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Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting

Meeting on 10 July 2023

**Updated background brief on the work and
latest development of Radio Television Hong Kong**

Purpose

This paper provides updated background information on the work and development of Radio Television Hong Kong (“RTHK”). It also gives a brief account of the major views and concerns expressed by members of the Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting (“the Panel”) in respect of the subject matter since 2021.

Background

2. The Administration commenced its radio broadcasting service in 1928. In 1948, the station became known as Radio Hong Kong, which became a government department in 1954. In 1976, the department was renamed RTHK to reflect its new involvement in television (“TV”) programme production.

3. Under the Charter of RTHK (“the Charter”), please refer to **Appendix 1** for details) promulgated in August 2010, RTHK is designated as the public service broadcaster (“PSB”) in Hong Kong while maintaining its status as a government department. It is the only local broadcaster that provides radio, TV and new media services.

Organizational structure

4. The Director of Broadcasting (“D of B”) is supported by a deputy director. The post of deputy director is taken up by a Staff Grade B Administrative Officer. The deputy director is underpinned by two assistant directors and three controllers, who respectively oversee the radio and corporate programming, TV and corporate businesses, and production services. At the end of March 2022, the department was employing 629 civil servants of various grades. These included about 457 in the departmental grades of Programme Officer, Telecommunications Engineer and Technical Officer, along with some 172 of other common grades and general grades officers. The organization chart of RTHK is at **Appendix 2**.

5. Apart from civil servants, RTHK also engages non-civil service personnel (including staff engaged on Non-Civil Service Contract terms and Post-retirement Service Contract staff), freelance service providers, as well as temporary manpower through the procurement of service contracts to meet its operational needs. According to the Controlling Officer’s Report in the 2023-2024 Estimates, the establishment of RTHK as at 31 March 2023 was 768 posts. The revised financial provision for RTHK in 2022-2023 was \$1,090.2 million, while the estimated expenditure for 2023-2024 was \$1,192.8 million.

Radio services

6. RTHK’s radio services offer a variety of programmes for all walks of life through its FM and AM channels. Currently, RTHK operates four FM channels (viz. Channels 1, 2, 4 and 8) and four AM channels (viz. Channels 3, 5, 6 and 7)¹.

7. The modes of programme production include in-house production, community involvement through Community Involvement Broadcasting Service (“CIBS”), acquisition and relay (including programmes from other broadcasters, soccer matches, concerts and selected meetings of the

¹ Channel 1 (Cantonese):news, information and general programming; Channel 2 (Cantonese):entertainment and popular music, promotion of youth, family and community projects; Channel 3 (English):news, information and general programming; Channel 4 (English and Cantonese):serious music and fine arts; Channel 5 (Cantonese):elderly, cultural and education; Channel 6 (Putonghua and Cantonese):relay of China National Radio Hong Kong Edition; Channel 7 (Putonghua and other languages):general programming, news and finance, and CIBS; and Channel 8 (Cantonese and Putonghua):relay of Radio the Greater Bay of the China Media Group.

Legislative Council (“LegCo”)).

Television services

8. In January 2014, RTHK started to operate three digital terrestrial television (“DTT”) channels. It gradually extended its broadcast to round-the-clock. In July 2014, RTHK obtained approval from the Finance Committee of LegCo to undertake a technical project at an estimated cost of \$64.2 million for establishing 22 new transmission stations to enhance its DTT coverage from the then 75% of the Hong Kong population to 99%. On 2 April 2016, RTHK took over the analogue TV channels vacated by the Asia Television Limited upon cessation of its free TV services, and proceeded with the simulcast of programmes on two analogue TV channels (TV31A and TV33A). By April 2019, the overall coverage of RTHK’s DTT channels had reached 99% of the Hong Kong population, which was on par with that of other commercial broadcasters. With the implementation of full digital TV broadcast from 1 December 2020, RTHK’s two analogue TV channels ceased to operate. In addition, RTHK TV 34 was officially launched on 1 July 2022. Currently, RTHK operates four DTT channels².

