Minutes of the 21st Meeting of the
Joint Committee on Information Technology (JCIT)
for the Social Welfare Sector
Held on 11 January 2012

Present   : Mr Nip Tak-kuen, Patrick   (Chairperson)
    Mr Fung Pak-yan
    Miss Sheila Kong
    Mr Tse Woon-por
    Mrs Leung Tsang Po-wan, Paula
    Dr John Fung
    Mr James Leung
    Dr Edith Mok
    Dr Ting Wai-fong
    Dr Ng Nam
    Mr Kwong Chong-ki   (Secretary)

Absent with apologies : Prof Helen Meng
    Mr Man Hung-yee, Joseph
    Ms Patty Wong

In attendance   : Ms Lorensa Mak
    Mr Timothy Cheng
    Mr Leung Pui-kei
    Dr Wong Yu-cheung   (for agenda item 5 only)
    Prof David Cheung   (for agenda item 5 only)
    Dr Law Chi-kwong   (for agenda item 5 only)
    Mr Chan Chi-hung   (for agenda item 5 only)
    Mr Yang Ki   (for agenda item 5 only)
    Ms Rose Yu   (for agenda item 5 only)

Opening Remarks

The Chairperson extended welcome to all Members, in particular two new Members, Mr James Leung and Dr Ng Nam who replaced Mr Nigel Ma and Ir William Li respectively.   He thanked Mr Tse Woon-por for attending the meeting on behalf of Mr Pang Hon-chi who was engaged in another meeting. The Chairperson also introduced Miss Sheila Kong who had replaced Mr Fung Man-chung as Principal Social Work Officer (Information Systems and Technology).

Confirmation of Minutes of the Last Meeting

2.   The minutes of the 20th Meeting were confirmed without amendment.

Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Last Meeting

Paragraph 3: The Information Technology (IT)-related Business Improvement Projects (BIPs)

3.   The Secretary reported that as at January 2012, all IT-related BIPs had been completed, except the Human Resource Management System of the Hong Kong Society for the Protection of the Children. The System was still under implementation and its completion date would be deferred to mid-2012, i.e. a delay of half a year owing to staff change of the contractor.

Agenda Item 4 – Progress Update of the Review of the Information Technology Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector (Paper JC 2/12)

4.   The Chairperson proposed and Members agreed to discuss Agenda Items 4 and 5 first.

5.   At the invitation of the Chairperson, Miss Sheila Kong gave an update on the progress of the Review of Information Technology Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector (the Review) as depicted in the Paper JC 2/12.

6.   Upon Members' endorsement on the direction and way forward for the proposed Review at the last meeting, SWD secured the in-principle support from the Lotteries Fund Advisory Committee (LFAC) to use the Lotteries Fund (LF) grant to conduct the Review in July 2011. Under restrictive tendering, eight local tertiary academic institutes were invited to offer quotations for the Review in August 2011. After completion of the assessment of the technical and price proposals submitted by two academic institutes, SWD commissioned the Research Team of the Department of Social Work and Social Administration, the University of Hong Kong (the Research Team) to take up the Review in December 2011. As the cost required for the Review was confirmed, SWD would submit a formal application for allocation of the required funding in the upcoming LFAC meeting to be held on 12 January 2012.

7.   Regarding the scope, methodology and work schedule of the Review, Miss Sheila Kong remarked that the Research Team would give a detailed introduction under Agenda Item 5.

Agenda Item 5 – Presentation: The Scope, Methodology and Work Schedule of the Review of the Information Technology Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector

8. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the following representatives from the Research Team presented the scope, methodology and work schedule of the Review to Members vide their presentation slides:

      (a)   Team Leader: Dr Wong Yu-cheung
      (b)   Project Coordinator: Mr Chan Chi-hung
      (c)   Team Members: Prof David Cheung, Dr Law Chi-kwong, Mr Yang Ki and Ms Rose Yu

9. In response to the concern raised by Dr Edith Mok on the coverage of the Review, Dr Law Chi-kwong highlighted that only subvented NGOs would be covered in this Review and the Research Team would explore the IT needs of NGOs to facilitate the comprehensive review of the IT strategy for the Sector. The Chairperson supplemented that the subvented NGOs had made significant progress in both service delivery and IT aspects in the past years, while SWD, upon the launch of the Client Information System in 2010, was also reviewing and formulating the Departmental Information Technology Plan for the coming five years. The Chairperson expected that the Review would enable wider use of IT in the Sector, enhance effective and efficient information exchanges between the Sector and SWD, and improve IT accessibility to the welfare service recipients and disadvantaged individuals.

