

**Minutes of the Eighth Meeting of
the Joint Committee on Information Technology
for the Social Welfare Sector held at 9:30 a.m. on 1 August 2003**

Present: Mrs Carrie Lam (Chairperson)
Mr Sit Tung
Mr Alex Ma
Ms Peggy Leung
Mr Chan Wing-tai
Ms Christine Fang
Mr Leung Wai-fung, Joseph
Mr Kang Tsi-kit
Mr Chan Ping-cheong, Ashton (Secretary)

Absent with apology: Mr Chong Chan-yau

In attendance: Mr Li Kam-chiu
Mr Kok Che-leung
Mr Eric Chan
Miss Mina Chow
Mr John Fung
Miss Johanna Tsao (for agenda items 3, 4, 5 & 6)
Mr Fu Tsun-hung (for agenda items 3, 4, 5 & 6)
Mr Lo Yiu-man, Joseph (for agenda item 3 only)
Mr Yuen Kin-ming (for agenda item 3 only)
Mr Wu Kwok-ming, Peter (for agenda item 3 only)
Mr Kwok Tik-lun (for agenda item 3 only)
Mr Chan Kwok-wing (for agenda item 4 only)
Mr Chan Lok-gee, Karl (for agenda item 4 only)
Ms Lilian Law (for agenda item 4 only)
Mr Stephen Law (for agenda item 4 only)
Ms Nancy Ling (for agenda item 4 only)
Ms Shirley Kiang (for agenda item 6 only)
Ms Ruby Ng (for agenda item 7 only)

Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Chairperson reported that the draft minutes of the meeting were sent to Members for comments on 7 May 2003. Two minor factual amendments had been received and incorporated into the revised minutes. With a further amendment by adding the name of Ms Peggy Leung to the present list, the revised minutes were confirmed.

Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Last Meeting

Paragraphs 4 - 8

2. The Chairperson informed Members that the progress on the implementation of the Core Applications of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) had been set out in Paper JC 10/03 and would be discussed under agenda item 5. Upon invitation of the Chairperson, Mr Alex Ma reported that HKCSS had met him twice to discuss the use of an e-leave application developed by the Information Technology Services Department (ITSD). HKCSS was studying the technical specification of the e-leave application and examining its usage for NGOs in the social welfare sector. Mr John Fung supplemented that the assessment result would be ready by end of August 2003. Should the application be found useful for NGOs, Mr Alex Ma advised that ITSD would seek approval from CITB for using this e-leave application by NGOs in the social welfare sector.

[Post-meeting Note: The HKCSS has completed the mini-feasibility study on the application of the e-leave system developed by ITSD for NGOs.]

Paragraph 13

3. In response to Mr Chong Chan-yau's suggestion in the last meeting, the Chairperson reported that a review on the IT strategy for the social welfare sector had been set out in Paper JC 13/03 and would be discussed under agenda item 8.

Paragraphs 15 – 57

4. The Chairperson reported that SWD had written to the Hong Kong Red Cross, Tsung Tsin Mission of Hong Kong Social Service Division and Christian Family Service Centre to convey Members' comments on their BIP proposals and all of them agreed to our recommendations. At the meeting on 12 June 2003,

LFAC endorsed LF grants to the NGOs concerned as recommended by JCIT. As for the proposal of the Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council (NAAC), the agency had submitted supplementary information which had been circulated to Members for further consideration. With Members' unanimous support, the proposal of NAAC was put up to LFAC for funding consideration and was approved in line with JCIT's recommendation at the meeting of 12 June 2003.

Paragraph 58

5. In respect of the NGO CIS, the Chairperson reported that a progress report had been set out in Paper JC 13/03 and would be discussed under agenda item 7.

