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Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services

Meeting on 2 June 2025

Background brief on promoting LawTech and the Judiciary's use of technology in court operations

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the promotion of LawTech by the Department of Justice (“DoJ”) and the Judiciary’s use of technology in court operations, and summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by Members on the subjects in the Seventh Legislative Council (“LegCo”).

Background

Efforts of the Department of Justice in promoting LawTech

2. According to DoJ, **proper use of LawTech** (e.g. systems such as artificial intelligence (“AI”), document automation, and electronic file management) can boost the efficiency, productivity and quality of Hong Kong’s legal and dispute resolution services, and can even achieve cost savings and enhance competitiveness, thereby **promoting Hong Kong’s position as a leading centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region**. DoJ has also been committed to promoting the development of LawTech in that, among others, (a) with the Government’s support, eBRAM International Online Dispute Resolution Centre, a non-profit-making organization, launched the Online Mediation Platform, the Online Arbitration Platform, the online Deal-making Portal and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (“GBA”) Online Collaborative Platform between 2020 and 2023, so as to facilitate online business transactions and dispute resolution among enterprises and support the establishment of diversified dispute resolution mechanisms in GBA; and (b) DoJ established the Hong Kong Legal Cloud Fund in 2022 to provide the local legal sector with safe, secure and affordable data storage services on a subsidized subscription.

3. As a policy initiative in the Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address, the Administration **set up the Consultation Group on LawTech Development** ("the Group") in January 2025 to research and formulate specific recommendations for promoting the use of LawTech. Members of the Group are from different fields such as the legal and dispute resolution sectors, law schools and the LawTech industry, and will provide advice and assistance to DoJ regarding the promotion and development of LawTech in Hong Kong.

Judiciary's use of technology in court operations

4. To enhance the efficiency of court operations, the Judiciary is also committed to making greater use of technology, and is implementing a series of **major technology initiatives** including the **integrated Court Case Management System ("iCMS")**, **remote hearings**, **live broadcasting of court proceedings** outside court premises, the **use of voice-to-text ("VTT") technology**, the **use of e-bundles** at court hearings, and **e-appointments for specific court services**. In this connection, the planning, design, and implementation of these technology initiatives have long been undertaken by the Judiciary Administration ("Jud Adm") through deployment of the required manpower and financial resources on Information and Communications Technology ("ICT") on an ongoing basis. According to Jud Adm's information, for the 2025-2026 financial year, the estimated recurrent expenditure of the Judiciary on the planning and implementation of all ICT initiatives is around \$310 million, representing 11% of the total operating expenditure of the Judiciary, whereas the average annual increase in the past five years was around 9%.

5. As regards the use of AI, the Judiciary promulgated in July 2024 its first set of guidelines on the use of generative AI for Judges and Judicial Officers ("JJOs") and its support staff.¹ In sum, JJOs and the Judiciary's support staff may make prudent and responsible use of generative AI in the course of their work where appropriate. **Until and unless** there is a generative AI model with proven **ability to protect confidential, restricted and private information** and adequate **built-in checking and verification mechanism** to ensure accuracy and reliability, the Judiciary **does not recommend** the use of generative AI for **legal analysis** (including judgment writing). That said, generative AI may potentially be useful in tasks such as **summarizing information, speech or presentation writing, legal translation** and **administrative tasks** where necessary and appropriate. The guidelines are subject to further review and revision by the Judiciary to keep abreast of the developments of the relevant technology and the experiences of other courts.

¹ The guidelines are available on the Judiciary's website at:
https://www.judiciary.hk/doc/en/court_services_facilities/guidelines_on_the_use_of_generative_ai.pdf.

Major views and concerns of Members

Use of artificial intelligence technologies

6. In view of the rapid development of AI technologies in recent years, Members expressed grave concern about how AI technologies could be leveraged to facilitate the work of DoJ and the Judiciary, and enhance the legal and dispute resolution services in Hong Kong. In respect of the systematic review of statutory laws of Hong Kong undertaken by the Secretariat of the Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong (“LRC Secretariat”), Members suggested that **AI** technologies be **leveraged** to help the LRC Secretariat to review Hong Kong’s statutory laws by enabling its staff to **more effectively identify provisions that needed to be followed up and provide preliminary analyses**, thereby enhancing the efficiency of the relevant work.

