

\$500m ID card fund hits a snag

THE Government has failed to win immediate backing for its proposal to set aside \$500 million to finance the issuing of new identity cards from next year.

The proposal failed to win immediate approval from the Finance Committee at a closed-door meeting on Wednesday.

The planned expenditure would be \$100 million more than the sum spent on the current identity card replacement programme, which began in May 1983 and will last until early 1987.

Unofficial members of the committee confirmed yesterday that they were opposing the \$500 million expenditure until the Government provided more information to justify such a large figure and clarified certain technical aspects of the new scheme.

Faced with mounting opposition in the Finance Committee meeting, the Government agreed to re-submit its application, with additional information, to the committee's next meeting on Wednesday.

The Government also bowed to the Unofficials on

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another point: accepting that the public had a right to know about the issue, it agreed that the hearing on the application be an open one.

The issuing of new identity cards from July 1, 1987, stating the holder's rights of abode, will coincide with the introduction of a new type of passport for Hongkong people - the British National (Overseas) passport.

But the cost of the scheme was queried by several members at Wednesday's Finance Committee meeting.

One member, Mr Ho Sai-chu, said a number of questions also needed to be clarified, such as whether the wording on the new identity cards - which are supposed to be valid after 1997 - had been endorsed by the Chinese Government.

A British team, led by the Director of Immigration, Mr Alan Carter, is expected to discuss this issue with Chinese experts in Beijing next week.

Another member, Mr Hui Yin-fat, said he doubted that the scheme, covering only about 4.8 million people, would need so much money.