

**Minutes of the Sixth Meeting of  
the Joint Committee on Information Technology  
for the Social Welfare Sector held at 9:30 a.m. on 22 January 2003**

Present: Mrs Carrie Lam (Chairperson)  
Mr Sit Tung  
Mr Alex Ma  
Mr Chan Wing-tai  
Mr Chong Chan-yau  
Miss Christine Fang  
Mr Leung Wai-fung, Joseph  
Mr Kang Tsi-kit  
Mr Li Kam-chiu  
Mr Kok Che-leung  
Mr Chan Ping-cheong, Ashton (Secretary)

In attendance: Mr John Fung  
Ms Shirley Kiang  
Mr Eric Chan  
Miss Mina Chow  
Mr Fu Tsun-hung (for agenda items 3 & 4)  
Mr Fong Cheung-fat (for agenda item 4 only)  
Mr Ivan Su (for agenda item 4 only)  
Ms Yonnie Ng (for agenda item 4 only)  
Ms Venus Au (for agenda item 6(a) only)  
Ms Phoebe Ma (for agenda item 6(a) only)  
Mr William Wong (for agenda item 6(a) only)  
Mr David Ng (for agenda item 6(b) only)  
Mr Jackit Cheng (for agenda item 6(b) only)  
Miss Lisa Ho (for agenda item 6(c) only)

Absent with apologies: Ms Peggy Leung

**Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The Chairperson reported that the draft minutes of the last meeting were forwarded to Members for comments on 22 November 2002. As no

comment was received from Members, the draft minutes were taken as confirmed.

## **Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Last Meeting**

### Paragraph 7

2. The Chairperson informed Members that the mini-feasibility study (mini-FS) on Client Information System (CIS) for family services centres (FSCs) in the subvented sector was completed on 29 November 2002. The subject would be discussed under agenda item 5.

### Paragraph 10

3. The Chairperson reported that a mid-term evaluation report on the Information Technology Resource Centre (ITRC) was circulated to Members for comment on 15 November 2002. Mr Alex Ma had suggested strengthening the capacity of ITRC for quality service by establishing strategic alliance with service vendors. This had been incorporated into the paper on the mid-term evaluation report submitted to the Lotteries Fund Advisory Committee (LFAC) for discussion at its meeting held on 26 November 2002. LFAC had endorsed the release of the Lotteries Fund (LF) grant to ITRC to complete the three-year project, except the component on Research and Development (R&D), for which LF grant would only cover the period up to 31 March 2003. The R&D was one of the core functions of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) to be supported by recurrent subvention under a new Funding and Services Agreement to take effect from 1 April 2003. Related R&D activities would continue in future.

### Paragraph 12

4. The Chairperson shared that as discussed in the last JCIT meeting, ITRC organised a “Seminar on Identifying and Addressing Information Technology Needs in Your Agency” on 19 December 2002 to assist NGOs in understanding and identifying their IT needs. Mr John Fung reported that the Seminar was attended by 56 participants coming from 39 NGOs. The programme covered the IT Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector (the IT Strategy) and the Guidance Notes on Application for Information Technology

Related Project for the Second Batch of Business Improvement Project (BIP) Scheme application. Furthermore, Dr Constantin Lo, Chairman of the Community Service Committee of the Hong Kong Computer Society, and Mr Steve Lam, Finance Manager of the Hong Kong Society for the Aged, shared their views and experience on managing IT development and projects. Participants found the seminar very useful.

5. Mr Chan Wing-tai enquired about the composition of the Seminar attendees. Mr John Fung replied that they were frontline IT staff, service administrative staff, senior management officers and chief executives. He observed that they had very limited knowledge of the IT Strategy. Mr Chan Wing-tai expressed that he found this observation a bit surprising. The Chairperson added that SWD had already made much effort in promoting the IT Strategy to agency administrators on different occasions. NGOs could make use of the “NGOs Corner” of the SWD homepage to get updated information. The Chairperson would like to know the hit rate of the “NGOs Corner”. Mr SIT would check if such figures were available. Mr John Fung said that ITRC would continue their efforts to promote the use of IT and keep NGO colleagues informed of the latest IT development in the Social Welfare Sector through regular publication of e-newsletters.

