Report No. 52 of the Director of Audit — Chapter 6

PROVISION OF E-GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Summary

1. In November 1998, the Government launched the first Digital 21 Strategy which set out a programme of initiatives to make Hong Kong a leading digital city. In May 2001, an updated 2001 Digital 21 Strategy, with a main focus on developing e-government, was issued. In March 2004, the Government issued the 2004 Digital 21 Strategy where the focus on "publishing information online" and "enabling e-transactions" in the first wave of e-government was changed to "integrating and transforming e-services". Government bureaux/departments (B/Ds) were required to move from a government-centric way to a "whole-of-government" and customer-oriented approach in providing e-services. In July 2004, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) was formed to drive forward e-government and other IT-related policies and strategies. In September 2004, a high-level E-government Steering Committee (EGSC), chaired by the Financial Secretary, was formed to provide support for the e-government programme at the most senior level. The Audit Commission (Audit) has recently conducted a review of the OGCIO's effort in implementing e-government.

Strategy for developing e-government

2. ***Joining up government e-services.*** In March 2006, a Service Transformation Sub-Committee (STC) was set up to better engage B/Ds in proposing and prioritising service transformation initiatives. At the STC's first meeting held in March 2006, the OGCIO identified 18 joined-up service transformation initiatives. Up to December 2008, the number of service transformation initiatives remained at 18. *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) step up the OGCIO's efforts to strengthen its leadership role in identifying opportunities for providing more joined-up government e-services; and (b) consider reviewing regularly the Departmental IT Plans and Information System Strategy Plans prepared by B/Ds with a view to identifying service transformation initiatives.*

3. ***Channel management.*** The OGCIO originally planned to promulgate a channel management strategy by the third quarter of 2005. Up to December 2008, the channel management strategy had not yet been promulgated. *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should expedite the development of the channel*

management strategy and promulgate the strategy to migrate customers to the e-channel and rationalise the other service delivery channels.

4. ***E-government Steering Committee and Service Transformation Sub-Committee meetings.*** Up to January 2009, the EGSC and STC had convened twelve and seven meetings respectively. The EGSC only convened one meeting in 2008 and the STC has ceased to meet since January 2008. The OGCIO was reviewing the overall governance structure of e-government initiatives and revamping the role of the STC. *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) convene EGSC meetings regularly to discuss the progress of the development of e-government; and (b) expedite the review and revamp of the STC with a view to identifying an appropriate forum to pursue service transformation initiatives.*

Provision of e-options

5. ***E-options for government services.*** According to the surveys completed by the OGCIO in 2007 and 2008, the percentage of services amenable to the electronic mode of service delivery provided with e-options decreased from 91% in December 2006 to 87% in March 2008. A total of 113 services were not provided with e-options mainly due to legal or procedural requirements. The OGCIO found that there were measures to tackle the problems raised by B/Ds. However, the OGCIO had not taken follow-up actions with the B/Ds concerned. According to the 2008 survey, 211 services provided with e-options by individual B/Ds could be grouped under three common types. Dedicated website(s) as a one-stop entry point may be set up for access to these common services. *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) explore with the B/Ds concerned the feasibility of providing e-options for those services amenable to electronic mode of delivery currently without an e-option; and (b) consider setting up dedicated website(s) for access to e-government services common to a large number of B/Ds.*

6. ***Utilisation of e-government services.*** Notwithstanding that since July 2003, the Legislative Council Panel on Information Technology and Broadcasting has requested the Government to set reasonable and achievable utilisation targets for e-government services, B/Ds are not required to set such targets. *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) consider requiring B/Ds to set utilisation targets for their e-government services and formulate action plans for achieving them; and (b) require B/Ds to keep track of the utilisation figures and monitor the level of usage of e-government services.*

7. ***E-options for government bills and statements.*** All B/Ds have to indicate in the annual Departmental IT Projects Portfolio (DITPP) a time frame for providing an e-option for all government bills issued under their purview. Some B/Ds had not complied with the

requirement. Only 23% of B/Ds' bills/statements issued to the public were provided with an e-option. The OGCIO estimated that by 2011, about 90% of government bills/statements would be provided with an e-option. The take-up rates of e-options for certain types of government bills/statements were not satisfactory. In the case of e-bills/e-statements being developed by six major issuing B/Ds, only two B/Ds set targets for the take-up rates. *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) take effective measures to ensure that B/Ds indicate in the DITPPs the time frame for providing e-options for the bills/statements; (b) encourage B/Ds to accord priority to developing e-options for their bills/statements so as to expedite the rollout of the provision of e-options; and (c) require B/Ds to set targets for take-up rates of e-bills/e-statements.*

8.   ***E-options for government forms.***   Up to January 2009, only 2,286 (84%) of the 2,722 downloadable forms were available from the Government Forms website.   According to the 2008 survey, 1,336 forms were not provided with e-submission options mainly because of legal or procedural requirements or the requirement for submitting original documents together with the forms.   The OGCIO found that there were measures to tackle the issues. However, the OGCIO had not taken follow-up actions with the B/Ds concerned.   *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) ensure that B/Ds place all their forms on the Government Forms website; and (b) explore with the B/Ds concerned the feasibility of providing e-submission options to those forms currently without such options.*

