

COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Paper 06/05

Future Areas of Work for the Council

Purpose

This paper briefly reviews the existing areas of work of the Council, invites Members to consider the scope for taking on new initiatives in the coming two-year term of the Council and outlines proposed new funding arrangements for Council activities.

Current Terms of Reference and Scope of Work

Terms of Reference

2. The role of the Council for Sustainable Development (SD), as originally set out in the 1999 Policy Address, is to –

“provide expert advice to the Government and keep the public regularly informed about its work, so that we can build a better understanding of the concept of sustainable development”.

At the first Council meeting on 1 April 2003, Members agreed to the terms of reference at **Annex A**, which explicitly set out the broad areas of the Council’s work. The Council has established two sub-committees to develop detailed proposals in the areas of SD Strategy building and public education and awareness raising. The terms of reference of these sub-committees are at **Annex B**.

Current Scope of Council Activities

3. During its first term, the Council has focussed its efforts on the design and implementation of an engagement process for building an SD Strategy for Hong Kong and the implementation of public education programmes – in particular sponsoring such programmes in the community through the use of the SD Fund.

4. As a result of Members’ efforts, the Council has been able to deliver –

- A first SD Strategy engagement process for Hong Kong, culminating in the

preparation of a detailed set of recommendations for sustainable development in three Pilot Areas;

- An assessment process for the SD Fund, which has so far led to the award of grants totalling nearly \$11 million to 10 community organisations; and
- A programme of education and awareness building events (such as the SD Fund briefings and press conferences, the SD exhibition, the SD Strategy Youth Forum and the On-line Resource Centre) aimed at enhancing public understanding of SD principles and the community's capacity to put these principles into practice.

Potential Further Areas of Work

5. The current scope of Council activities is in line with the terms of reference at Annex A and has helped raise the profile of SD in the community. In the course of the engagement process, some stakeholders have commented that there may be other areas that the Council could consider taking up, in order to build on its role and enhance its capacity to raise awareness of the need for more sustainable practices locally.

Reviewing and Commenting On the Sustainability Implications of Major Projects

6. At a previous Council meeting, Members considered the Government's Sustainability Assessment (SA) system for new public policies and proposals. Members noted that the system was under review, and expressed an interest in taking a more in-depth look at the system in future.

7. Under the existing SA system, assessments are conducted mainly as part of the process of submitting new public policies and proposals to the Policy Committee and the Executive Council. For this reason, there is a need to observe relevant confidentiality requirements when considering how best to make the content of the sustainability reports available to Members.

8. With the above in mind, we invite Members to consider the following measures to enhance the Council's involvement in the SA process –

- (a) On a monthly basis, the SDU will provide Members with an updated list of SA reports on major new public policies and proposals that are in the public domain;
- (b) Following from (a), when Members are interested in having further

information on any SA report or when there is general consensus for a briefing on the sustainability implications of a particular public policy or proposal, we will make appropriate arrangements with the relevant Bureau's agreement; and

- (c) The above is to facilitate Members' better understanding of the sustainability implications of those new policies and proposals that are of interest to them. There may be press or other requests for Members to comment on the sustainability dimension of a particular policy or proposal from time to time. Unless stated otherwise, Members would be free to use and quote the information provided through (a) and (b) above.

Commissioning Studies on SD Issues

9. Detailed sustainability impact assessments are normally carried out by the responsible Bureaux only for *new* public policies or proposals, rather than ongoing initiatives or *private* projects. Without duplicating Bureaux' resources or efforts, there is the proposal for the Council to, through the SDU, commission its independent research into the more 'macro' sustainability issues, particularly those that are integral to the SD Strategy but cut across different policy portfolios.

10. Members may consider whether the Council should, on a need basis, use the SD Fund to commission its own research into such issues. To contain the resource implications and to enhance the quality of the research, the Council may wish to consider conducting not more than two studies a year, and the SDU should be allowed to engage external experts or consultants as necessary. Each proposed subject for research would need to be considered and endorsed by the full Council beforehand.

Funding

11. There is a need to establish a proper funding mechanism for the Council's research or other initiatives.

12. One of the major tasks of the Council is to advise on the management of the SD Fund. To date, \$10.85 million has been earmarked for grants to 10 organisations to conduct community-based projects to build public awareness of SD. The balance of the Fund therefore currently stands at \$89.15 million, against the Council's agreed provision to use about \$10 million a year.

13. Members may wish to note that at a previous Council meeting, the

following arrangement for managing the SD Fund was agreed –

“There should be a fixed percentage of the SDF annual allocation that the Council should draw for its own initiatives, leaving the bulk of the annual allocation to community organisations or eligible applicants for their community programmes”.

Whilst the annual allocation from the Fund should be \$10 million, it was agreed that the Council could use \$2 million to carry out tasks in relation to its sustainable development activities.

Terms of Reference

14. Subject to Members’ advice on the issues outlined in this paper, we will consider the need to refine the terms of reference of the Council and submit specific wording at the next Council meeting.

Council Secretariat
April 2005