**Minutes of the Ninth Meeting of
the Joint Committee on Information Technology
for the Social Welfare Sector held at 4:15 p.m. on 1 June 2004**

Present: Mr Paul Tang   (Chairperson)
                   Mrs Agnes Allcock
                   Mr Sit Tung
                   Mr Alex Ma
                   Prof. Chan Wing-tai
                   Ms Christine Fang
                   Mr Leung Wai-fung, Joseph
                   Mr Kang Tsi-kit
                   Mr Lam Bing-chun   (Secretary)

Absent with apology: Ms Peggy Leung
                              Mr Chong Chan-yau

In attendance: Mr Li Kam-chiu
                   Mr Kok Che-leung
                   Ms Gladys Tsui
                   Mr John Fung
                   Miss Ann Hon
                   Mr Fu Tsun-hung
                   Ms Shirley Kiang
                   Mr Edmond Keung   (for agenda item 4 only)
                   Ms Yue Mui-ying   (for agenda item 7 only)
                   Ms Connie Kwan   (for agenda item 7 only)
                   Ms Louise Chan   (for agenda item 7 only)

Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting

       The <u>Chairperson</u> reported that the draft minutes of the 8th meeting were sent to Members for comments on 8 October 2003. Two proposed amendments had been received and incorporated into the revised minutes, which were confirmed in the meeting without further amendment.

Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Last Meeting

<u>Paragraph 2</u>

2.   The Hong Kong Council of Social Service (HKCSS) had completed the

mini-feasibility study on the application of the e-leave system developed by the Information Technology Services Department (ITSD) to non-governmental organizations (NGOs).   Ms Shirley Kiang said that the result of the mini-feasibility study on the application of the e-leave system and the pre-requisites for NGOs to use the system were set out in the progress report of Information Technology Resource Centre (ITRC) attached to Paper JC 4/04. ITRC would collaborate with ITSD to conduct a presentation of the e-leave system to interested NGOs.

[Post meeting note:
The former Information Technology Services Department was renamed as the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer by merging its functions and the information technology (IT)-related divisions of the Communications and Technology Branch of the Commerce, Industry and Technology Bureau with effect from 1 July 2004.   The presentation was held on 15 July 2004 in the HKCSS to more than 200 NGO representatives.]

Paragraph 33

3.   Mr Sit Tung informed Members that a blueprint for the formation of the integrated family service centre (IFSC) had been set out upon the completion of the pilot project of IFSC in March 2004.   The Social Welfare Department (SWD) had been reviewing the cost implications for extending the Client Information System (CIS) to the NGO IFSCs based on the findings and recommendations of the Mini Feasibility Study on the CIS for Family Services Centres in the Subvented Sector (Mini-FS).   SWD would convene a meeting at working level with the NGOs concerned in June 2004.   Following that, agency heads' views would be sought on their commitment to the recurrent cost.   Subject to their commitment, SWD would proceed with the funding application for extending the CIS to NGO IFSCs in October 2004.

[Post meeting note: The meeting with NGO representatives at working level was held on 14 July 2004.   The bases for apportioning the recurrent cost for running the CIS were agreed upon.]

4.   The meeting also noted that the implementation of CIS for NGO IFSCs would be issued for open tendering.

Paragraph 34 – 40

5.   The Chairperson reported that the Sector-wide Seminar on Promoting the Use of IT in the Social Welfare Sector was held on 5 March 2004.   About 370 participants attended the Seminar and provided positive feedback.   An evaluation report on the seminar had been sent to Members.   The Chairperson thanked

Members for their participation in the Task Group and the Sector-wide Seminar.

Business Improvement Projects

6.   Mr Lam Bing-chun, the Secretary, reported the progress on the vetting of the 3rd batch BIP proposals.   Referring to Paper JC 5/04 on a summary of the 19 applications submitted in the 3rd batch BIP Scheme, Mr Lam highlighted that 11 NGOs had applied to join the CAP, including one application on HRM, four on FM and six on both.   These 11 applications would be discussed in the next JCIT meeting.

7.   Mr Lam revealed that three BIP proposals would not be supported.   Of the remaining five applications, the proposal of the Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong (BGCA) on a Local Service Needs Assessment and Prospecting System and the proposal of the Po Leung Kuk would be discussed under a separate agenda item in this meeting while the other three proposals would be considered in the next JCIT meeting after seeking clarifications with the applicant NGOs.

8.   In response to Mr Alex Ma's enquiry, Mr Lam Bing-chun clarified that the vetting of the 3rd batch BIP applications was based on the current IT Strategy. Mr Kang Tsi-kit enquired about the quality of the BIP proposals in the 3rd batch application.   Mr Kok Che-leung said that SWD had provided guidelines to facilitate NGOs in preparing their BIP proposals in a prescribed format with a comprehensive coverage including project objectives, technical options, cost and benefit comparison, project monitoring and schedule, etc.   In general, the quality of the proposals in the 3rd batch had improved and the presentation was more systematic.   However, some proposals were still flimsy in content.   Mr Sit Tung supplemented that the quality of the proposals varied from agency to agency. Regarding unsuccessful applications, SWD would suggest areas for improvement for the reference of the relevant NGOs.

