaise with other government departments on information interchange with their systems including negotiation of inter-departmental agreements for data interchange; and
- (f) to develop departmental policies on data administration (i.e. the standards and controls of data capture, storage, security, retrieval, retention and destruction) and access rights to data.

Proposed Organisation Chart of the LAD



Legend :

- DPLAC - Deputy Principal Legal Aid Counsel
- APLAC - Assistant Principal Legal Aid Counsel
- SLAC - Senior Legal Aid Counsel
- LAC - Legal Aid Counsel

Note : * post under consideration