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Legislative Council

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Panel on Security

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 6 January 2015**

Operation of control points

Purpose

This paper summarises past discussions of the Panel on Security ("the Panel") on the operation of immigration control points in relation to e-Channels and electronic Exit-Entry Permit for Mainland residents travelling to and from Hong Kong and Macao ("electronic EEP").

Background

e-Channels

2.   At present, there are three different types of e-Channels, namely e-Channels, express e-Channels and multi-purpose e-Channels.

3.   Since December 2004, the Immigration Department ("ImmD") has introduced e-Channels, an automated passenger clearance system, for Hong Kong residents.   The e-Channel system deploys fingerprint verification technology for authentication of a person's identity.   A Hong Kong resident using e-Channel service has to insert his Hong Kong smart identity card into a card reader.   The system would verify the fingerprint captured by the scanner on the spot against the fingerprint template stored in the chip of the smart identity card.   ImmD introduced express e-Channels in March 2009 to provide expedited e-Channel service to Hong Kong residents aged 18 or above upon voluntary enrolment.   The clearance time for express e-Channels is about eight seconds, which is four seconds faster than that of e-Channels.   Eligible visitors may, after successful registration, undergo automated immigration clearance

through multipurpose e-Channels.   Multi-purpose e-Channels may also serve as express e-Channels for Hong Kong residents.

Electronic EEP

4.   Mainland residents holding 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 e-Channels for clearance upon prior successful enrolment at enrolment offices set up at various control points.   To facilitate Mainland residents' immigration clearance, the Mainland authorities decided in 2010 to introduce a new electronic EEP to enhance immigration control.   All existing holders of booklet EEP will be eligible to apply for the new electronic EEP.   It is anticipated that booklet EEPs will gradually be phased out and replaced by electronic EEPs by the end of 2018.   The Administration will extend e-Channel service to electronic EEP holders.

Deliberations of the Panel

Security of e-Channels and contingency measures during breakdown of the e-Channel system

5.   Members noted that e-Channels deployed fingerprint verification technology for authentication of a person's identity.   Concern was raised as to whether there would be measures against the use of false fingers or artificial fingerprints at e-Channels.   According to the Administration, a series of measures had been adopted to combat the problem, including the use of optical scanners, which deployed multi-spectral technology involving detection of the textural and optical characteristics of the outer and inner skin of a finger, in fingerprint authentication.

6.   Members noted with concern that some people could not use their smart identity cards for automated immigration clearance through e-Channels due to fingerprint recognition problem.   Information was sought on the measures to reduce failure in fingerprint verification.

7.   According to the Administration, some people with blurred fingerprints might have difficulty in using e-Channels.   This was because the fingerprint scanner used on the spot might not be able to capture a good fingerprint image. In some circumstances, for example, when the weather was dry, the fingerprint identification problem was more distinct.   However, statistics showed that less than 1% of smart identity card holders had such a problem.

8. Concern was raised on the contingency measures to be adopted in the event of a breakdown of the e-Channel system. Members noted that in the event of a breakdown of the e-Channel system, arrangement would be made for visitors to undergo clearance at tradition immigration counters. There was also a back-up system for the computer terminals at conventional immigration counters.

9. Members were advised that in view of the global development of electronic document and self-service immigration clearance as well as the inclusion of an electronic or digital photo in the electronic travel document as required by various immigration authorities in other countries or regions, the adoption of a second biometrics was being studied. Members were also informed that facial recognition technology had been well developed over the years and its accuracy was comparable to that of fingerprint verification. The application of facial recognition technology would strengthen the security of the e-Channel system, given the two levels of security.

Immigration clearance arrangements relating to electronic EEPs

10. Concern was raised over the possible impact of the Administration's proposed arrangements on immigration control relating to electronic EEPs on Hong Kong residents using e-Channels. Information was sought on whether different e-Channels were designated for Hong Kong residents and Mainland visitors at immigration control points. According to the Administration, different e-Channels were designated for Hong Kong residents and visitors. Where necessary, e-Channels for visitors could also be designated as e-Channels for Hong Kong residents.

11. Members were advised that ImmD would procure additional multi-purpose e-Channels to cater for the increase in visitors arising from the extension of e-Channel service to electronic EEP holders. Members also noted that immigration manpower and immigration counters were flexibly deployed to cope with changes in visitor volume at different hours of a day. The immigration clearance time for a visitor at a conventional immigration counter was about 75 seconds, while that at an e-Channel was about 20 seconds. With the increase in the number of visitors using e-Channels, more frontline immigration staff would be relieved from traditional immigration counters for monitoring work at e-Channels.

12. Concern was raised as to how the frontline immigration staff originally deployed at traditional counters and redeployed for monitoring visitors at e-Channels could exercise effective immigration control.

13.   According to the Administration, the monitoring of visitors was not confined to the time when a visitor was at a traditional immigration counter or e-Channel, but throughout the time when the visitor was inside a control point. With the addition of multi-purpose e-Channels, more frontline immigration staff could be deployed for monitoring of visitors.   It was the international trend to focus on visitors with a high risk and suspicious visitors.

Relevant papers

14.   A list of the relevant papers available on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
2 January 2015

Relevant papers on
operation of control points

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Legislative Council	11.11.2009	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 7)
Legislative Council	11.5.2011	Motion on "Improving ancillary facilities at various crossings for the convenience of residents travelling between Guangdong and Hong Kong"
Panel on Security	7.11.2011 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	1.2.2012	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 17)
Panel on Security	13.3.2012 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	4.7.2012	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 15)
Panel on Security	4.12.2012 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	20.11.2013	Official Record of Proceedings (Question 2)
Panel on Security	3.12.2013 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes

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