[Post-meeting note: The hit rate for the index pages of “NGOs Corner” was around 3 200 to 5 000 per month, which indicated that it was quite a popular section in the SWD homepage.]

#### Paragraphs 21 and 30

6. The Chairperson reported that SWD had written to the Haven of Hope Christian Service and the Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation to convey Members’ comments on their respective BIP proposals. They agreed to our recommendations. At its meeting held on 22 October 2002, LFAC approved LF grants to the two NGOs.

#### Paragraphs 41 and 42

7. The Chairperson said that a progress report on the implementation of Core Applications Development on Human Resource Management (HRM) and Financial Management (FM) (the Core Applications) of HKCSS had been set out in the paper JC 01/03 for discussion under agenda item 3.

## **Implementation of the Core Applications**

8. The Chairperson reported that LFAC had endorsed a grant of \$25,066,000 to HKCSS to implement the Core Applications for 26 NGOs at its meeting held on 26 November 2002. In the second batch of the BIP applications, we had received ten applications from NGOs indicating their wish to join the Core Applications. SWD would discuss with HKCSS on the arrangements and incremental cost incurred. A separate LF grant would be sought for this purpose.

9. Mr John Fung supplemented that HKCSS had formed a Project Steering Committee (PSC) on the Core Applications chaired by Mrs Agnes Mak and independent IT professionals and user NGOs as members. HKCSS had made reference to the tender documents, contracts of other IT projects of similar scale as well as the terms and conditions of Government contracts in drawing up its tender document for the Core Applications. He further informed that HKCSS was seeking legal advice from solicitors with solid experience in IT project contracts in order to ensure that the interests of the participating NGOs would be well protected before inviting tender proposals. It was expected that the tender documents would be ready for issue by end of January 2003.

10. Mr John Fung informed that a briefing session for user NGOs would be conducted on 27 January 2003 to report on the implementation plan of the Core Applications. On 6 February 2003, a separate briefing session for potential bidders would be conducted to introduce the tender documents and evaluation criteria.

[Post meeting note: On 27 January 2003, 37 participants from 21 NGOs attended the briefing session on the progress of the project implementation plan. On 6 February 2003, 42 representatives from 19 companies attended the briefing session for potential bidders.]

11. In response to Mr Chan Wing-tai's enquiry, Mr John Fung confirmed that HKCSS would adopt an open tendering approach in order to solicit the best value for money proposals and provide level playing field for all interested suppliers. The Chairperson would like the progress of the Core Applications be reported in coming JCIT meetings.

## **Business Improvement Project**

12. At the meeting, Members deliberated on a BIP application and offered their advice for the further processing of the funding request to LFAC for consideration..

### **Mini-Feasibility Study (mini-FS) on Client Information System (CIS) for Family Services Centres (FSCs) in the Subvented Sector**

13. The Chairperson invited Mr Sit Tung to present the key points and issues of the mini-FS to Members. He briefed that SWD had sought funding support from LFAC in February 2002 to commission the Electronic Data System (HK) Ltd. to take up the mini-FS. The objectives of that study were to examine the feasibility of extending SWD CIS to the family services centres (FSCs) in the subvented sector as well as to identify, if any, additional user requirements common to all NGO FSCs. The mini-FS was completed on 29 November 2002.

14. Mr Sit Tung referred Members to the JC Paper 3/03 on the details of the findings and recommendations of the mini-FS. He highlighted that the business model of SWD's CIS was applicable to concerned NGO FSCs, which had only a few additional requirements relating to the forms, statistical tools and assessment tools, etc. The databases and facilities of SWD CIS and NGO CIS would be hosted in separate data centres. Moreover, only the agreed information containing in a master index would be shared between SWD and NGOs as well as among NGOs themselves on a need-to-know basis and with client's verbal or written consent. The project would last for about 100 weeks from the formation of project team. To mitigate risks on rolling out two major systems at the same time, NGO CIS would go-live three months after rolling out SWD CIS.