7. According to the Administration, DoJ would participate in the pilot use of a generative AI document processing copilot application developed by the Hong Kong Generative AI Research and Development Center, established with the funding support from the InnoHK Research Clusters, with a view to gradually applying AI technologies in DoJ’s work. In addition, since the LRC Secretariat spearheaded the systematic review of statutory laws of Hong Kong in February 2022, it had all along been assisting responsible bureaux in taking forward such work with the aid of technology as far as practicable. The LRC Secretariat welcomed and maintained an open attitude on the use of AI to support the work on the “Systematic Review of the Statutory Laws of Hong Kong”, and would keep exploring the possibility of using suitable AI systems in its work, and participate in and offer feedback on the pilot use in applying such technologies. Nonetheless, the LRC Secretariat would exercise due prudence to ensure that the use of AI complied with the requirements on accuracy, information security and other aspects and was in line with the policy on the use of such technologies.

8. Regarding legal and dispute resolution services, Members were concerned as to whether the Administration had any plans and targets for the legal sector to **upgrade and transform by employing AI**, and suggested that consideration might be given to developing a **large AI model** that would fully take into account the environment and needs of Hong Kong’s legal sector. The Administration advised that DoJ would maintain close communication with the Group, which had just been set up in January 2025, and actively consider the Group’s advice, with a view to drawing up plans and timetables for policy initiatives relating to LawTech as early as possible. Moreover, DoJ would work with government departments or enterprises as appropriate to explore the implementation of further AI applications and large language models related to the laws of Hong Kong, having due regard to relevant factors including technological developments in the market, the needs of the legal sector and the community, and the resource considerations involved.

9. Members also noted that the Judiciary was actively exploring the use of VTT technology (an AI technology) for recording court proceedings, and had been testing

and developing a court-specific VTT system using VTT software products in the market. In December 2023, the Judiciary started using its developed VTT system for JJOs' real-time note-taking in hearings to enhance the efficiency of judgment writing. Members urged the Judiciary to, with reference to the Mainland's practice, **provide parties to proceedings with speech transcripts prepared by the system and verified by the parties on the spot**, so as to obviate the need for the parties to make simultaneous records.

10. Jud Adm advised that it would continue to endeavour to enhance the accuracy rates of the VTT system adopted, and to keep abreast of latest developments of the relevant technology with a view to exploring new modes of operation to enhance the overall efficiency of transcription work. Nevertheless, Jud Adm stressed that the transcripts generated by the system were not official court documents for the time being, and the Judiciary would study ways to provide convenience for the legal sector as far as practicable after clarifying the relevant principles and legal issues.

Assisting local small and medium-sized law firms in applying technologies

11. The application of technologies by local small and medium-sized law firms was also a matter of concern to Members. They opined that the Administration should study and introduce appropriate measures to **motivate small and medium-sized law firms to improve** the environment for **the application of LawTech**, and encourage the legal sector to utilize AI in legal practice. That apart, during discussions on the implementation of iCMS by the Judiciary, there were views that **subsidies should be provided to local small and medium-sized law firms** for the procurement of relevant equipment, so as to provide incentives for these law firms to **use iCMS**.

12. The Administration and Jud Adm noted Members' views, and the Administration added that at the first meeting of the Group held on 10 February 2025, it came to the Group's attention that the lack of motivation of the legal sector (including small and medium-sized law firms) to boost its use of LawTech was due to, apart from financial considerations, the legal sector's limited awareness of LawTech and the conventional mode and mindset of legal practice, which seldom relied on technology. With the aim of facilitating the wider use of LawTech by the legal sector in the long run, DoJ would continue to consult and consider the Group's advice, and promote the application of LawTech by the legal sector through different means, thereby strengthening the competitiveness of the legal sector and consolidating Hong Kong's status as a centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, DoJ would closely monitor the development of technology in the market and implement appropriate measures to help the legal sector apply LawTech in the light of the sector's needs and resource considerations.

Implementation of the integrated Court Case Management System

13. Noting that the Judiciary was steaming ahead with the implementation of iCMS to **enable the handling of court-related documents and payments electronically** across various court levels, Members requested Jud Adm to provide information on the situation and trend of law firms registering for iCMS in recent years, the Judiciary's efforts to promote iCMS, and the difficulties encountered and the solutions adopted in connection with such work.

