For information on
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Panel on Security of the Legislative Council

Latest Progress on the Electronic Exit-Entry Permit for Travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao (e-EEP)

Introduction

The Mainland authorities will soon introduce a new card-type e-EEP. This paper briefs Members on the latest progress of the complementary arrangements undertaken by the Immigration Department ("ImmD").

Background

2.   Mainland residents holding Exit-Entry Permit for Travelling to and from Hong Kong ("EEP") may enter Hong Kong after examination by immigration officers at counters at the control points. Since January 2012, eligible frequent visitors from the Mainland aged 18 or above may use the Automated Passenger Clearance System ("e-Channels") of ImmD for clearance upon prior successful enrolment[1] at enrolment offices set up at various control points. By October 2013, 629,000 persons have enrolled to use e-Channels. Nearly 21 million movements have been recorded, representing 20.5% of the total EEP visitor traffic at the control points in Lo Wu, Lok Ma Chau Spur Line, Shenzhen Bay, China Ferry Terminal, Macau Ferry Terminal, Airport, Kai Tak Cruise Terminal and Man Kam To.

3.   To enhance immigration control and to facilitate Mainland residents' immigration clearance, the Mainland authorities decided in 2010 to introduce a new e-EEP. We briefed this Panel on the matter on 1 June 2010 and sought the Finance Committee's funding approval on 2 July 2010 to extend the e-Channel services to e-EEP holders and to upgrade ImmD's computer systems and install immigration clearance facilities to complement this

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[1]   To enroll, a visitor must: (i) be a holder of a valid EEP with valid one-year multiple exit endorsement; (ii) have visited Hong Kong 3 times or more within the last 12 months immediately before the date of enrolment; and (iii) have no adverse record in Hong Kong.

measure. The Mainland authorities plan to roll out the e-EEP initiative soon, with Guangdong Province as pilot. Depending on the outcome of the pilot rollout, the Mainland authorities will extend this arrangement to other provinces by phases. All existing holders of booklet EEP will be eligible to apply for the new e-EEP in the future. It is anticipated that booklet EEPs will be gradually phased out and replaced by e-EEP by end 2018.

Immigration Clearance Arrangements for Holders of e-EEP

4.   In April 2013, the Mainland authorities agreed to give ImmD the right, for the purpose of processing e-Channel clearance, to read the fingerprint templates of holders aged above 16 that are provided to the Mainland authorities and stored in the computer chip of the e-EEP, on condition that these holders give prior written consent to the Mainland authorities to allow ImmD to read the fingerprints. These holders will be able to use e-Channels for immigration clearance without enrolment. Other e-EEP holders[2] will still use traditional immigration counters for clearance in future.

5.   As a measure to ensure effective immigration control, all future e-EEP holders who have given consent to the Mainland authorities and wish to use e-Channels for clearance will be required to present themselves to ImmD's traditional immigration counters for a one-time face-to-face clearance on their first visit to Hong Kong before they can use e-Channels on subsequent visits. ImmD will authenticate the e-EEPs presented and ensure that the e-EEP holders meet normal immigration requirements, including holding a valid e-EEP, having no likelihood of becoming a burden to Hong Kong, being a bona fide visitor, and whether they have adverse records. This one-time face-to-face clearance will ensure that only genuine visitors who have gone through thorough examination and have been given permission to land are allowed to use e-Channels.

6.   When an e-EEP holder uses an e-Channel for clearance, the genuineness of the e-EEP card will be authenticated through designated security servers, and the identity of the holder will be verified. If the system cannot verify the holder's fingerprint or detects any other problems, such as the presence of adverse record registered after the one-time face-to-face clearance, the holder will not be able to pass through the e-Channel and ImmD officers will examine the holder manually.

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2   For example, those who do not give consent for ImmD to access their fingerprint templates, or are under 16 years old.

7.	ImmD will take appropriate measures, including the use of signage and broadcast messages and the deployment of regulators, to ensure that on their first arrival to Hong Kong, e-EEP holders are directed to traditional counters without affecting the passenger flow at control points.	ImmD will also roll out publicity measures at various locations in Hong Kong and the Mainland in liaison with the Mainland authorities.

8.	With the introduction of e-EEP, service demand at control point enrolment offices will gradually decrease with the gradual phasing out of booklet EEPs.	Officers currently deployed to enrolment offices may be redeployed to regulate e-EEP holder traffic going through e-Channels, allowing for more flexible staff allocation to handle peak traffic, etc. Extending the service of e-Channels to e-EEP holders will shorten clearance time as compared to clearance at traditional counters.	This helps alleviate the stringent manpower in coping with growing number of Mainland visitors.

9.	ImmD estimates that the total movement of Mainland visitors using e-Channels will increase to about 23.5 million by 2014, which may rise further.	ImmD will procure an additional 179 multi-purpose e-Channels between 2014 and 2016 to cater for the increase in visitors.	ImmD will closely monitor passenger growth and travel patterns with a view to maintaining effective immigration control and ensuring immigration clearance is conducted in an orderly fashion.

Advice Sought

10.	Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

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