15. It was estimated that the total non-recurrent cost and annual recurrent cost of the project was about \$16 million and \$3 million respectively. SWD would apply for LF to cover the capital cost on setting up NGO CIS. NGOs were required to bear the recurrent cost as the other LF-funded IT initiatives under the IT Strategy and BIP Scheme. The payback period for NGO CIS would be 6.7 years which was a bit longer than the industry norm of less than five years.

16. Mr Sit Tung also reported that the major concerns of NGOs were about the management of client data and recurrent costs of CIS. Of the former issue, SWD would draw up guidelines governing the good practice on access to clients' data based on the advice given by the Department of Justice and Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data. Of the latter issue, we considered that NGOs would have adequate time to identify internal resources to meet the recurrent cost, which would start from 2006. SWD was prepared to absorb part of recurrent cost pertaining to social work staff to support the maintenance board, all communication lines between NGO CIS and SWD CIS, disaster recovery facilities, CIS application maintenance on common functionalities, ongoing CIS training, etc.

17. Mr Alex Ma enquired if it would be possible to re-design the database structure of the NGO's CIS such that only one master index would be held for both SWD CIS and NGO CIS for a more effective client identification. The maintenance cost of the master index could be borne by SWD in order to attract participation of all the concerned NGOs by lowering their share of recurrent cost. It would also benefit the on-going management of data security. Mr Sit Tung explained that the maintenance cost of a separate master index of NGO CIS might not form a material amount as compared to SWD's support of a full-time ASWO for the maintenance board. Mr Li Kam-chiu supplemented that we would embed holistic security measures in the system application and draw up administrative procedures to guide the good practice in addressing the issue of data privacy. Meanwhile, the recurrent cost to be shared by the concerned NGOs would mainly arise from on-going operating cost of data centre, communication lines and system maintenance, etc.

18. Mr Chong Chan-yau would like to clarify whether NGO CIS would be implemented if some NGOs had difficulty in meeting the recurrent cost. Mr Chan Wing-tai shared the view that NGO CIS should be implemented as an integrated whole. Without the full participation of all concerned NGOs in the project, it would defeat the original objectives of developing NGO CIS. Moreover, he considered it reasonable for NGOs to identify resources to support the ongoing running cost in view of the importance and benefits of setting up such computerised system. Otherwise all the efforts made in the past six months or more would become abortive.

19. Mr Chong Chan-yau supported the implementation of NGO CIS

because it would enable the concerned NGOs to be more accountable to their clients. He further commented that when the all-or-none approach was adopted, it might not be fair for those NGOs who supported the use of CIS all along. He asked whether there would be any alternative in taking forward the NGO CIS in case any of the NGOs withdrew.

20. The Chairperson responded that family services were regarded as one of the core services in both SWD and NGO sector. About two-third of the FSCs were operated by SWD whilst the remaining one-third by NGOs. CIS had to be operated on a comprehensive basis with all NGO FSCs being linked up and having access to the application. It would bring significant benefits to them in terms of an upgrading of their IT infrastructure and a platform for them to add on other applications to meet their agency needs in future. CIS would also benefit the whole agency in terms of service planning based on structured statistical information, more accurate and efficient resource deployment to meet changing social needs and enhancement of their accountability on public money. These benefits were considered justifiable for NGOs to identify their internal resources to meet the recurrent cost of the CIS through business process re-engineering, refocusing of services, natural wastage, etc. in the coming few years to prepare for rolling out CIS in 2005-06.

21. Miss Christine Fang appreciated the potential benefits of NGO CIS on service delivery and monitoring but expressed her recognition of NGOs' worry about the heavy financial commitment under the current stringent financial conditions. NGOs also needed to exercise tight budget control to prepare for the lapse of the Tide-over Grant for implementation of the Lump Sum Grant subventions in 2006-07. She however noted that there would be a few years' time for NGOs to assess and plan their resources to meet the recurrent cost of CIS. She believed that the actual amount might be lowered through market competition. For the purpose of providing NGOs with more support, Miss Christine Fang asked if there would be additional funds that could be used to subsidise the recurrent expenses of NGO CIS.

