

ITEM FOR FINANCE COMMITTEE

Discussion paper on the starting time of Finance Committee meetings and related meeting arrangements

Purpose

This paper sets out the outcome of consultation on the suggestion of the House Committee (HC) to hold its meetings before the meetings of the Finance Committee (FC) on Friday afternoons.

Background

2. At the HC meeting on 6 January 2006, it was agreed that consideration should be given to swapping the meeting time of HC and FC on Fridays, so that HC meetings could start at 2:30 pm and FC meetings would follow immediately after the HC meetings. As the suggestion would affect FC's meeting arrangements, it was also agreed that the matter required further discussion by FC after consulting the Administration.

3. Upon consultation, the Administration has advised that it is not averse to change. However, it does foresee practical difficulties coping with an alternative arrangement whereby the starting time of FC meetings is subject to the progress of HC meetings. The Administration considers that if the starting time of FC meetings is contingent upon the duration of HC meetings, public officers designated to attend FC meetings would effectively have to standby as from 2:30 pm, in particular for those who work outside the Central District. This would generate additional idle time. To minimize the waiting time, the Administration suggests that the starting time for FC meetings should be fixed as the standing arrangement. The Administration also suggests that the swap, if implemented, should take effect no earlier than 1 May 2006, or three months after a decision on the matter to allow a reasonable time for Bureau Directors and other public officers to clear their diaries before the new arrangement comes into effect.

Matters for consideration

4. Apart from the starting time of FC meetings, there are also questions on the duration of FC meetings, and whether FC meetings are allowed to be extended beyond the scheduled time to deal with time-critical items.

5. To gauge members' views on the questions in paragraph 4, the Secretariat issued a consultation paper (LC Paper No. FC43/05-06) on 28 February 2006. The outcome of consultation reveals that the majority of members support swapping the meeting time of FC and HC on Fridays, and most of them prefer fixing the starting time of FC meetings at 3:00 pm. On the duration of meeting, the majority of members support maintaining the two-hour slot without extension. Any items not dealt with at the meeting shall be carried over to the next meeting in accordance with FC Rule 11, and the Administration should give advance notice of time-critical items. A summary of response is given in the **Appendix**.

Advice sought

6. Members are invited to advise if the arrangements set out in paragraph 5 should be endorsed and if the matter should be referred to the House Committee for further discussion.

Council Business Division 1
Legislative Council Secretariat
17 March 2006

**Summary of response to question on the starting time of Finance Committee (FC) meetings
and related meeting arrangements**

Question 1 - FC meeting to start at 2:30 pm

Number of Response received	Yes		No	No comment
	59	17	39	3
	keep the present 2-hour slot to end the meeting at 4:30 pm sharp; any items not dealt with at the meeting shall be carried over to the next meeting in accordance with FC Rule 11; and the Administration to give advance notice of time-critical items	meeting to end at 4:30 pm sharp and, if there is a need to deal with time-critical items, to continue after House Committee (HC) meeting to deal with such time-critical items only	no specific ending time; HC meeting will start after FC has dealt with all its business on the agenda	
	12	3	2	

Question 2 - Change the meeting time to after the House Committee meeting

Number of Response received	Yes							No	No comment
	42								
59	Starting time			duration of meeting				16	1
	3:00 pm	3:15 pm	3:30 pm	fixed starting time but certain degrees of flexibility for postponement should be allowed to cater for special circumstances	two hours with no extension; any items not dealt with at the meeting shall be carried over to the next meeting in accordance with FC Rule 11; and the Administration to give advance notice of time-critical items	two hours subject to extension in accordance with House Rules 24A	unlimited, until all business is finished		
40	--	--	2	33	16	4			