Implementing and promoting GovHK

9.   ***Public-private partnership.***   The planned implementation dates of the public-private partnership (PPP) project milestones stated in the plan submitted to the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in March 2006 were not achieved.   *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should endeavour to take proactive action to expedite the introduction of PPP in the management and operation of selected service clusters of GovHK.*

10.   ***Rollout of GovHK services.***   Before new online services were added to the new GovHK portal, about 30 online services of various B/Ds were gradually reprovisioned from the Electronic Service Delivery portal to GovHK.   Six services were suspended for one to four days when they were reprovisioned to GovHK.   There were also delays of about three to seven months in the rollout of three new GovHK services.   *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should take necessary actions to ensure that in future: (a) suspension of services is kept to a minimum and actions are taken to mitigate the inconvenience to the public; and (b) new services are rolled out on schedule.*

11.   ***GovHK Business Plan.***   The planning period covered by the GovHK Business Plan was three years.   In the 2006-07 to 2008-09 Business Plan, some key deliverables were not specified and some performance targets were stated as "to be determined".   Up to December 2008, the Plan had not been updated and the missing information had still not been provided in it.   *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) update the Business Plan so that the missing information such as key deliverables and performance targets are provided in the Plan; and (b) in line with good practices, consider changing the Business Plan to a 3-year rolling plan which is reviewed and updated on an annual basis.*

12.   ***Cluster management.***   In some cases, problems were encountered when B/Ds were invited to take up cluster ownership.   The difficulties were mainly financial, and shortage of staff and relevant expertise.   *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should take effective measures to address the concerns of B/Ds in taking up cluster ownership.*

13.   ***User satisfaction survey.***   In March 2008, a consultant completed a user satisfaction survey of GovHK.   Overall, 87% of the respondents liked GovHK.   95% indicated that they would use GovHK in the future.   However, only 56% of the respondents agreed that the GovHK portal design catered for different users' needs, and only 44% of the respondents agreed that the feature articles of GovHK attracted them to visit the portal regularly.   Only about 40% of the target users visited GovHK, and regular users of GovHK represented 4% of the respondents only.   *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) conduct user satisfaction surveys on GovHK regularly and take measures to improve GovHK with a view to enhancing the satisfaction level of the users; and (b) fine-tune the promotion and publicity activities where necessary to increase user awareness.*

Project governance

14.   ***Project governance mechanism.***   With effect from 1 April 2006, an enhanced project governance mechanism was promulgated to strengthen the OGCIO's role in the governance of project implementation.   In order to monitor the progress and expenditure position of projects, the OGCIO prepares Quarterly Progress and Expenditure Review (QPER) reports for review by the Administrative Computer Projects Committee.   Audit examination of QPER reports for the period January 2006 to June 2008 and the OGCIO's Controlling Officer's Reports for 2004 to 2008 revealed that: (a) 44% to 75% of the on-going major projects experienced slippages; (b) on-going block vote projects with slippages ranged from 6% to 35%; and (c) the percentage of projects completed on schedule decreased from 57.1% in 2004 to 43.2% in 2008.   *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) closely monitor the slippage of e-government projects; and (b) when the situation warrants, take prompt actions to address the problem.*

15.   ***Project risk profile assessment.***   Under the enhanced project governance mechanism, projects are classified into five categories, namely Tier 1, Tier 2(a), Tier 2(b), Tier 3(a) and Tier 3(b) according to the cost involved and the risk level as determined by the project risk profile assessment.   For Tier 1 and Tier 2 projects, the OGCIO had not laid down guidelines on the methodology for the quarterly risk profile assessment performed at the project implementation stage.   The risk factors considered and the justifications for arriving at the assessed risk level were not documented.   For Tier 3 projects, the OGCIO used different assessment methodologies for different quarters.   *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) consider devising a project risk profile assessment scheme for the project implementation stage; and (b) document the risk factors considered and the justifications for arriving at the assessed risk level.*

16.   ***Post implementation evaluation mechanism.***   A Post Implementation Departmental Return (PIDR) consists of three parts which are to be completed by the relevant user B/D, the policy bureau and the OGCIO respectively.   As at 31 December 2008, of the 295 PIDRs due for submission in 2008, 119 (40%) were outstanding.   Of the 119 outstanding PIDRs, 72 (61%) were not submitted by user B/Ds, 29 (24%) were pending policy bureaux' completion, and 18 (15%) were pending OGCIO's completion.   No Post Implementation Review (PIR) was conducted by the OGCIO in the past ten years despite the fact that there were projects with significant slippages.   *Audit has recommended that the Government Chief Information Officer should: (a) take proactive action to remind user B/Ds and policy bureaux to submit PIDRs in a timely manner; (b) process PIDRs received promptly; and (c) conduct PIRs for projects which experienced significant problems during their implementation.*

Response from the Administration

17.   The Government Chief Information Officer accepts the audit recommendations.

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