New media services

9. RTHK leverages on various platforms in the new media to extend its reach to the audience. Its official website, “rthk.hk”, provides simulcast of AM and FM radio channels as well as Chinese and English TV programmes. Other online services include on-demand archives of most radio, TV and news programmes broadcast within the past 12 months, and original web contents. In addition, RTHK operates eight mobile applications (namely “RTHK On The Go”, “RTHK Screen”, “RTHK Mine”, “RTHK News”, “RTHK Vox”, “RTHK Memory”, “Chinese History — the Flourishing Age” and “RTHK Audio Description”). RTHK reviews the

² The four DTT channels comprise:

- (a) RTHK TV 31 – general programming on current affairs, education, arts and culture and minority interests, comprising in-house produced programmes, commissioned programmes, acquired programmes and education programmes;
- (b) RTHK TV 32 – covering live events including local, Mainland and international news, press conferences, LegCo meetings, international and local sports and live events of public interest, and also providing the latest traffic information, weather forecasts, news updates and video segments;
- (c) RTHK TV 33 – relaying programmes of China Central Television Channel 1; and
- (d) RTHK TV 34 – relaying programmes of China Global Television Network Documentary.

usage of the applications regularly. One of the applications, RTHK Vox, ceased to operate in end-February 2023 due to low usage rate.

Director of Audit's Report No. 71

10. In March 2018, the Audit Commission conducted a value for money audit on RTHK's operations. The Audit Commission's findings and recommendations, which related to RTHK's low TV ratings and public awareness, programme performance evaluation, procurement of survey services and engagement of contract staff/service providers, were set out in Chapter 5 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 71 submitted to LegCo in October 2018. RTHK accepted all the recommendations in the Audit Report. It has been taking follow-up action under the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau ("CEDB")'s steer and reporting the implementation progress to the Public Accounts Committee of LegCo in accordance with the established mechanism.

11. In May 2020, CEDB submitted a paper entitled "The Governance and Management of Radio Television Hong Kong"³ to the Panel for discussion. The paper mentioned that while RTHK had completed the follow-up action on a variety of recommendations in the Audit Report, a number of actions concerning the review on the commissioning arrangements for TV programmes, the procurement of the Television Programme Appreciation Index Survey and the Radio Audience Survey, and the evaluation of TV programmes were still underway. The paper also mentioned that the programme contents of RTHK had led to public concerns and discussions, including public complaints to the Communications Authority ("CA") against some RTHK programmes for their biased stance and inaccurate/partial contents.

The Governance and Management of Radio Television Hong Kong Review Report

12. In recent years, the management and programme contents of RTHK have been a cause of public concern⁴. In response, CEDB announced in May 2020 the establishment of a dedicated team to review the governance

³ For details, please refer to [LC Paper No. CB\(1\)593/19-20\(05\)](#).

⁴ In 2019-2020 and 2020-2021, CA found a total of eight substantiated complaint cases concerning RTHK's programmes, for which one serious warning, three warnings, two strong advices, one advice were issued respectively and one case with no sanction imposed.

and management of RTHK and to provide recommendations on improving its overall management systems, processes and practices, with a view to ensuring full compliance with the Charter, the codes of practices issued by CA and all applicable government rules and regulations. CEDB released the Governance and Management of Radio Television Hong Kong Review Report (“the Review Report”)⁵ on 19 February 2021.

Editorial management

13. In response to the relevant recommendations in the Review Report, RTHK introduced a new editorial management mechanism in March 2021, under which an editorial committee comprising D of B and the senior management of RTHK was set up. The Editorial Policies and Processes of Radio Television Hong Kong was promulgated in September of the same year to elaborate on RTHK’s editorial policies and demonstrate the editorial processes of different categories of productions, assist programme makers to fulfil and adhere to the editorial principles set out in the Charter. These principles include disseminating information accurately and authoritatively, upholding the highest professional standards of journalism, and providing accurate, impartial and objective news to members of the public.

Major views and concerns expressed by members

14. The Administration briefed the Panel on the findings of the Review Report at the meeting held on 15 March 2021. A special meeting was held on 25 May 2021 to follow up with the Administration on the progress of RTHK’s implementation of the recommendations in the Review Report. The major views and concerns expressed by members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Charter of Radio Television Hong Kong and the role of Radio Television Hong Kong

15. Noting that RTHK’s status as PSB was stated in the Charter made in 2010 following the Review of Public Service Broadcasting in Hong Kong conducted in 2006, members queried whether there was scope for re-examination of the Charter and RTHK’s role, and for refocusing RTHK’s work on advocating and promoting the Administration’s policies by sharing the staff between the Information Services Department (“ISD”) and RTHK or even merging the two departments.

⁵ [The Review Report](#) has been uploaded onto the website of CEDB.

