

For information

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

Reducing the Use of Paper in the Judiciary

PURPOSE

This paper informs Members of the Judiciary's position, efforts and plans on reducing the use of paper in the Judiciary.

BACKGROUND

2. The Judiciary has been committed to ensuring that its operations are conducted in an environmentally responsible manner. Since 1999, the Judiciary has been publishing its annual Environmental Report to give an account of the policies and initiatives implemented, as endorsed by the Judiciary Administrator, in respect of various environmental friendly measures in relation to the operation of the Judiciary. The Judiciary will continue to explore new and improved measures in this regard.

CURRENT SITUATION

3. The Judiciary has been contributing to the protection of the environment and minimizing waste through a number of measures, and reducing the use of paper has always been one of its major concerns. Throughout the years, different means have been adopted to achieve the Judiciary's green initiatives. Administrative measures aiming at minimizing the consumption of paper include the following –

- (a) introducing e-services and e-publications as appropriate;
- (b) providing internet and intranet facilities for members of the Judiciary;

- (c) disseminating information through intranet;
- (d) extending the use of recycled paper;
- (e) photocopying limited to the absolute necessary;
- (f) making full use of the blank side of used paper;
- (g) reusing envelopes and loose minute jackets;
- (h) using e-invitations for various ceremonies; and
- (i) using lighter papers for court related documents.

4. As far as court operations are concerned, currently, court users and parties to a litigation are required to make applications/submissions or submit case bundles in paper form. Hence, paper is predominantly being used in court operations. That said, the Judiciary has been actively exploring alternative means to using paper, such as introducing the use of e-bundles, pilot scheme on e-submissions in the District Court¹, and providing iPads for use by Judges and Judicial Officers.

INITIATIVES IN THE LONGER TERM

5. The Judiciary has also been implementing the Information Technology Strategy Plan (“ITSP”), which aims to provide more effective and efficient services to all its stakeholders through the greater application of information technology (“IT”) in its operation in the longer term. In handling documents for use in the litigation process, electronic services of various types will be introduced as appropriate as an additional option to the existing channels on a voluntary basis. While court users can choose to continue to interact with the Judiciary by conventional means, the Judiciary will encourage legal representatives and court users to transact court businesses through e-means when they are available.

¹ The pilot scheme covers e-submission of skeleton arguments, opening submissions, closing submissions and list of authorities.

6. The ITSP is being implemented across all levels of courts on an incremental basis in two key phases². At present, the development of new IT system in Phase I, stage 1 (i.e. the District Court and the Summons Courts of the Magistrates' Courts) is at an advanced stage. The Judiciary will carry out pilot runs with the stakeholders when ready.

7. Besides, the Judiciary is preparing the necessary legislative amendments to enable the electronic handling of court documents. The Judiciary will consult the stakeholders and the Legislative Council when ready.

8. In the longer run and subject to the take-up rates of the voluntary electronic processes, the implementation of the ITSP should help reduce the use of paper in the Judiciary and by the court users.

WAY FORWARD

9. The Judiciary will continue its effort in reducing the use of paper generally and supporting the use of electronic records in court proceedings to move towards a "less paper" environment.

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² The development of an Integrated Court Case Management System, being one of the core initiatives under the ITSP, would eventually be implemented in all courts and tribunals. The implementation of the ITSP is divided into the following phases and stages:

- (a) Phase I, stage 1 : covering the District Court and the Summons Courts of the Magistrates' Courts;
- (b) Phase I, stage 2 : covering the Court of Final Appeal, the High Court, Non-Summons Courts of the Magistrates' Courts, the Small Claims Tribunal and the Probate Registry; and
- (c) Phase II : covering all the remaining courts and tribunals.