

For information on
1 June 2021

Legislative Council Panel on Security

Enhancement of services by the Immigration Department through better use of digital technology in the epidemic

Purpose

This paper aims to brief the Legislative Council Panel on Security on the major initiatives of the Immigration Department (ImmD) in enhancing its services for the convenience of the public through wider use of digital technology and in reducing non-essential social contact in support of the Government's response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic.

Background

2. ImmD has along been striving for service enhancement. Making greater use of information technology has become a global trend. This not only improves the standard and efficiency of service delivery to the public through productivity enhancement, but also helps the organisation to cope with the increasing workload without increasing resources. ImmD provides a wide range of services that are closely related to the daily lives of members of the public. As one of the government departments which has frequent contact with members of the public, ImmD is committed to making extensive use of information technology in order to further enhance its business performance and to serve the public with excellence.

3. Social distancing and minimising physical contact have become even more important amid the COVID-19 epidemic. In support of the Government's public health policy and to address public concerns about anti-epidemic measures, ImmD proactively deployed existing resources in the past year to incorporate "anti-epidemic elements" in various services through the use of digital technology. Such services include:

- (a) Electronic and contactless payment;
- (b) "Smart Renewal" Service for foreign domestic helpers (FDHs);

- (c) Electronic visa (e-Visa); and
- (d) Contactless self-service immigration clearance service (Contactless e-Channel).

Electronic and contactless payment

4. Since the outbreak of the epidemic, public awareness of social distancing and personal hygiene has raised substantially. To cope with the “new normal” under the epidemic, government departments have been encouraged to keep pace with the times by making the best use of digital technology.

5. ImmD has been committed to promoting online services. Eleven types of online services have been launched on ImmD’s website, including application for visas for FDHs, identity cards, travel documents, births and deaths registration, and marriage registration¹. Members of the public are also encouraged to complete their application and payment processes in one-go on ImmD’s electronic platform. For instance, members of the public can pay the application fee for an HKSAR Passport by PPS or credit card through ImmD’s website or mobile app².

6. Since May 2019, ImmD has included the Octopus as an electronic payment means at its service counters and self-service kiosks for applications for Hong Kong identity cards and travel documents. In addition, to further promote the use of contactless electronic payment, ImmD commenced development of system supporting Faster Payment System (FPS) payment in mid-2020. With the introduction of FPS at all Registration of Persons Offices and Immigration Branch Offices in December 2020, ImmD has become one of the first seven government departments accepting payment by FPS. By scanning the FPS QR code with the mobile app of banks or e-wallet operators, members of the public can pay application fees for identity cards and travel documents at service counters and self-service kiosks in a contactless manner. The payment process is simple, convenient and fast. From January to April 2021, 78 000 electronic and contactless payment transactions made on ImmD’s electronic platform, service counters and self-service kiosks were processed,

¹ Other online services of the ImmD include visas for non-permanent residents and visitors, right of abode, pre-arrival registration, registration of outbound travel information, reporting of immigration offences, and access to information of ImmD. For details, please visit: <https://www.immd.gov.hk/eng/menu/online-services.html>.

² For HKSAR Passport applications submitted in person, the application fee can be paid by EPS, crossed cheque, cash, Octopus (since May 2019) or FPS (since December 2020). For applications submitted by post or drop-in box, a crossed cheque should be enclosed.

accounting for about 50% of the total number of transactions.

7. ImmD will continue to promote electronic and contactless payment. Starting from the third quarter of this year, ImmD will gradually replace the existing ageing “Application and Investigation Easy System” with the “Next Generation Application and Investigation Easy Systems” (namely “Visa Automation System”; “Assistance to Hong Kong Residents, Births, Deaths and Marriage, Right of Abode Decision Support System”; and “Enforcement Case Processing System”). The new systems allow members of the public to pay fees relating to births, deaths and marriage registration, visa or entry permit applications, and Chinese nationality applications at Immigration Offices by Octopus or FPS. By then, all the payment services of ImmD (including online services, mobile app, service counters and self-service kiosks) will support electronic and contactless payment, further facilitating ImmD’s service users (please refer to the Annex for details). ImmD will continue to consider addition of other electronic and contactless payment means.

“Smart Renewal” Service for FDHs

8. In 2020, ImmD received over 300 000 applications for employment visas for FDHs, of which over 60% were for contract renewal with the same employer. For these applications for contract renewal, upon approval of their applications, persons who submit the applications are normally required to pay the visa fee and collect the visa in person or through an authorised representative at an office of ImmD.

9. For the convenience of the persons applying for visas for FDHs, ImmD introduced the “Smart Renewal” service on 5 March 2021. The new service enables persons who submit online applications for visas for further employment of FDHs to pay the visa fee through electronic and contactless means, upon approval of their applications, and collect the visas by registered mail so as to spare the need for them to go through the formalities at an office of ImmD, which is both convenient and time-saving. This can also reduce travelling and avoid crowd gathering.