Business Improvement Projects

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

Experience Sharing of the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong in Implementing a Knowledge Management System

7. The Chairperson welcomed Ms Lilian Law, Assistant Director; Mr Chan Kwok-wing, Supervisor; Mr Chan Lok-gee, Karl, IT Development officer; Mr Stephen Law and Ms Nancy Ling, Agency's Consultants of the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong (BGCA) to give a presentation to Members on their experience in implementing a knowledge management (KM) system supported by this Committee in March 2002. The KM was demonstrated and discussed in the meeting. Members considered that the evaluation result on the system would shed light on the future applications of KM.

(Ms Lilian Law, Mr Chan Kwok-wing, Mr Chan Lok-gee, Karl, Mr Stephen Law, and Ms Nancy Ling left the meeting at this juncture.)

Progress Report of the implementation of the Core Applications on Human Resource Management and Financial Management for Non-governmental Organisations

8. The Chairperson referred Members to Paper JC 10/03 on the progress report of the Core Applications development by HKCSS which was a summary of recent development on the tendering process. Members made no further comment on the progress.

Third Progress Report on the Information Technology Resources Centre

9. The Chairperson referred Members to Paper JC 11/03 on the third progress report of the Information Technology Resource Centre (ITRC) of which LFAC had advised vigorous monitoring and evaluation. A replacement sheet was tabled to supersede paragraph 12 of the Paper.

10. Mr John Fung agreed to the views and suggestions as set out in the Paper. He clarified that in addition to those mentioned in their report, ITRC had in fact been involved in some other R&D works, the outcome of which could only be shared with NGOs at a later stage when more concrete findings were available. With regard to the sustainability of ITRC on the expiration of the three-year project period in May 2004, ITRC had started re-examining its position in providing IT services to NGOs in the social welfare sector in view of the maturity of IT supply in the open market.

11. For Members' information on the issue of sustainability of ITRC, the Chairperson recapitulated that the IT supplies function was not regarded as an essential function for forming ITRC in its original proposal. In addition, the most needed research and development function had already been subsumed under one of the core businesses of HKCSS. Since service vendors in the market had become mature enough to provide adequate IT supplies services to NGOs in the sector, ITRC should re-examine its provision of IT supplies services. To this end, the Chairperson reminded that the notion of sustainability of ITRC should be viewed in a wider perspective by taking into account the distinct services provided by ITRC to the sector and the service quality of IT vendors in the market so that ITRC would not be deemed as competing with the private market with the use of public fund. Mr John Fung agreed that ITRC should not put much emphasis on IT supplies. However, by running the procurement services for NGOs, ITRC had developed some linkages with a few service vendors who would in turn provide special offer for NGOs in the sector.

12. In response to the Chairperson's enquiry on the relatively low utilisation

of on-site maintenance service, Mr John Fung said that more NGOs were willing to employ internal IT support staff to take charge of regular maintenance of IT facilities of their organisations. In response to this trend, ITRC had started organising sharing sessions for IT staff of NGOs. The need of NGOs had in general migrated from infrastructure setup to maintenance and support, while some had even moved to a higher level of system consultation.

13. Pertaining to Mr John Fung's observation on NGOs' internal IT support, the Chairperson said that such redeployment of resources for internal IT support had been made possible upon the implementation of the Lump Sum Grant subvention in these two years. It would be worthwhile conducting a sector-wide stock-taking exercise on internal IT staff support in NGOs in the social welfare sector to verify the long held assumption that majority of NGOs were in need of external IT assistance. The result of the exercise would provide a concrete base for planning the next stage of IT strategy.

14. Mr Joseph Leung said that some local universities were willing to provide free service to NGOs like data mining. While recognizing such as being valuable resources, the Chairperson shared an experience that free service provided by a university was of very limited scope. Mr John Fung revealed that some local universities had formed subsidiary companies to conduct IT-related business in competition with other service vendors in the market. The part of free service would therefore be confined to a limited scope, e.g. early stage of consultation. He pointed out that it might be more useful to tap the assistance of individual lecturers or professionals instead.

