

COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Paper No. 04/03

Working Arrangements for Council Meetings

Purpose

This paper seeks Members' advice on the working arrangements for meetings of the Council, in particular regarding public access to the work of the Council.

Proposal

2. Given that the Council is required to keep the public informed of its work, we propose that –
 - (a) the agenda for each meeting be made available to the public on-line before the meeting;
 - (b) as a general practice, full Council meetings be closed to the public;
 - (c) discussion papers, together with a “non-attributable” digest of the meeting’s proceedings be made available to the public on-line after each meeting; and
 - (d) the Chairman or other designated Council Member(s) be available to brief the press immediately after each Council meeting.

Considerations

3. In his 1999 Policy Address, the Chief Executive noted that one of the functions of the Council would be to: “keep the public regularly informed about its work, so that we can build a better understanding of the concept of sustainable development”. There have been regular enquiries both from Legislative Council Members and from the general public

regarding the establishment of the Council and the drawing up of a sustainable development strategy. We therefore expect there to be some public interest in the work of the Council. There may well be requests for the meetings of the Council and its sub-committees to be open to the public.

4. We have looked at the practice of a number of other councils and committees¹ with regard to public access to meetings. We have also assessed the possible logistic arrangements for opening regular Council proceedings to the public. The other councils and committees surveyed usually do *not* open their meetings to the public. Also, many other councils and committees do not make relevant papers available, although there are exceptions (notably the Advisory Committee on the Environment, whose agenda and discussion papers are available on-line after its meetings). If we were to make Council meetings open to the public, we would need to make some special logistical changes. Furthermore, Members may note that such an arrangement might prevent the Council from considering matters that are not yet ready for public disclosure.

5. With the above considerations in mind, we propose that regular Council meetings be closed to the general public. The Council might however hold special “open” meetings on certain issues, or to invite expert groups or stakeholders to attend meetings on an ad hoc basis where their input might contribute positively to the discussion of a particular item.

6. Notwithstanding the above, we should provide as much information as possible to the public on the Council’s work. Accordingly, we propose that the agenda for each meeting be available on-line prior to the meeting. Following the meeting, we would post discussion papers and other non-classified documents on the Council website. To provide for greater accountability and to put a “face” to the Council, we further propose that the Chairman or other designated Members be available to brief the press on the gist of the issues discussed by the Council immediately after each meeting.

Council Secretariat
March 2003

¹ Including the Advisory Committee on the Environment, the Hong Kong Arts Development Council and the Transport Advisory Committee