10. As at the end of April 2021, more than 6 800 applications for visas for further employment of FDHs paid the visa fee and collected the visa labels through the “Smart Renewal” service. Since the launch of the “Smart Renewal” service, the online applications for visas for further employment of FDHs submitted has increased more than doubled from 15% before the launch of the service to 33% (as at the end of April 2021),

reflecting the positive public response to the new service. ImmD is planning to extend the scope of the “Smart Renewal” service to applications for visas for further employment of FDHs submitted by other means (i.e. by post or drop-in box) in mid-2021 to further facilitate those who apply for visas for further employment of FDHs and to support the government’s social distancing measures. In the long run, ImmD plans to introduce the e-Visa to spare the need for persons applying for visas for FDHs (including new applications) to attend an office of ImmD for going through the formalities (see paragraphs 11-13 below for details).

e-Visa

11. ImmD plans to refine all visa application processes by the end of this year with a view to further enhancing service efficiency. Among others, ImmD will start issuing e-Visas for applications for entry visas and extension of stay. By then, visa applicants may complete the whole process of submission of applications, payment and collection of visas through online services or ImmD mobile app. The e-Visa service allows applicants to go through the formalities without having to visit offices of ImmD, thereby reducing crowd gathering and protecting public health. As different types of visas are involved, ImmD will implement the arrangement in phases and disseminate the relevant information to the public in a timely manner.

12. The e-Visa service will provide applicants with a new means for collection of visas in replacement of the current visa labels. Upon completion of visa application assessment, ImmD will notify the applicant of the result by email. After entering his/her personal data as a password using the link attached to the email and making payment through e-payment service, the applicant will be able to download the e-Visa (which will be in the PDF file format). The visa holder may instantly print or save the e-Visa on his/her personal mobile device through the link for handy access. This will allow the applicant to obtain an approved visa without leaving home, which is time-saving, convenient and is conducive to reducing contact among people. ImmD will also retain the existing means for submission of applications (i.e. in person, or drop-in box or by post), payment and collection of e-Visa (i.e. in person or by post) for applicants to choose from.

13. Apart from the personal data on the existing visa label, an e-Visa will also contain a QR code for anti-forgery purpose, so that law enforcement officers and airline staff, etc. may scan the QR code through

ImmD mobile app for quick verification of the authenticity of the e-Visa and view the relevant visa information when necessary. The QR code is generated by ImmD's encryption key to prevent law-breakers from forging e-Visas issued by ImmD.

Contactless e-Channel

14. ImmD has all along been actively utilising technology to facilitate immigration clearance for Hong Kong residents and visitors. Following the launch of "Smart Departure" in 2017, visitors holding eligible passports may use the Automated Passenger Clearance System (e-Channel) which employs facial recognition technology to perform self-service departure clearance without prior enrolment. ImmD plans to extend the use of the contactless e-Channels employing facial recognition technology. In addition to the existing traditional counters and e-Channel service, eligible Hong Kong residents may choose to use the contactless e-Channel service to perform self-service immigration clearance under which the current fingerprint verification would be replaced by facial verification. Hong Kong residents are free to choose whether or not to use the contactless e-Channels. Hong Kong residents who choose to use the contactless e-Channels may present their smart identity cards or an encrypted QR code generated from their personal mobile phones to enter the e-Channels. Inside the e-Channels, they may simply look at the camera from the marked location to perform facial verification through the system. During the process, there will be no need to touch shared equipment viz. the fingerprint scanner.

15. Having regard to the raising public health awareness amid the COVID-19 epidemic, contactless e-Channels would enable members of the public to reduce contact with shared equipment during self-service immigration clearance; while providing faster, more convenient and hygienic immigration clearance service. ImmD plans to install contactless e-Channels which employ facial recognition technology at all control points. The contactless e-Channels will commence service in phases from the end of this year. Thereafter, this contactless e-Channel service will gradually be extended to other eligible passengers.

Conclusion

16. This year marks the 60th anniversary of ImmD. For more than half

a century, ImmD has been keeping itself abreast of the times and devoted to enhancing its service quality. Looking ahead to the next six decades, ImmD will continue to strive for excellence and deliver services of the best quality to the Hong Kong community.

17. Members are invited to note the major initiatives mentioned above.

Immigration Department
May 2021

**Immigration Services which Support
Electronic and Contactless Payment**

Service	Date of Implementation of Electronic and Contactless Payment
Travel Documents	
Application for HKSAR Passport	Implemented
Application for HKSAR Document of Identity for Visa Purposes	Implemented
Application for HKSAR Re-entry Permit	Implemented
Application for HKSAR Seaman's Identity Book	Implemented
Identity Cards	
Replacement of Identity Card (lost / destroyed / damaged / defaced / alteration of particulars)	Implemented
Application for Certificate of Registered Particulars	Implemented
Births, Deaths & Marriage Registration	
Application for Search of Birth, Marriage and Death Records and/or a Certified Copy of a Birth, Marriage and Death Entry	Q4 2021
Application for Post-Registration of Birth	Q4 2021
Application for Addition or alteration of Child's name	Q4 2021
Application for Giving Notice of Intended Marriage and Celebration of Marriage	Q4 2021
Application for Certificate of Absence of Marriage Record	Q4 2021

Service	Date of Implementation of Electronic and Contactless Payment
Visas for Foreign Domestic Helpers	
Online Application for Visas for Further Employment of Foreign Domestic Helpers	Implemented
Application for Visas for Further Employment of Foreign Domestic Helpers by Post or Drop-in Box	Mid-2021
Application for Other Visas and Extension	Q4 2021
Visas for Non-permanent Residents or Visitors	
Application for Visas / Entry Permits	Q4 2021
Application for APEC Business Travel Card	Q4 2021
Application for HKSAR Travel Pass	Q4 2021
Chinese Nationality	
Application for Naturalisation as a Chinese National, Restoration and Renunciation of Chinese Nationality	Q3 2021
Application for Declaration of Change of Nationality	Q3 2021
Right of Abode	
Genetic Test Arrangements for Verification of Parentage	Q4 2021
Transfer of Endorsement	Q4 2021
Other Service	
Application for Access to Information	Second half of 2022