

Some proposals on the method of work in Panels and Bills Committees

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Objectives:

- (1) To enhance the function of the Legislative Council (LegCo) in monitoring Government policies and scrutinizing bills; and
- (2) To improve the working relationship between the executive authorities and the legislature.

Proposals:

- (1) The role of Panels in monitoring the implementation of policy objectives should be enhanced by turning the Panels into a forum for the executive authorities and the legislature to exchange views on legislative and financial proposals;

Specific measures:

- (a) sufficient time should be allocated for each agenda item at Panel meetings to allow full discussion among members;
 - (b) discussions should be two-way instead of questions raised by members only; some time should be allowed for members to discuss the views they have heard and state their positions;
 - (c) the clerk of a Panel should provide background information on matters of special concern of the Panel, if necessary and possible, so that the members will know clearly the matters requiring special attention in addition to those highlighted in government papers;
 - (d) a Panel should submit a report to the Council after consultation and studies on a matter of public concern, and a motion debate should be moved by the Panel if necessary; and
 - (e) all parties, alliances and groups should endeavour to assign their members to all Panels and important Bills Committees for better representation in Panels and Bills Committees.
- (2) For bills involving policy changes or introduction of new policies, the Panels concerned should be given the opportunities and sufficient time for substantive discussion.

Specific measures:

- (a) the Government should be asked to submit the legislative time-table when the Policy Address is given every year, and the time-table should be updated monthly; information on all legislative proposals should be provided to the Panels concerned for consultation three to six months before the proposals are tabled at the Council;
- (b) all parties, alliances and groups should indicate their stances in the course of deliberation;
- (c) comments of Panels should be included in papers to be submitted to the Executive Council by policy bureaux; to ensure actual implementation of this process, an item "Consultation with LegCo Panel" should be added to the papers concerned to report on the dates of discussion in the Panels and the support solicited; this information should also be given in LegCo Briefs;
- (d) if the position of the Administration differs from the general view of LegCo or the Administration's previous position stated in the consultation paper submitted to the Panel concerned, an explanatory paper highlighting and explaining the discrepancies should be attached when the matter is referred to a Bills Committee;
- (e) a Bills Committee should support in principle the policy of a bill which has been endorsed by the panel concerned; no fresh discussion is required unless the situation has changed; deliberation should be focussed on how to implement the policy as well as on issues and necessary amendments concerning the policy to be implemented through the bill and the drafting aspect; and
- (f) in principle, Committee Stage Amendments to be moved by Members or government officials at Council meetings should be put to discussion in the Bills Committee in advance. Justifications are required when amendments are proposed without prior discussion.

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