

For discussion on  
17 November 2006

Paper No. 08/06

## **COUNCIL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Review of the Sustainability Assessment System in Hong Kong**

#### **Purpose**

This paper informs Members of the outcome of the review of the sustainability assessment (SA) system in Hong Kong.

#### **Background**

2. At the Council meeting on 9 August 2005, the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) gave a briefing on the SA system and informed Members that the Unit would undertake a review for completion in 2006. Members agreed that the review should involve consultation with stakeholders within the Administration and outside, and advised that the review should have regard to the findings of the Study on Sustainable Development in Hong Kong for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Susdev 21) and the international practice in SA. Preliminary findings of the review were reported at the Council meeting on 16 December 2005.

3. The SDU has now completed the review in consultation with Government users and community stakeholders. The full review report is attached to this paper. The key improvement measures aim to make the SA system more effective and the assessments more focused. These improvement measures are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### **Measures to Improve the SA System**

4. Having regard to our research findings and the views from the users and stakeholders, we plan to implement the following measures to improve the SA system –

### Adoption of the “Social Checklist” Approach to Assess Social Implications

5. The SA system is built upon a total of 42 sustainability indicators covering the economic, social and environmental dimensions of Hong Kong. It has been generally recognized that using the indicator approach to assess social implications has certain limitations. The “social checklist” (Annex C to the attached report) was consequently introduced in 2003 as an alternative to the social indicators. With the Government users’ increased experience in using the checklist, this approach has proven to be a more effective way to conduct a social impact assessment. We will therefore make the “social checklist” the only, rather than an alternative, approach to assessing the social implications of proposals.

6. As a result, the existing 14 social indicators <sup>(Note 1)</sup> will no longer be used to assess the social implications of any proposals as the social aspects they represent have already been subsumed into the “social checklist”. However, users will still be encouraged to refer to their baseline data kept within the computer-aided sustainability evaluation tool (CASET) in making the checklist assessment.

### Changes to Sustainability Indicators

7. In addition to the above changes to the indicators, one indicator, namely the “beach water quality”, would be deleted as this indicator is already covered by another one on “marine water quality”. Two other indicators (i.e. “significant landscape features (point-based)” and “freshwater supply”) would be expanded to cover old and valuable trees as well as freshwater consumption respectively. The relevant custodian departments for the indicators concerned, namely the Environmental Protection Department, the Planning Department and the Water Supplies Department, support these changes.

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<sup>(Note 1)</sup> These 14 indicators are “cancer”, “respiratory diseases”, “communicable diseases”, “housing waiting list”, “private rent”, “housing inadequacy”, “living space”, “elderly care services”, “students joining community services”, “registered volunteers”, “archaeological sites”, “historical sites”, “Urbtix ticket sales” and “education attainment”.

8. Subject to paragraphs 6 and 7 above, all the remaining indicators will be retained. A revised list of indicators is at Annex G to the attached report.

*Incorporation of the Government's First Sustainable Development Strategy*

9. To ensure that the assessment of Government policies and proposals takes account of the latest developments in the Council's strategy process, checklist questions relating to the agreed targets and objectives of solid waste management, renewable energy and urban living space under the Government's First Sustainable Development strategy, would be included. Users would have to respond to these questions once the CASET has established that the proposal in question may have an impact on these areas.

*Other Improvement Measures*

10. At present, an SA is conducted on a territory-wide basis. To enhance the depth of the assessments, users would be required to, throughout the CASET run, state whether and how individual districts, communities or sectors may be affected.

11. We will also make the CASET run more efficient and user-friendly by putting in place measures such as screening questions and merger of assessment screens.

**Way Forward**

12. The SDU will implement the various improvement measures set out in paragraphs 4 to 11 above by end 2006 and promulgate new user guidelines for the revised SA system.

13. The SDU has organized training courses and seminars for nearly 2,600 Government officers to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills for proper application of the SA system. We will introduce the

detailed working and application of the improved system in our on-going training sessions.

Council Secretariat  
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