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From : Clerk to the House Committee
To : Members of the House Committee

Budget Arrangements

At the House Committee meeting on 22 February 2002, the Chairman undertook to request the Administration to provide advance copies of the Draft Estimates of Expenditure to Members, in accordance with existing practice. This is to inform Members of what was discussed at the meeting between the Chairman and the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) on Monday, 25 February 2002, and CS's response to Members' request.

2. At the meeting, the Chairman said that what Members found unacceptable was not so much the merits of the changes to the Budget arrangements, but the way the changes were introduced. Members considered that introducing the important changes without prior consultation was not conducive to improving the relationship between the Executive and the Legislature. The Chairman also pointed out that the schedules planned by Members' offices and the Legislative Council Secretariat would be disrupted as a result of the changes.

3. The Chairman relayed Members' request that advance copies of the Draft Estimates of Expenditure be provided to Members on 1 March 2002 as originally scheduled. If this was not possible, they should be made available at least some time before 6 March 2002.

4. CS undertook to inform the Financial Secretary (FS) of the views and request of Members. However, he had in fact spoken to FS earlier and understood that it was now not possible to revert to the current arrangements. He realized that the changes would disrupt the original schedules of Members and the Secretariat, and he had

therefore informed the Deputy Chairman of the House Committee as early as possible. He apologized for the inconvenience caused. He said that FS had, in the course of preparing the Budget, decided that it would be more appropriate, conceptually and presentationally, to combine the revenue and expenditure parts and introduce them at the same time. In fact, this was the arrangement before 1990. He had been advised that there was a lot of cross-referencing in the Budget, and it was now technically not possible to revert to the current arrangements. The new arrangements could be reviewed afterwards to see whether they should continue for the next Budget.

5. On CS's point regarding informing the House Committee, the Chairman said that it was unfortunate that because of the Chinese New Year break, the issue could not be raised at the House Committee until 22 February 2002.

(Mrs Justina LAM)
Clerk to the House Committee