15. In response to Mr Joseph Leung's question on the nature of hotline calls, Mr John Fung replied that majority were related to issues of software developed by HKCSS. In order to make effective use of other community resources, such as IT EasyLink Service, ITRC had referred out some general enquiries on hardware and software to other resource hotlines in the community.

Progress Report of a Client Information System (CIS) for Family Services Centres Operated by NGOs

16. The Chairperson referred Members to Paper JC 12/03 on the progress report of NGO CIS in the past several months. She highlighted that the update was on the business side of NGO CIS while Members had been well informed of

the IT side of the project in previous meetings. In the Review of Family Services, it was suggested that service rationalisation should precede computerisation. Early re-engineering of family services was found conducive to a successful and cost-effective CIS as the rolling out of integrated family service centres (IFSC) would involve a number of issues in relocation, reprovisioning and merging of service units. Ultimately, it would increase the number of users of NGO CIS as IFSC should have more professional workers than that of existing family services centres. As a means to encourage NGOs to start forming their IFSC in due course, the recurrent cost of NGO CIS would be considered as a legitimate resource requirement of IFSC of individual NGOs in the pooling exercise albeit no additional funding would be injected. This would help ease the earlier concern expressed by some NGOs about the recurrent expenses arising from CIS. Members noted and raised no questions on the implementation progress set out in the Paper.

Review of IT Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector

17. The Chairperson referred Members to Paper JC 13/03 on the review of IT strategy for the social welfare sector, and revealed that about \$200 million had been injected into IT related initiatives in the sector upon the implementation of IT strategy in 2001. There was a need to map out the next stage of IT strategy with views and contributions from Members as well as NGOs. In taking through a more comprehensive review on the IT strategy, it would be necessary to organise a sector-wide seminar on the use of IT in the sector to enable stakeholders to review and revisit what have been done as well as to give views on mapping out the next stage. Initially, it was considered appropriate to shift the focus of investment from IT awareness and infrastructure setup in the early stage to computer application and innovative use of IT in specific service delivery. Along with service re-engineering in recent years, there was a growing need for developing IT applications to streamline and facilitate service provision to customers, such as integrated community services for the elderly in particular.

18. In response to Mr Chan Wing-tai's enquiry on the experience sharing among NGOs in developing their IT initiatives, Mr Sit Tung anticipated that a few NGOs supported by LF grants to implement IT initiatives would be ready to share their experience by end of this year after a period of smooth running of the applications.

19. Mr Chan Wing-tai further suggested drawing overseas experience in formulating the second stage of IT strategy. The Chairperson said that the 7th International Conference of Human Services Information Technology Applications (HUSITA 7) was originally scheduled for August 2003 in Hong Kong, but due to the recent outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic, it had been postponed to August 2004.

20. Mr TK Kang agreed that it would be about time for JCIT as well as NGOs to share what had been accomplished in recent years before taking forward the next stage of IT strategy. It would be appropriate to encourage NGOs to actively participate in the process by getting them prepared for the upcoming sector-wide review.

21. Ms Christine Fang said that ITRC would be ready to discuss with SWD in preparing for the sector-wide review on the strategy. Mr Chan Wing-tai suggested ITRC to organise some brain-storming sessions for NGOs so as to get them ready to express their views actively. Mr John Fung said that ITRC would consider arranging such sessions.

22. Ms Christine Fang enquired if ITSD could share the Government's experience in implementing IT strategy for different sectors in the community, which would serve as good reference for the social welfare sector. Mr Alex Ma agreed to the suggestion and would arrange his colleagues to participate in preparing the seminar.

23. Upon the Chairperson's invitation, Mr Joseph Leung and Mr Chan Wing-tai agreed to join the task group to be set up to organise the large-scale seminar in early 2004, with input from ITRC and ITSD. The Chairperson said during the course of preparation for the seminar, some relevant personnel in the IT industry and others could be co-opted to the task group to give advice on reviewing the IT strategy of the social welfare sector and organising the seminar.

Any Other Business

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

Social Welfare Department
August 2003