14. Jud Adm advised that as at 28 February 2025, a total of 562 court users (including 441 law firms, representing about 48% of the law firms registered with The Law Society of Hong Kong) had registered for accounts under iCMS, and it believed that the take-up rate would rise substantially upon the imposition of the mandatory use of iCMS by all legally represented litigants as from 2026. To incentivize registration under iCMS during the initial years, court users were offered a fee concession of 20% for certain years on fee items related to the electronic handling of court documents. Besides, the Judiciary had been implementing a series of promotion and facilitation measures to raise potential users' awareness of iCMS and help them familiarize with handling court businesses in the electronic mode. To tie in with the implementation of the plan for mandating the use of iCMS by the legal profession, the Judiciary would, upon the extension of iCMS to selected case types of the High Court in mid-2025, stipulate in the Practice Direction that a party filing or submitting a document in the conventional mode would be required to provide the Court with an electronic copy of the document at the same time of filing or submission at the court registry. This new arrangement was expected to incentivize law firms to switch from the conventional mode to iCMS as soon as possible.

15. Expressing concern that **electronic service of documents** was not available under iCMS for the time being, Members suggested that Jud Adm could consider adding such a function to iCMS to enhance the efficiency of service-related work, thereby providing an incentive for the legal profession to use iCMS. Jud Adm advised that adding such a function to iCMS would involve practical as well as system design and operational difficulties. That said, noting Members' views and the demand of the legal profession in this regard, the Judiciary aimed to promote the wider use of iCMS as the first step before proceeding to have in-depth communication with the legal profession about electronic service of documents, among other things, and study ways to address the issue.

Remote hearings

16. The Administration introduced the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill into LegCo on 4 December 2024 with the aim of providing for the application for, and the operation and effect of, remote hearings for court proceedings in Hong Kong, so as to provide a clear legal basis for JJOs to order remote hearings at various levels of courts and tribunals where appropriate, having regard to all relevant factors, as well as the dual

requirements of open justice and fair hearing. The Bill was passed by LegCo on 26 March 2025, and the enacted Courts (Remote Hearing) Ordinance (Ord. No. 6 of 2025) came into operation upon gazettal on 28 March 2025.

17. During the scrutiny of the Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill, Members enquired whether the Judiciary would provide technical support to users of remote hearings in the light of the experience gained from the conduct of over 2 000 remote hearings for civil proceedings at different levels of courts and tribunals since 2020, and suggested that the Judiciary should **provide adequate training and assistance to the legal sector and the public** for the conduct of remote hearings.

18. Jud Adm pointed out that the operation of remote hearings had been smooth since their introduction. With respect to technical support, Jud Adm would assign dedicated staff to liaise in advance with any witnesses or parties appearing remotely. Information such as links, login accounts and passwords for remote hearings would be provided by email to the witnesses or parties participating in the hearings, and connection tests would be carried out to ensure that the connection was smooth before the formal hearings were conducted. Jud Adm also advised that it would issue practice directions for the use of remote hearings to provide legal practitioners and parties to the proceedings with specific guidance on the details and specific operation of remote hearings, and would issue administrative instructions on the hardware and software requirements for audio-visual facilities or how they should be technically implemented.

Latest position

19. The Administration and Jud Adm will brief the Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services on the relevant developments in DoJ's promotion of the use of LawTech, as well as the latest developments of the Judiciary's use of technology in court operations, at the meeting on 2 June 2025.

Relevant papers

20. A list of the relevant papers on the LegCo website is in the [Appendix](#).

Promoting LawTech and the Judiciary's use of technology in court operations

List of relevant papers

Meeting	Date	References
Panel on Administration of Justice and Legal Services	25 April 2022	Agenda Item III: Promoting and facilitating wider use of LawTech Minutes
	25 November 2024	Agenda Item IV: Latest development of the Judiciary's use of technology in court operations Minutes
	16 December 2024	Agenda Item II: Law Reform Commission Secretariat – Progress on the Systematic Review of Statutory Laws of Hong Kong Minutes
Bills Committee on Courts (Remote Hearing) Bill	21 March 2025*	Report of the Bills Committee
Finance Committee	7 April 2025	Administration's replies to initial questions raised by Legislative Council Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2025-2026 (Reply Serial Nos.: SJ007, SJ008, SJ033 and SJ051)
		Judiciary Administration's replies to initial questions raised by Legislative Council Members in examining the Estimates of Expenditure 2025-2026 (Reply Serial Nos.: JA003, JA004, JA005, JA006, JA007, JA012, JA026, JA027 and JA031)

* Issue date