

For discussion
on 16 November 1999

**Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services of
The Legislative Council**

**Proposed Creation of
One Supernumerary Post
of Assistant Principal Legal Aid Counsel
for Implementation of An Information System Strategy
in the Legal Aid Department**

PURPOSE

This paper seeks Members' support to the proposed creation of a supernumerary post of Assistant Principal Legal Aid Counsel (APLAC) (DL1) in the Legal Aid Department (LAD) for a period of 15 months for implementing an Information System Strategy (ISS).

BACKGROUND

2. On 27 May 1999 Members supported the proposal of the Director of Legal Aid (DLA) to implement an ISS in LAD by replacing its out-dated and fragmented computer systems with an integrated information system. The new system will significantly improve LAD's service and efficiency in legal aid application processing, case management, resources management, information generation and communication. The major benefits of the system are summarised at Annex 1. In addition, the system will bring about a substantial annual net saving of \$19,014,000 from 2002-03 onwards.

3. The schedule for implementation of the system is very tight. The tender for the system has been called in October 1999. Site preparation and procurement of equipment will begin in April 2000. 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. Members have been informed that while most of the additional work arising from the project will be absorbed by existing staff of LAD, a supernumerary post at directorate level will have to be created for 15 months from April 2000 to oversee the project during the core period of implementation.

4. On 2 July 1999 LAD sought and obtained Finance Committee's (FCR(1999-2000) 29) approval for a commitment of \$44,366,000 for the project. The Administration indicated that it would submit the proposal for the creation of the supernumerary APLAC post separately to Establishment Subcommittee with justifications in due course.

JUSTIFICATION

5. The need for a directorate post to oversee the project has been considered very carefully. Taking into account the complexity, the special nature of the work involved and the tight schedule for implementation as described above, there is the functional need for a dedicated officer to be appointed in LAD as Project Director (PD) during the core period. The PD will have the overall responsibility to supervise and monitor its progress, exercise control over expenditure and 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) consolidating the function requirements of the Sections and Divisions 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 exploit the maximum advantage of the system;

- (c) liaising with other Government departments on information interchange and communication;
- (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 installation and testing of the new system.

6. To accomplish these tasks, the PD should be a legal professional who is familiar with the operation and information needs of the LAD. He should have sufficient knowledge and experience to lead the business re-engineering processes and developing data policies; he should also be sufficiently senior to be able to exact co-operation from Sections and Divisions which are headed by directorate staff, to implement changes and to be delegated with authority to make prompt and sound management decisions on behalf of the DLA in dealing with the contractor. Having regard to the speciality of the work and the level of responsibilities involved, it is considered appropriate to pitch it at the APLAC (DL1) level.

7. LAD will be committed to introducing new performance pledges on processing time, payments to aided persons and lawyers, and new measures to improve the monitoring of assigned-out cases during the core period of implementation of the system. DLA has reviewed the overall directorate establishment of the LAD and has concluded that it will not be possible to redeploy an existing APLAC to undertake the additional work without affecting the normal functioning of the Department as well as the implementation of the improvement measures described.

8. The possibility of delegating part of the responsibilities to an officer at a lower level (that is Senior Legal Aid Counsel) has also been explored. Given the importance and the responsibilities of the PD, delegation to a lower level would jeopardise the timely and smooth implementation of the project. Any delay in implementation would procrastinate the realisation of the expected benefits, and may also disrupt the financial and resource planning of LAD. It is therefore proposed that a supernumerary post at APLAC level be created for 15 months from April 2000 for the purpose.

9. The job description of the PD is at Annex 2. He will be answerable to the Policy and Administration Co-ordinator (D3) who heads the Departmental Administration Division of LAD. The organisation of the LAD following the creation of the post is at Annex 3.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

	\$	<u>No. of Post</u>
New permanent post	1,213,000	1

The additional full annual average staff costs of the proposal, including salaries and staff on-cost is \$2,135,232. Subject to Finance Committee's approval of the proposal, the necessary provision will be included in the 2000-01 draft Estimates.

ADVICE SOUGHT

11. Members are requested to support the proposed. The post will be created through the Establishment Sub-committee in the normal way.

Legal Aid Department

11 November 1999

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 Policy and Administration Co-ordinator 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 amounting to \$44 million;
- (b) To co-ordinate with Divisions/Sections/Units and to consult their Heads on the specific information and function 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;
- (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

Director of Legal Aid