(Ms Christine Fang, Mr John Fung and Ms Shirley Kiang joined the meeting at this juncture.)

9.   In response to Prof. Chan Wing-tai's enquiry, Mr John Fung said that NGOs would consult them before submitting their applications in relation to the CAP.

10.   After discussion, Members agreed to the recommendations proposed in the Paper.   The Chairperson concluded that SWD would write to the three NGOs to explain why their applications had been rejected.   These NGOs could revisit their proposals and submit fresh or revised applications in the future rounds of BIP

applications.

11.   At the meeting, Members deliberated two BIP proposals and offered their advice for processing them further.

IT Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector

12.   Referring to Paper JC 2/04 on the IT Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector, <u>Mr Sit Tung</u> summarized that the current IT Strategy was considered a pertinent guide for the NGOs to exploit IT to underpin their corporate governance and business mission. There were divided views on setting out an IT development roadmap for the sector with SWD taking a leading role. Some opined that NGOs should assume full autonomy in laying down their organisational IT strategy. It was further proposed that ITRC might consider developing templates to assist NGOs in this task.

13.   Regarding replacement of personal computers (PCs) funded previously by Lotteries Fund (LF), Mr Sit Tung said that NGOs should try to resolve this through flexible re-deployment of their own resources.

14.   Support for IT initiatives to bridge the digital divide for elders, disabled persons and disadvantaged individuals should continue subject to availability of resources and the merits of individual proposals.

15.   On application systems, NGOs considered that the future focus should be on service delivery. It was suggested that a portal site be developed as a platform for NGOs and SWD to share information. While the suggestion was considered worth pursuing, it would be necessary to conduct a feasibility study to objectively assess the costs and benefits. In view of the implementation of CIS for SWD and the proposed NGO IFSCs, the earliest time for conducting the feasibility study would be early 2006.

16.   Lastly, regarding humanware, <u>Mr Sit</u> said that most of the NGOs had deployed social workers and administrative/clerical staff to oversee IT management and development. NGOs considered it necessary for further development on humanware and that it would be desirable for agency administrators to lay down relevant human resource management strategy.

17.   <u>Mr Alex Ma</u> suggested supporting IT infrastructure which would upkeep and accelerate NGOs' IT development. <u>Mr Sit Tung</u> said that currently infrastructural upgrading would be considered if it was part and parcel of NGOs' proposals for developing application systems under BIP. To make best use of resources, requests for infrastructure upgrade alone would not be considered. <u>Mr</u>

Ma wondered if the existing mechanism of setting a funding ceiling for individual NGOs in BIP applications could help contain the financial burden. Mr Sit explained that the ceiling was only an indicative figure and that all applications should be considered on individual case basis.

18.   Prof. Chan Wing-tai asked if it was possible for JCIT to support IT related proposals in principle but encourage NGOs concerned to look for alternative funding support. Mr Sit explained that it would be outside the ambit of JCIT.

19.   Ms Christine Fang enquired if it was possible to use the block grant under LF for replacement of PCs. Mr John Fung estimated that the financial implication was around 14 million per year for the PCs replacement exercise. The Chairperson cautioned that PC replacement would unlikely be a priority for LFAC when compared with other funding applications.

20.   In response to Ms Christine Fang's enquiry on NGO CIS, Mr Sit Tung recapitulated that it had been agreed in the past JCIT meetings that participating NGOs should shoulder the recurrent cost of NGO CIS. Mrs Agnes Allcock supplemented that the user-pay principle should be adopted in NGO CIS under the lump sum grant spirit. Upon Mrs Agnes Allcock's enquiry, Mr Alex Ma clarified that the Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF) was open for application for innovative IT projects with one-time grant. Recurrent cost would not be supported.

21.   In response to Ms Christine Fang's worry that some NGOs might not join the NGO CIS due to financial consideration, Mrs Allcock reiterated that NGOs needed to re-prioritise the use of their resources and identify savings to meet the recurrent cost of CIS. The Chairperson stressed the importance of identifying savings in the computerization process. Quoting the successful example of starting the use of broadband Internet connection in the sector by providing funding for three years, Mr John Fung suggested similar incentive be considered. The Chairperson said that SWD would discuss the issues with the participating NGOs and explore options for the implementation of NGO CIS.

22.   Ms Christine Fang appreciated that the NGOs' suggestion of setting up a portal site would be pursued. Instead of conducting a feasibility study in early 2006, Ms Fang proposed that ITRC could start conceiving the framework of the portal site for JCIT's consideration earlier. Ms Fang also informed Members that ITRC was working on a plan to support NGOs to develop their own IT Strategy for consideration by JCIT.

23.   Mr Sit Tung appreciated Members' support for setting up a portal site but reiterated that it would be difficult to advance the time table for this project in view

of the department's commitment to extend CIS to NGO IFSCs and the need to conduct internal service re-engineering.

