

## **Support Group on Air Quality Meeting on 14 December 2006**

### **Remarks by the Vice Chairman, Dr Edgar Cheng**

Good morning everyone. On behalf of the Council I would like to thank you all for volunteering your time to be a part of this very important project – namely, to piece together an IR document on issues such as Demand side management for energy efficiency and conservation, Appropriate actions on high API days and Congestion charging mechanisms to reduce traffic congestion, three very contentious issues on how to reduce local air pollution and then take it out for public debate and discussion.

Air pollution is a major environmental challenge for Hong Kong. It is an economic as well as a public health priority. It is our hope that at the end of this exercise, what we call the engagement process, this group will be able to advise the Council through the Strategy Subcommittee (SSC), on actions to be taken for the above three issues, based on analysis of feedbacks from the various stakeholders.

Air pollution is a very complex issue with a local and a regional component that require very different and separate attention by the government and the community. While the SAR government has worked very closely with its Guangdong counterpart on the regional component, the Council has decided to focus mainly on the local component first because the roadside air pollution, which has direct ill effect on our health, comes mainly from our own transport vehicles and the local power stations, and despite much efforts by our government, there are still a lot more we, as a community, can do to reduce local air pollution.

The Council has published a report on Better Air Quality recently. A total of 14 recommendations, involving institutional issues, as well as issues relevant to the electricity generation, transport and industry sectors were given to the Government for consideration. The Government has responded positively to the Council's recommendations. Details of the Government's responses have been published. In the coming months, the Council will receive a periodic report on the progress of the responses.

The Council also recommended a set of issues to be taken out to the public for debate and discussions. In addition to the above three issues, the fourth one on banning idling vehicles will be taken up by EPD in January next year for public consultation.

The Government provided additional resources to this special engagement exercise. In addition to experts on survey who will be involved in the process early on, there will be also a communication expert and a project manager to assist this group. Together with SDU and other voluntary organizations, this group, unlike previous ones, should have the kind of resources to take the engagement process further, to come up with innovative ways to reach out to as many stakeholders as possible and to educate the community on how we all can play a part in this campaign of making air quality better for Hong Kong.

Three and a half years ago, the Council for Sustainable Development started with a blank piece of paper on how to make Hong Kong a sustainable city. With the help of SSC, various support groups (SGs) and many government and non-government organizations, we, members of the Council together with the secretariat (SDU), created an engagement process and an institutional structure to address priority issues affecting sustainability in Hong Kong. We have not finished our job yet. As a matter of fact, we have just embarked on this long journey towards better and more sustainable Hong Kong. Air pollution has become such a critical priority issue for us that we need leadership at every level to work together to make a difference. This Council will not be able to solve all sustainability issues in Hong Kong. We can, however, take on an issue, refine the process to deal with it and continue to evolve to a better model for other future issues. This support group will not solve the air pollution problems in Hong Kong, but, by focusing on the three issues, it will definitely contribute significantly to the process of reducing air pollution. I urge all of you, including the government participants, to come up with ideas of how to make this happen.