**For the meeting on**
**13 November 2000**

<div align="center">

**Legislative Council**
**Panel on Welfare Services**

**Assistance to the Blind or Visually Impaired Persons in**
**Processing and Accessing Information on Computers**

</div>

**Purpose**

This paper updates Members on the assistance rendered to the blind or visually impaired persons in processing and accessing information on computers.

**Background**

2.	At the meeting of the LegCo Welfare Services Panel held on 12 June 2000, Members were briefed on the assistance provided by Government Bureaux and Departments and the NGO Sector to assist and promote the use of computers and information technology by disabled persons in particular, the blind or visually impaired persons.	At the meeting, Members suggested that the Administration should make available computer courses and suitable computer devices for use by the visually impaired.	The Administration should also assist to solve the problem of the visually impaired being unable to access certain sites on the Internet.

**Progress**

*IT Awareness and Computer Courses*

3.	In addition to the various efforts and activities outlined in the

LC Paper No (B(2)2256/99-00(03)), the Administration has since June 2000 taken further action to encourage and facilitate disabled persons to use computers and benefit from information technology.

4.      The Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau (ITBB), Information Technology Services Department (ITSD), Home Affairs Department (HAD) and Social Welfare Department (SWD) in collaboration with several NGOs providing rehabilitation services and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) have recently launched an IT Awareness Programme for the disabled as part of the "IT Hong Kong" Campaign to promote wider use of IT in the community.   The objective of the Programme, which will last for 4 months, is to promote an understanding of computers and information technology amongst disabled persons.   Under the Programme, training courses are being run whereby trainers will learn to develop an understanding of the special needs of different disability groups including the visually impaired, mentally handicapped, physical handicapped, ex-mentally ill and chronically ill. The trainers will also acquire better skills in providing IT training for the disabled groups.   Initially, there will be 30-50 places for trainers and 1,200 places for trainees.   Due to the favorable feedback received so far, consideration is being given to extending this programme.   Our preliminary plan is to provide additional places for another 50 trainers and 1,200 trainees in the coming six months.   As a 'Train the Trainers' approach will be adopted, we envisage that a substantial number of disabled persons will benefit from the Programme.

**IT Facilities Available for People With Disabilities**

5.         Under a project run jointly by ITBB, ITSD and HAD, cyberpoints have been set up in community halls/centres operated by HAD for use by the public including, people with disabilities.   To date, 61 cyberpoints providing over 200 public computers have been set up.   Most of them are accessible to disabled persons.   In addition, computers with power Braille, screen enlarger and voice synthesizer have been installed in 6 NGO run service units for use by the visually impaired.   Our plan is to expand this scheme.

**Towards a 'Barrier-free' Environment on the Internet**

6.         An inter-departmental working group led by Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) has been reviewing the Guidelines for Government Homepages. Enhancements to the current Guidelines will soon be made and promulgated within Government, including revising the part of the guidelines relating to accessibility, taking into account the contribution from the Hong Kong Blind Union. ITSD will adapt that part of the Guidelines and publish them on the Digital 21 web site (www.digital21.gov.hk) for the public's reference before the end of this year.   HAB has also set a target to revamp at least half of all Government websites by the end of 2001 (and the remainder by the end of 2002) to facilitate accessibility by people with disabilities, based on the updated Guidelines.

7.         To promote the industry's support for the revised accessibility guidelines, ITSD will meet (in December 2000) the relevant industry organizations, including Internet service providers and web site designers, to solicit their views and support.   ITSD will also organize a seminar for

Internet service providers and web site designers on the best practices for web site design in early 2001. The Administration's aim is to promote these best practices to the industry and to encourage their adoption of these practices.

8.　　　　The Administration is also in discussion with the Equal Opportunities Commission on how to revise the Code of Practice for Recognized Certification Authorities under the Electronic Transactions Ordinance. The purpose is to ensure that recognized certification authorities follow international standards in catering for the special needs of people with disabilities in using electronic authentication services. We will consult the Advisory Committee on the Code of Practice for Recognized Certification Authorities before firming up the proposals.

**Way Forward**

9.　　　　The Administration will continue to closely monitor the special needs of people with disabilities in order to facilitate their access to computers and their enhancement of IT skills. Through public education and inter-sectoral collaboration, we aim to promote further awareness and understanding of IT accessibility by the disabled and encourage IT service providers to incorporate the special needs of the disabled into their overall development strategies.

Health and Welfare Bureau
November 2000