16. According to the Administration, the conclusion of the Review conducted in 2006 that Hong Kong needed a PSB remained valid, and RTHK could perform that role by closely abiding by the terms of the Charter. As the roles and functions of RTHK and ISD were distinct, it would not be appropriate to replace RTHK's news teams by ISD's personnel. The Administration also remarked that the scope of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region ("NSL") covered RTHK and there was no need to amend the Charter as a result of the implementation of NSL.

Cost-effectiveness of Radio Television Hong Kong productions

17. Members discussed how the Administration would ensure that RTHK had sufficient resources to meet its operational needs. Some members suggested that the Administration should consider renovating RTHK's Broadcasting House to provide a better working environment for staff and to boost production activities. Some members pointed out that there were criticisms that RTHK's production cost was high but the viewership was low and that its operation was not value-for-money. The Administration assured members that adequate resources would be provided to meet RTHK's operational needs. RTHK would also step up maintenance and repairs and introduce measures to improve the facilities and working environment of RTHK.

Mechanism for editorial management

18. Members enquired about the progress of RTHK in developing the editorial management mechanism and referral mechanism for dealing with contentions and sensitive issues as recommended in the Review Report. They suggested that the setting of editorial policies and development of practice guidelines should be transparent. Some members considered that a disciplinary mechanism should be instituted against breach of the editorial policies or guidelines.

19. The Administration advised that the new editorial management and referral mechanism were introduced in March 2021 to ensure that RTHK's programmes complied with the Charter and Producers' Guidelines. The editorial committee would review and endorse proposals from programme production staff and provide guidance to them at the early stages of production. The decisions of the editorial committee would be communicated to the relevant production staff and its deliberations on what constituted controversial contents of a programme would be recorded.

RTHK would abide by the Charter and the Code of Practices issued by CA, as well as all relevant government rules and regulations. Staff found to have contravened the Codes and rules would be liable to disciplinary sanctions.

Management of Radio Television Hong Kong's workforce

20. Some members pointed out that there had been several occasions where CA had ruled RTHK breaching the Generic Code of Practice on Television Programme Standards ("Code of Practice"). They commented that RTHK should not be a platform for any group to advocate its political ideas using public money. Members queried whether any civil servant working in RTHK had been subject to disciplinary actions for breaches of the Charter or the Code of Practice.

21. The Administration explained that RTHK and its entire staff, be they civil servants, contract staff or freelance service providers, were required to comply with all applicable government rules and regulations, as well as the instructions of the department. The department had followed up complaint cases rigorously and professionally, in accordance with the requirements under the Civil Service Regulations. Any act of an RTHK's staff or a programme that was contrary to the Constitution, the Basic Law, local laws, the Charter or any rules and regulations governing RTHK would be dealt with by CEDB and the management of RTHK in accordance with the established practice.

Workforce and Category II service providers and contract staff

22. Members had expressed concerns about RTHK's procedures on engaging service providers and evaluating their performance. In particular, they noted that the Review Report had indicated that RTHK's administration of Category II ("Cat. II") service providers⁶ were loose. Some members pointed out a number of issues concerning the management of Cat. II service providers and they queried about the progress of the implementation of the recommendations in the Review Report on improving the process of engaging Cat. II service providers and cost-efficiency in programme productions. There were questions on why there were more Cat. II service providers than civil servants in RTHK, and there were more service contracts than the number of service providers engaged. Members commented that RTHK should refrain from increasing headcounts in programme production

⁶ Cat. II service providers are independent contractors or self-employed persons who are engaged for a specific purpose in the production of programmes, for example, artistes, presenters, scriptwriters, translators and technical producers.

but should adopt measures to improve cost-effectiveness. They queried whether sanctions would be imposed on Cat. II service providers who had breached the instructions issued by the RTHK management.

23. The Administration explained that RTHK engaged Cat. II service providers to carry out tasks that required specialized knowledge and expertise not available from within the civil service. As a Cat. II service provider might be engaged in more than one contract position at a time, the total number of contracts RTHK had entered into might exceed the total number of Cat. II service providers in RTHK's employment. In the light of the recommendations of the Review Report, the Administration would consider deploying Programme Officers, who were civil servants in RTHK, to take up duties of Cat. II service providers as appropriate.

Withdrawal of scheduled programmes

24. Members expressed concerns about the withdrawal of a number of RTHK programmes that had been produced. Specifically, members asked why RTHK had removed parts of the programme, *LegCo Review*, where former and serving Members appeared as guests. They commented that RTHK should explain to these Members why the programme was withdrawn, and assure them that the programme was not withdrawn because they had made any inappropriate comments.