10. Dr Edith Mok echoed that the development of an electronic information exchange platform between NGOs and SWD was strongly required as the current information exchange process was time-consuming and labour intensive.

11. In relation to the concern raised by Dr Ting Wai-fong on the coverage of the case study, Dr Wong Yu-cheung clarified that the Research Team would conduct case study on nine subvented NGOs of different sizes and ten IT projects costing over $100,000 with the funding support from the BIP or Social Welfare Development Fund (SWDF).

12. With regard to NGOs' IT maturity raised by Dr Ting Wai-fong, Dr Law Chi-kwong agreed that for those NGOs which had not applied for any funding under the BIP or SWDF to implement IT-related projects, the Research Team should, under the Review, explore the underlying causes, their IT needs and limitations of using IT. The Research Team undertook to closely liaise with SWD and propose suitable arrangements to capture and collect the views of these NGOs.

13.   Dr Ng Nam opined that the IT Strategy should aim to promote the acceptance and awareness of IT within the Sector as well as the use of IT to improve NGOs' operational efficiency.   Regarding Dr Ng Nam's enquiry on the overseas experience to be covered in the literature review, Dr Law Chi-kwong confirmed that the Research Team would make reference to the similar reviews in UK and Australia as well as relevant studies reported by the international journals.

14.   In relation to the concern raised by Mr James Leung on the validity of the new IT Strategy, having regard to the rapid technological development and the change of service needs in the Sector, Dr Law Chi-kwong responded that the Review would both consider the continuity of the prevailing IT Strategy as well as the latest IT development and changes. Mr Timothy Cheng shared that, given the rapid changes in the technology and the business environment, it had been the current practice of the government departments to review their IT strategies / plans regularly. Fine-tuning of the IT strategy / plan would nevertheless be made as and when appropriate. Similarly, the new IT Strategy for the Social Welfare Sector could provide a direction in the IT development for NGOs while the JCIT would fine-tune the IT strategy in the light of the changes in the technological and business environments.

15.   Dr John Fung opined that the Research Team should recommend the frequency of review of the IT Strategy having regard to the technological change and service development of the Sector. In view of the international trend, he further suggested that the provision of IT training in the local institutes should dovetail with the IT development in the Sector. The Research Team should also make recommendations from both the macro and micro perspectives so that the use of IT in the Sector could meet the societal changes and agency needs.

16.   Towards the concern raised by Mrs Paula Leung on the follow-up of non-responsive NGOs during the survey, Dr Law Chi-kwong affirmed that the Research Team would make personal contacts with these NGOs to find out the reasons of non-response and would provide assistance as necessary. The response rate was expected to be over 50%. The Chairperson opined that the response rate would correlate with the design of the questionnaire and NGOs' knowledge about the background and objectives of the survey. He suggested the Research Team to arrange briefing for the concerned NGOs before conducting the survey and interviews. Dr Edith Mok proposed that the Research Team could conduct a trial run of the draft questionnaires for fine-tuning purpose. She further suggested that the Research Team could consider devising two sets of questionnaires with different levels of complexity for NGOs of different sizes and IT maturity levels.

17.   Mr Tse Woon-por shared that the Government had made significant development in the use of IT over the past ten years.   The new IT Strategy should take into account the varied levels of IT maturity and awareness among NGOs and devise feasible options to meet different IT needs.   Mr Timothy Cheng supplemented that the SWDF not only provided funding to NGOs for implementing IT projects, but also catered for the IT training needs of NGO staff.   NGOs could flexibly deploy their resources to meet their identified needs.   It was noted that many NGOs had already advanced from the stage of accessibility to the stage of the implementation of IT applications to improve their operational efficiency and service delivery.

18.   Dr Ting Wai-fong remarked that, to facilitate service planning and data sharing, the Research Team should also review the information exchange opportunity between NGOs and the government departments, in particular the data of the service users.   Mr James Leung echoed that the Research Team should explore the possibility of data / information / knowledge exchange among NGOs and SWD.   Prof David Cheung shared that the e-Health Record system was a good example to demonstrate the exchange of data / information amongst various stakeholders within the health sector.

19.   Dr Wong Yu-cheung thanked Members for the views and assured that the Research Team would take note and consider Members' comments and advice in conducting the Review.