22. The Chairperson considered that NGOs should not have problem in meeting the recurrent cost of NGO CIS as it constituted only a tiny percentage of the total recurrent subventions for individual NGOs. NGO management should be able to identify internal resources to subscribe to CIS. For example, one of the NGOs who would be required to share about \$1 million annual recurrent cost of CIS, was allocated over \$500 million recurrent subventions in

2002-03. When compared to the annual recurrent cost of SWD CIS at \$48 million, which the Department was required to absorb in full by the LegCo Finance Committee in approval the capital commitment, the requirement that NGOs system should meet the recurrent cost was considered reasonable and acceptable. The Chairperson further shared that there would not be any other sources of funding to subsidise the NGOs in using CIS.

23. Miss Christine Fang further asked about the cost implications if more integrated FSCs were to be set up in future. The Chairperson advised that given fiscal constraints, new IFSCs would be formed through pooling of existing centres and resources. There would thus be no significant impact on the total number of centres and users.

24. Mr John Fung enquired if it would be possible to reduce the recurrent cost of participating NGOs by expanding the users from FSCs to other settings like rehabilitation or elderly services and re-examining other technical options such as hosting the facilities in the same data centre of SWD CIS. The Chairperson advised that there was no room to extend CIS to other NGO service settings at the present stage in order not to complicate the development of the proposed system. For the cited examples on rehabilitation and elderly services, the prevailing focus was on service matching rather than case management. We should accord priority on service rationalization and business process re-engineering before pursuing service-wide IT applications. Mr Sit Tung supplemented that the ultimate technical option would be subject to the tender results of SWD CIS and NGO CIS. Moreover, Mr Chan Wing-tai shared that the PSC of the mini-FS had thoroughly discussed the matter, and endorsed that the option of hosting NGO CIS in a separate data centre would allow greater autonomy and flexibility for NGOs in the future development of NGO CIS.

25. The Chairperson summarised that Members generally agreed to SWD's views on the implementation of NGO CIS as set out in the JC paper 3/03. She revealed that the department was considering the possibility of service rationalization in the family services in near future in accordance with the findings of the Family Service Review. This might affect the scope of the proposed CIS for NGOs. SWD would seek the commitment of NGOs concerned before NGO CIS could be taken forward. In case any NGOs decided not to proceed, it would be difficult to implement NGO CIS as the remaining NGOs would have to bear a higher recurrent cost and the sustainability of CIS would be at risk. Furthermore, it would not be possible to



compile a comprehensive and consistent set of management information and statistics for clients receiving family services if any of the concerned NGOs did not join the CIS. She remained confident that given the common objective to upgrade family services and promote cross-agency co-operation, the Department should be able to persuade the concerned NGOs to join the CIS on terms as proposed.

### **Project Sharing on i-net of the Association for Engineering and Medical Volunteer Service**

26. The Chairperson welcomed Ms Venus Au, Executive Secretary, Ms Phoebe Ma, Occupational Therapist, and Mr William Wong, System Engineer of the Association for Engineering and Medical Volunteer Service to give a presentation to Members on the outcome of the i-net supported by Members in 2001. She invited Mr Venue Au and Mr William Wong to brief Members on the background and progress of the project. They highlighted that the i-net was the first of its kind in Hong Kong to provide web-based training for mentally handicapped persons and their family members including training packages in six different training aspects. Feedback from the users was generally positive and encouraging.

27. In response to Mr Chan Wing-tai's question on the future development of the i-net, Ms Venue Au replied that the organisation had considered a number of alternatives to support the continued operation of the i-net upon the lapse of this two-year LF-funded project by May 2003. In addition to deployment of internal resources, the agency would consider some fee-charging measures such as membership subscription and sale of the training packages in order to generate the revenue for ongoing operations.

