

Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs

System of Accountability of Principal Officials

**Speaking Note of Acting Secretary for Constitutional Affairs
at the meeting of the Panel on 27 August**

In last year's Policy Address, the Chief Executive undertook to examine how, under the leadership of the Chief Executive, the accountability of principal officials for their respective policy portfolios could be enhanced. Among other things, we would need to consider devising a compatible system of appointment for these principal officials, setting out their powers and responsibilities and clearly defining their role in formulating and implementing government policies under the new system.

2. Since the Policy Address, the Chief Executive has personally led a Steering Group to conduct the review. The Steering Group comprises the Chief Secretary for Administration, the Financial Secretary, the Secretary for Justice, Secretary for Constitutional Affairs, Secretary for the Civil Service, Head of the Central Policy Unit and Information Coordinator.

3. The Steering Group has held a number of meetings. It has thoroughly considered the views expressed by different sectors of the community, including the "Report on the Development of the Political System of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" submitted by the LegCo Panel on Constitutional Affairs ("the Panel") to LegCo during the previous term, as well as LegCo's debate on the Report in June last year. The Steering Group has also noted the views expressed by academics during the Panel's public consultation in February this year, and the discussion at the Panel's meetings in March and May. The Steering Group has also noted media reports, and views of academics and commentators.

4. The Steering Group noted that these views generally support the Government's endeavour to improve the system. There is broad consensus on the need to rejig the top echelon of senior officials and for a new system of appointment, but views on the detailed arrangements differ. We will continue to keep in view discussions in the society.

5. The main areas of the Steering Group's review include:

- (i) problems arising from the existing system and the existing arrangements in the face of fast changing circumstances;
- (ii) public expectation and LegCo's expectation for enhanced accountability on the part of officials;
- (iii) whether the Government machinery since the establishment of the HKSAR has been able to meet the expectations arising from Hong Kong people running Hong Kong, and whether there needs to be any adjustment to the system;
- (iv) the implications in terms of the operation of the Government if new arrangements are introduced, and the adjustments and changes that have to be made; and
- (v) how to tackle public expectation that senior officials should shoulder responsibility for the outcome of policy and the effectiveness of implementation.

6. Since the exercise involves important and complex issues, we need to consider the issue carefully and thoroughly. After several months of study, we have formed certain preliminary views but the framework has yet to be completed.

7. We are grateful to the Panel for the report on its duty visit. We will study the report and would be happy to take note of any concrete proposals from the Panel.

8. Depending on progress made prior to October, the Chief Executive will give an account in his Policy Address. As the exercise involves many facets and complex issues and has far-reaching implications, we will continue to study the matter and examine the different aspects after October.

Constitutional Affairs Bureau
27 August 2001