20.   The Chairperson informed Members that the Research Team would, on the basis of the scope, methodology and work schedule of the Review endorsed by Members, formulate the Inception Report, i.e. the first deliverable of the Review.   The draft Inception Report would be completed in January 2012 and circulated for Members' consideration and endorsement.

(All the representatives of the Research Team left the Meeting at this juncture.)

21.   Miss Sheila Kong continued to take Members through the remaining part of the Paper JC 2/12 regarding the management of the Review, the proposed terms of reference and membership of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) and the Working Group (WG).

22.   The proposed terms of reference and membership of the PSC and WG were endorsed by Members.   The Information Systems and Technology Branch (ISTB) of SWD would extend official invitation to the recommended representatives to join the PSC and WG.

Agenda Item 3 – Progress Update of the IT-related Applications under Phase I of the Social Welfare Development Fund (SWDF) (Paper JC 1/12)

23.   The Chairperson invited Ms Lorensa Mak to update the progress of the IT-related applications under the Phase 1 of the SWDF as depicted in the Paper JC 1/12.

24.   Ms Lorensa Mak reported that 113 applications from NGOs, involving 233 IT-related projects, were vetted and supported by Members during the three rounds of application under the Phase 1 of the SWDF.   About $80 million were granted to the applications.   The 233 IT-related projects mainly fell into the categories of service delivery and capacity enhancement initiatives (65%), Website (16%), Human Resource Management System (11%) and Financial Management System (8%).   Amongst these 233 IT-related projects, 158 (68%) were new development projects while 75 (32%) were either re-development or enhancement projects.

25.   She further highlighted that as a monitoring mechanism, the applicant NGOs were required to submit to ISTB of SWD the progress reports at intervals and the final evaluation reports upon project completion.   By the end of 2011, progress reports of 140 IT-related projects were received.   Of these, 49 projects (35%) were on schedule while 91 projects (65%) encountered various degree of slippage for one reason or another.   The slippage reasons revealed that NGOs were in need of professional support and advice in project governance and management to complete their projects in an effective and efficient manner. With a view to enhancing the implementation framework of the SWDF before inviting applications for Phase 2, SWD would conduct a review in 2012. Meanwhile, ISTB would closely monitor the progress of the approved IT-related projects and provide timely advice and assistance to the concerned applicant NGOs.

26.   In response to Dr Ng Nam's enquiry on the difference in the number of IT projects in progress and the number of progress reports received, Ms Lorensa Mak explained that the approved IT projects started at different times and the applicant NGOs were only required to submit the progress report of each project amid individual approved implementation schedule.

27.   Regarding the concern raised by Dr Edith Mok on the difficulties encountered by NGOs in meeting the project schedule, Mr Timothy Cheng shared that the concerned NGOs might have made an aggressive project schedule without adequate contingency for unforeseen issues.   SWD would advise the applicant NGOs to propose a more realistic project schedule under the Phase 2 application.

28.   Mr James Leung enquired whether the recommendations made by the Research Team on the IT projects could be included in Phase 2 of the SWDF.

Ms Lorensa Mak responded that the Research Team's recommendations would be taken for reference as far as possible. Miss Sheila Kong supplemented that the review of SWDF, which aimed at enhancing the implementation framework, would be conducted shortly before the commencement of the Phase 2 applications. As regards the supported scopes of IT projects under the SWDF, SWD would keep in view the recommendations of the Review and make consequential updating if required. Mr Timothy Cheng added that SWD would make adjustments as and when appropriate during the SWDF application period to facilitate NGOs to secure the required funding to implement their projects.

29. With regard to the enquiry raised by Mrs Paula Leung on NGOs' concerns on humanware, Ms Lorensa Mak informed that the Research Team would also look into this area and make recommendations. Members also shared that there was a shortage of manpower supply in the IT industry currently.

30. Dr John Fung opined that system maintenance and support were another concern of NGOs after the production launch of IT systems. Mr Timothy Cheng advised that while the SWDF allowed NGOs to employ IT staff to help implement the IT projects, cloud service might be an option to address the issue especially for those small NGOs. However, the charging scheme of the cloud computing service would involve mainly recurrent expenses, which would not be supported by the SWDF and the LF at the moment.

31. The Chairperson expressed his gratitude to Members for their valuable contribution and assistance in vetting all the IT-related projects under Phase 1 of the SWDF.

Agenda Item 6 - Any Other Business

32. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m. The next meeting would be held in June 2012 to endorse the second project deliverable, i.e. Interim Report, of the Review.

Social Welfare Department
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