25. The Administration responded that since March 2021, three programmes, namely *Hong Kong Story*, *LegCo Review* and *Hong Kong Connection*, had been withdrawn from airing. These programmes were withdrawn because they were not considered to have met the requirement of being impartial, and not because of any comments expressed by the guests or because there was an imbalance in the number of guests holding different stances and opinion. As regards the episode of *LegCo Review* in question, the Administration added that a certain footage was found to have been inserted without the prior approval of the editorial committee. Cat. II service providers had been hired to take up future production of *LegCo Review* and the responsible RTHK production team had been redeployed to other duties pending internal investigation.

26. On 15 March 2021, the Panel passed a motion which called on the Administration to steer the implementation of RTHK's reform in compliance with the recommendations made in the Review Report.

Legislative Council Questions

27. Members had raised questions related to the operation and governance of RTHK at Council meetings. Details of the questions and the Administration's replies are given in the hyperlinks in **Appendix 3**.

Latest development

28. The Panel visited RTHK on 16 June 2023 to enhance understanding of the PSB work. The Administration will brief the Panel on the work and latest development of RTHK on 10 July 2023.

Relevant papers

29. A list of relevant papers is set out in **Appendix 3**.

Council Business Division 1 and Public Complaints Office
Legislative Council Secretariat
3 July 2023

Charter of Radio Television Hong Kong¹

As the public service broadcaster in Hong Kong, Radio Television Hong Kong (“RTHK”) is required under the Charter of RTHK (“the Charter”) to fulfil the following public purposes:

- (a) sustain citizenship and civil society, and this involves (i) promoting understanding of our community, our nation and the world through accurate and impartial news, information, perspectives and analyses; (ii) promoting understanding of the concept of “One Country, Two Systems” and its implementation in Hong Kong; and (iii) engendering a sense of citizenship and national identity through programmes that contribute to the understanding of our community and nation;
 - (b) provide an open platform for the free exchange of views without fear or favour;
 - (c) encourage social inclusion and pluralism²;
 - (d) promote education and learning²; and
 - (e) stimulate creativity and excellence to enrich the multi-cultural life of Hong Kong people².
2. The Charter states that RTHK’s mission is to:
- (a) inform, educate and entertain members of the public through multi-media programming;
 - (b) provide timely, impartial coverage of local, national and global events and issues;
 - (c) deliver programming which contributes to the openness and cultural diversity of Hong Kong;

¹ [Charter of Radio Television Hong Kong](#)

² See paragraph 4 of the Charter for further details.

- (d) provide a platform for the Government and the community to discuss public policies and express views thereon without fear or favour; and
- (e) serve a broad spectrum of audiences and cater to the needs of minority interest groups.