24.   <u>Mr Kang Tsi-kit</u> viewed that NGOs, especially the smaller ones, might need help to achieve a certain level of IT development by setting a baseline.   He stressed support from their management was essential in NGOs' IT development. <u>Ms Christine Fang</u> concurred that a baseline be set for NGOs to achieve in IT development and to promote synergy amongst NGOs.   She suggested setting out the objectives for the sector to achieve in the IT Strategy with a definite timeline, for example, in two years' time.

25.   <u>Prof. Chan Wing-tai</u> suggested that measures be taken to boost the use of IT, for example, SWD might consider allowing only those NGOs participating in the NGO CIS project to operate IFSCs.   <u>The Chairperson</u> explained that it was not appropriate to set the use of IT as a pre-requisite for running such services.   He concluded that it would be more appropriate to promote the use of IT in the sector through encouragement as NGOs' autonomy in developing IT at their own pace had to be respected.

26.   <u>Prof. Chan Wing-tai</u> opined that sharing of knowledge and information was important for IT development in the sector, but it was crucial to generate synergy among NGOs through different sharing platforms.   <u>Mr Sit Tung</u> revealed that focus group members had suggested ITRC to consider further strengthening its role of facilitating NGOs to share experiences and knowledge in IT development. <u>Mr John Fung</u> said that ITRC had organised different sharing forums, including the 7th International Conference of Human Services Information Technology Application (HUSITA 7), IT seminars and setting up a technical exchange group for the IT staff of NGOs.   Subject to the availability of manpower and resources, ITRC would arrange regular meetings for middle management of NGOs to focus on organisational IT policy and management.

27.   <u>Miss Ann Hon</u> pointed out that small NGOs would need to change their culture in using IT.   <u>Mr John Fung</u> agreed that small NGOs might encounter difficulties and needed more support from ITRC.   <u>Mr Kang</u> echoed that the creation of a list of NGOs' websites might motivate individual NGOs to set up their own websites.

28.   <u>The Chairperson</u> thanked for Members' ideas and concluded that effort would be made to promote the use of IT in the welfare sector.   <u>Mr Sit Tung</u> supplemented that SWD would incorporate Members' ideas and prepare a paper on IT Strategy for Members to endorse in the next meeting.

Progress Report on the Implementation of the Core Applications Development

Project on Human Resource Management and Financial Management for Non-governmental Organisations (CAP)

29.   Referring to Paper JC 3/04, <u>Mr John Fung</u> briefed Members the progress of the CAP.   There was a slippage of project schedule due to change in PCCW project team members and the project management approach.   The fact that user acceptance test for some NGOs clashed with NGOs' auditing period had caused further delay.   A revised schedule had been worked out with all participating NGOs.   The HRM system for one NGO had already been rolled out. Presently, only one NGO opted for the "Product and Service" option.   ITRC was supporting it in handling the contractual issues with the vendor.

30.   In response to Mr Joseph Leung's enquiry, <u>Mr John Fung</u> agreed to arrange presentation on the CAP system in JCIT meeting.

31.   In response to Mr Sit Tung's enquiry, <u>Mr John Fung</u> replied that they would like to start implementing the 3rd batch CAP as soon as possible.   There was some cash flow problem due to the delay of the 1st and 2nd batches.   Although PCCW should be held responsible for the problem, it had put extra manpower to remedy the situation.   The Project Steering Committee of CAP decided not to take legal action for the time being but reserve such right in order not to jeopardize the revised project schedule.

(Ms Christine Fang and Mr Edmond Keung left the meeting at this juncture.)

Progress Report on the Information Technology Resource Centre

32.   <u>Mr John Fung</u> referred Members to Paper JC 4/04 for details of the progress of ITRC.   He conveyed Ms Christine Fang's clarification that the accumulated revenue of $5.16M had just slightly exceeded the original estimate of $4.7M for the period.   ITRC just started its self-financing operation from 1 June 2004.   He shared that ITRC mainly served the small and medium size NGOs in the past three years.   As most of them had a limited budget for IT services, it might be difficult for ITRC to sustain continuous business growth in future.   On the other hand, ITRC had become well versed with the service needs of NGOs, which was beneficial for ITRC's future development and service improvement. <u>Mr Fung</u> conveyed Ms Christine Fang's hearty thanks to SWD for its support to ITRC.   <u>Mr Sit Tung</u> suggested Mr Fung to consider mentioning the future operation mode of ITRC in the final evaluation report.

Any Other Business

33.   <u>Mr John Fung</u> reported the progress of HUSITA 7, of which SWD was one of the sponsors. The conference was postponed to August 2004 due to the outbreak of SARS last year. About 100 papers from 23 countries with different themes had been received, about 20% of which were from local organisations. HKCSS also considered convening a symposium on specific topics, such as electronic case management and GIS. In response to Prof. Chan Wing-tai's enquiry, <u>Mr Fung</u> supplemented that the symposium would be held during lunch time or after the routine programmes of the Conference.

34.   There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:18pm. The next meeting would tentatively be held in August 2004 with a date to be fixed.

[Post-meeting Note: Due to clash of time schedules among Members, the meeting has been rescheduled for 6 October 2004]

Social Welfare Department
August 2004