

INFORMATION PAPER FOR LEGCO PANEL ON SECURITY

Feasibility Study on introducing a new Identity Card and its new supporting computer system

INTRODUCTION

This paper informs Members of a feasibility study currently undertaken by the Immigration Department (ImmD) on introducing a new identity card and a new computer system to support the issue of the identity card.

BACKGROUND

Problems with the existing Identity Card

2. The existing identity card (ID Card) was introduced in July 1987, and the computer system supporting the issue of ID Cards [i.e. the Registration of Persons (ROP) system] was installed in 1982. With the passage of time, the design of the current ID Card as well as the ROP system have become aged and outdated. Due to the advance of technology, the existing ID Cards are no longer as secure and forgery-proof as they were ten years ago. The use of counterfeit or unlawfully obtained ID Cards has been detected from time to time. This calls for a detailed study to assess the opportunities in strengthening the security features of the ID Card and replacing the ROP system.

Feasibility study on the new ID Card system

3. Meanwhile, the overall information technology system of the ImmD is becoming obsolete, necessitating a comprehensive review of the Department's information systems strategy. As reported in the 1999 Policy Address, ImmD commissioned a consultancy study in May 1999 to review its computer systems and to formulate a strategy for optimising the use of information technology to meet the operational needs of the Department, such as the use of smart cards storing biometrics identification data and the issue of electronic visas. In the course of the review, the consultant alerted ImmD that the existing ROP system will reach the end of its life expectancy by 2002 and must be replaced.

4. On the recommendation of the consultant, the Director of Immigration (D of Imm) urgently commissioned a separate feasibility study in November 1999 to examine and recommend options for the introduction of a new ID Card and a new ROP system. Because of the tight schedule and the complexity involved, D of Imm, with the support of Secretary for Security, created under delegated authority a supernumerary Deputy Director post for six months to oversee and manage the feasibility study. At the Establishment Subcommittee held on 23 February 2000, Members endorsed the proposal to retain the supernumerary post from 19 April 2000 to 31 December 2000 to continue to steer and monitor the feasibility study, and to assist in making a policy decision on whether and how to proceed with the implementation of the identity card project. The recommendation of the Establishment Subcommittee will be discussed at the meeting of the Finance Committee on 10 March 2000.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

5. Specifically, the objectives of the feasibility study are -
- (a) to identify the most suitable types of technology for producing and personalizing a secure ID Card;
 - (b) to devise a computer solution for processing applications for ID Card and related services;
 - (c) to design an efficient record management system and to recommend the strategy for converting the existing records to the new system;
 - (d) to work out the costs and benefits of possible options;
 - (e) to identify the opportunities for including other value-added applications in the new ID Card;
 - (f) to formulate the plan for commissioning the new computer system; and
 - (g) to recommend the approach for a Region-wide ID Card replacement exercise.

6. For the purpose of the feasibility study, the consultants were asked to make use of their expertise in new technology to identify the most cost-effective means of producing a secure HKSAR identity card and implementing a secure supporting system, and to design a highly automated work model for processing ID card applications in order to deliver an efficient and customer-focused service. Owing to the limited time available for the feasibility study, the consultants should focus primarily on Immigration Department's core businesses and explore how the new identity card could be used to enhance the Department's efficiency, for example, whether it would be feasible to use the smart card and biometrics identification technology to automate passenger clearance at immigration control points. They should also consider if there is any scope to bring additional benefits to the community, for example, whether there is a possibility of automating voter's registration by computerising the addresses of ID Card holders. Should the consultants recommend the smart ID Card option, they should make use of their international experience to identify opportunities for other value-added applications to be built in the card having regard to the practices of other countries. In view of the sensitivity on the storage of electronic data in a smart card, the consultants would need to give technical advice on data security and privacy issues and to propose solutions on how these problems could be resolved.

WAY FORWARD

7. The feasibility study will be completed in May 2000. On completion of the study, the Government will have an idea of the available technologies that can be used for producing a secure ID Card, the technical benefits and constraints for implementing a smart or a non-smart ID Card solution, the capabilities which a smart ID Card may have in meeting ImmD's business strategy and its potentials in other areas, and the costs and benefits of the possible options. This will enable the Government to formulate a policy decision on whether and how to proceed with the implementation of the ID Card project. Members of the Panel and, if necessary, other relevant panels will be consulted before a decision is taken.

Security Bureau
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