28. Mr Chan Wing-tai would like to know whether the agency had assessed the effectiveness of the training net. Ms Venue Au replied that they had not carried out any scientific study on the outcome by comparing the performance of users before and after using the i-net. However, the general impression was that the i-net was useful.

29. Mr Kang Tsi-kit enquired if the agency had sought views from any consultant in developing the training packages for the mentally handicapped and their family members. Ms Venus Au said that before rolling out the i-net in

May 2001, they had visited a number of NGOs providing direct services to the mentally handicapped to understand the training needs. In addition, the development of the packages was steered by a management committee comprising of different professionals such as engineer, IT professionals and occupational therapists.

30. Mr Chong Chan-yau showed that he had two concerns on this project. Firstly, since the project would lapse shortly, the agency should look for solution to sustain the operation of the i-net. Secondly, he advised that the agency should consider conducting a formal assessment on the effectiveness of the packages. Ms Phoebe Ma agreed that it was important to ensure the effectiveness of the training packages.

31. Miss Christine Fang appreciated the work of the agency in developing web-based interactive training packages for the mentally handicapped, and suggested if possible the agency could share their experience with counterparts in Hong Kong and overseas in HUSITA 7. Ms Venus Au expressed interest in this suggestion.

(Ms Venus Au, Ms Phoebe Ma, and Mr William Wong left the meeting at this juncture.)

(The Chairperson asked Mr Sit Tung to chair the meeting on her behalf as she had to leave the meeting at this juncture due to an urgent engagement.)

### **Project Sharing on CyberAble.net of SWD**

32. Mr Sit Tung invited Mr David Ng, Social Work Officer and Mr Jackit Cheng, Project Officer of the Social Welfare Department to share with Members on the implementation of the CyberAble.net. Mr David Ng highlighted that the CyberAble.net had incorporated several special features including shortcut keys, customizable colour schemes, etc. in order to facilitate people with disabilities to browse through the website. All these features were compliant with the web accessibility standards of the W3C and the Hong Kong SAR Government. Features of searchable databases on rehabilitation service and barrier-free facilities, tips of living for the disabled and their carers, discussion group and registration of computer training online were introduced.

33. Mr Kang Tsi-kit appreciated the work of the CyberAble.net especially its features that enhanced web accessibility. He suggested SWD taking one step further to involve the blind or visually impaired people in user tests. Mr David Ng confirmed that such kind of users' involvement had been carried out before rolling out the CyberAble.net.

34. Concerning Mr Chan Wing-tai's question on the hosting of the web site, Mr David Ng replied that the CyberAble.net was hosted by a service provider in the market.

35. Mr Chong Chan-yau advised placing more information relevant to the common needs of disabled persons, e.g. health. Mr David Ng said that they had been making efforts to collect more information from different sources to enrich the contents of the site. He hoped that eventually a group of disabled persons could be organized and enlisted to advise and assist in the future development of this portal site in order to enrich the web site meeting the needs of the disabled. Mr T K Kang suggested that it would be most preferable to add in a column of users' comment at relevant parts of the web site.

(Mr David Ng and Mr Jackit Cheng left the meeting at this juncture.)

### **Project Sharing on Social Welfare Information Kit (SWIK) On-line of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS)**

36. Miss Lisa Ho, Project Officer of HKCSS highlighted the contents and demonstrated features of SWIK on-line to Members. In collaboration with the Centamap, SWIK on-line could provide digital map for users to find out the exact location of the social service organisations and their service centres in Hong Kong. It also allowed individual NGOs to upload, without the need for technical assistance, such information as correspondence addresses, telephone numbers and activities of their centres to keep the service information up-to-date.

37. Mr Chan Wing-tai appreciated the work in developing SWIK. He suggested keeping a repository of important papers on social service development in Hong Kong for downloading at the SWIK web page.

38. Mr Kang Tsi-kit showed his appreciation for arranging the demonstration of IT applications supported previously by JCIT in this meeting. Members could have a better idea of the progress of the IT development made in the sector as well as the challenges encountered by agencies concerned in the development process.

39. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.

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Social Welfare Department  
March 2003