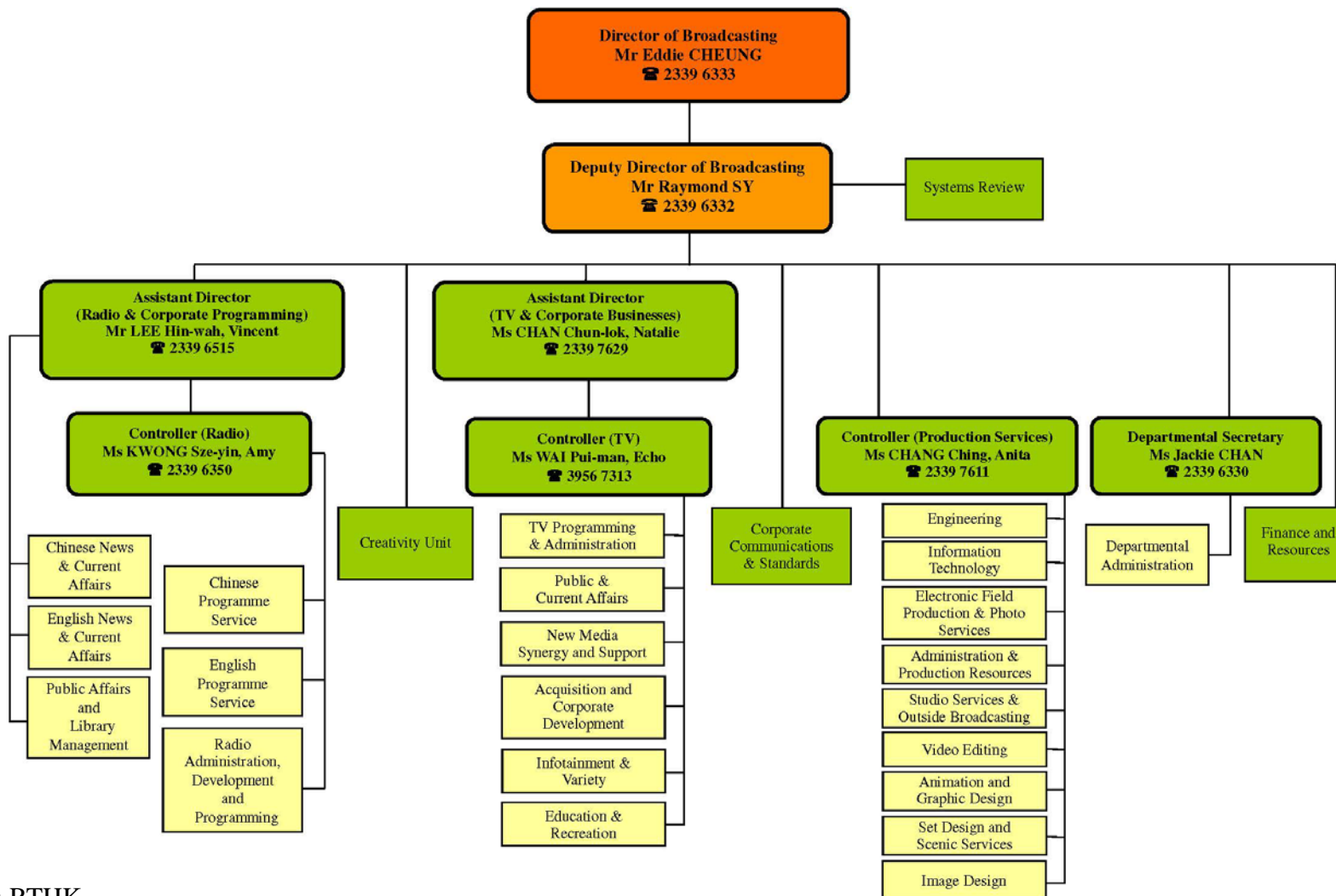
3. The Charter provides for RTHK's editorial independence and stipulates the editorial principles to be observed by RTHK. It sets out RTHK's key programme areas of activities, the modes of service delivery as well as the arrangements for conducting performance evaluation and promoting operational transparency. Besides, it prescribes RTHK's relationship with the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau ("CEDB") and the Board of Advisors, as well as the Communications Authority ("CA")'s role in regulating RTHK's programme content through complaints handling.

4. The Charter provides for a governance structure which involves:

- (a) the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, who provides policy guidance and support to RTHK;
- (b) the Director of Broadcasting, who is the Editor-in-chief in RTHK and is accountable for the effective operation and management of the department; and
- (c) the Board of Advisors, which advises the Director of Broadcasting on the services of RTHK, in particular on editorial principles, programming standards and quality of RTHK programming.

5. As a government department under the policy purview and housekeeping oversight of CEDB, RTHK and its staff are subject to all applicable government rules and regulations, including those on financial control, human resources management and procurement matters.

Organization Chart of Radio Television Hong Kong (as at 7.10.2022)



Source: RTHK

**The work and latest development of
Radio Television Hong Kong**

List of relevant papers

| Date of meeting | Meeting | Papers |
|------------------------|--|--|
| 15 March 2021 | Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting | <p>Administration's paper on the governance and management of Radio Television Hong Kong (LC Paper No. CB(1)652/20-21(04))</p> <p>Updated background brief on the governance and management of Radio Television Hong Kong prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (LC Paper No. CB(1)652/20-21(05))</p> <p>Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(1)924/20-21)</p> <p>Administration's response to the motion passed at the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(1)742/20-21(01))</p> |
| 25 May 2021 | Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting | <p>Administration's paper on the Governance and Management of Radio Television Hong Kong Review Report (LC Paper No. CB(1)927/20-21(01))</p> <p>Updated background brief on the governance and management of Radio Television Hong Kong prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat (LC Paper No. CB(1)927/20-21(02))</p> <p>Minutes of meeting (LC Paper No. CB(1)1470/20-21)</p> |

Hyperlinks to relevant Council questions:

| Date of Council meeting | Question |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 3 February 2021 | Question No. 17 — Operation of RTHK |
| 17 March 2021 | Question No. 5 — News reporting of RTHK |
| 24 March 2021 | Question No. 1 — Governance and management of RTHK |