

LCQ3: Electronic service systems of the Government and public organisations

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Lo Wai-kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Innovation, Technology and Industry, Professor Sun Dong, in the Legislative Council today (May 8):

Question:

The 2023 Policy Address has announced the establishment of the Digital Policy Office (DPO) by merging the existing Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) and the Efficiency Office. On the other hand, it has been reported that recently, system launch failures occurred one after another for electronic service systems of the Government and public organisations (including the mobile applications "Check-in Smart (HKDSE)" and "i-Invigilation (HKDSE)" of the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, as well as the intelligent sports and recreation services booking and information system "SmartPLAY" of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department), and the relevant organisations would usually explain afterwards that system failures were due to system overload caused by a login traffic far exceeding the expected level during testing. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the existing OGCIO or DPO to be established will, in the light of the expected number of users and the scale of different electronic service system projects of the Government and public organisations, improve the relevant practice guidelines and enhance monitoring by, for example, (i) requiring the contractors concerned to conduct various levels of load and extreme testing and even requiring the engagement of an independent third party for evaluation; (ii) including the past performance of contractors as one of the criteria for tender assessment; and (iii) specifying an incentive and penalty mechanism in the tenders; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as there are views that with the progressive integration of cities in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), the development of the event economy in Hong Kong will induce more non-Hong Kong residents to register or purchase tickets for participation in various activities through electronic service systems of the Government, whether the authorities will consider commissioning the system contractors concerned to launch, in collaboration with large-scale electronic service providers in GBA, the relevant electronic service systems applicable in GBA, so as to achieve the complementarity of advantages; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as there are views pointing out that the co-hosting of the 15th National Games by Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao in 2025 will pose greater challenges

to cross-boundary interconnectivity in the flow of people, goods, capital and information amongst the three places, and the relevant government electronic service systems (including ticketing systems) must measure up to higher requirements, whether the authorities will expeditiously step up communication and collaboration with the relevant Mainland and Macao authorities and formulate plans to cope with the situation in case of failures of the relevant systems; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB), my reply to the three parts of the question is as follows:

(1) The government information technology (IT) projects mainly serve to meet the service needs of individual departments. Hence, these IT projects are spearheaded by responsible bureaux and departments (B/Ds) to ensure that the development and operation of the systems cater for respective B/Ds' policies and the needs of their public service recipients. To instil greater public confidence in the Government's implementation of digital services, the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) has since end-2023 strengthened its support to the B/Ds in respect of their governance of IT projects at different levels, by enhancing the departments' risk management mechanism concerning the initiation, development and rollout of the electronic service systems, in order to further improve the stability and security of e-government systems. The support measures include requiring the B/Ds to raise the weighting of technical assessments in tender marking schemes to 70 per cent when procuring system development services for large-scale or high-risk IT projects, and to conduct third-party independent test before launching electronic services to assess system resilience to abnormal or extreme loading as well as cyberattacks.

The recent hiccups in the performance of IT systems upon rollout by individual public bodies show that besides government departments, public bodies must also plan carefully and conduct sufficient testing before launching public-facing electronic services to ensure the secure and stable operation of the system. The OGCIO is actively examining appropriate guidelines and technical support to the B/Ds to strengthen their governance of new IT systems launched by public bodies within their purview, including adequate testing before system rollout.

We are seeking the views and necessary approval of the Legislative Council on the establishment of the Digital Policy Office, which is expected to be in place in mid-2024. This office will continue to undertake the existing functions and work of the OGCIO, including the above-mentioned support to the B/Ds in the governance of their own IT systems projects as well as those of the public bodies under their policy oversight. It will also strengthen its function to steer and guide the B/Ds in responding to the needs and expectations of society in an appropriate manner as we take forward

implementation of electronic government services.

(2) According to information provided by the CSTB, there are at present different service systems in the local market, such as the Urban Ticketing System (URBTIX) operated by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and some privately-run systems, for event organisers to select the suitable ticketing arrangement in light of their programmes, activities and sales strategies. The URBTIX provides a wide range of ticketing channels (including box offices and self-service kiosks, booking hotlines and 24-hour online and mobile application ticketing services) and a variety of electronic payment methods (including credit card, debit card, UnionPay card, Octopus, Alipay, WeChat Pay and the Faster Payment System) to facilitate purchase of ticket by the public and tourists, including tourists from Mainland cities in the Greater Bay Area. Tourists from different places can opt for ticket delivery to the Mainland and overseas, or collect them at the URBTIX box offices/self-service kiosks before the performance, after purchasing the tickets online or through mobile application of URBTIX. E-tickets are also available for individual programmes. Some organisers of programmes held in Hong Kong also choose to sell tickets through Mainland sales channels, including online ticketing systems and travel websites.

In addition, to further enhance convenience to Mainland visitors who use our government services, the 2023 Policy Address has set the indicator to provide an option for making payment by Mainland e-wallets for government services commonly used by Mainland visitors (including booking of various leisure facilities) by the third quarter of 2024. This measure will facilitate Mainland residents' purchase of tickets for programmes or activities including different mega events through relevant government electronic systems.

(3) The Government attaches great importance to the preparatory work in Hong Kong for the 15th National Games, the 12th National Games for Persons with Disabilities and the 9th National Special Olympic Games. On the part concerning the IT systems of the Games, the National Games Coordination Office (Hong Kong) of the CSTB has already started discussions about the work involved with the General Administration of Sport of China (GASC) and the concerned authorities of Guangdong Province and Macao in collaboration with the OGCIIO. We will formulate practical and feasible implementation plans with regard to the requirements set out in the overall IT plan of the GASC and the actual situation in Hong Kong. We will also arrange system testing in due course, with a view to ensuring that the IT systems and electronic services of the Games, including the network and communication system, competition information system, event management system, etc., will operate smoothly.