

CS visits Legal Aid Department

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, visited the Legal Aid Department today (July 23) to learn more about the work of the department and meet its staff.

Mr Cheung started his visit by meeting the Director of Legal Aid, Mr Thomas Kwong, and other senior officers of the department. They shared with Mr Cheung the services provided to the public, the work of various divisions and the challenges ahead.

Accompanied by Mr Kwong, Mr Cheung toured the Legal and Management Support (LMS) Section under the Policy and Administration Division. The LMS Section is mainly responsible for providing information technology and management support to the department, assessing bills of costs submitted by assigned lawyers, attending legal aid taxation hearings and conducting enforcement proceedings for the recovery of judgment debts and costs in legally aided cases.

Mr Cheung then visited the Litigation Division to find out more about the litigation services provided for aided persons whose cases have been assigned in-house. At the Crime Section, he was briefed on the processing of criminal legal aid applications and handling of criminal litigation, and the operation of the Remote Official Visit System. The System allows the officers to interview inmates at the Lai Chi Kok Reception Centre through a video conferencing system in the interview room.

He was also given a tour of the Application and Processing Division to understand how the front-line staff of the Information and Application Services Unit met with the public and handled their enquiries on matters related to the procedures for applying for legal aid. He received a briefing from officers on the processing of legal aid applications and the assessment of applicants' eligibility for civil legal aid on the basis of prescribed means and merits tests.

The responsibilities for formulating legal aid policy and housekeeping the department have been transferred to the Chief Secretary for Administration's Office since July 1, 2018.

Mr Cheung emphasised that legal aid services are the cornerstone of the rule of law in Hong Kong. He thanked the department for its efforts in providing quality legal aid services to the public as well as its commitment to ensuring that any person who has reasonable grounds for taking or defending a legal action will not be denied access to justice because of a lack of means. He was pleased to note that the department has also been working closely with the legal profession and other stakeholders with a view to enhancing its legal aid services. He encouraged colleagues of the Legal Aid Department to keep up their professionalism and dedication to serve the public.