

立法會

Legislative Council

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Paper for House Committee meeting on 21 February 2003

Holding Council and committee meetings in English

Background

At the meeting between the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the House Committee and the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) on 27 January 2003, CS invited the Chairman to follow up the suggestion he made during the motion debate on "Promoting the Use of English in Hong Kong" on 22 January 2003 that meetings of the Legislative Council (LegCo) and its committees be held in English once a month. Members will recall that the terms of the motion were :

"that, as English is one of the two official languages in Hong Kong under the Basic Law, and in order to strengthen Hong Kong's position as Asia's world city, this Council urges the Government to adopt measures to promote the use of English with a view to maintaining its importance and improving its standard in Hong Kong."

2. The Chairman reported the matter to the House Committee meeting on 7 February 2003 and requested the LegCo Secretariat to prepare a discussion paper for the House Committee's consideration.

CS's suggestion

3. The exact terms of CS's suggestion made during the motion debate on "Promoting the Use of English in Hong Kong" on 22 January 2003 were :

"Madam President, may I make a humble suggestion for consideration by Honourable Members. Very few public forums come close to the Legislative Council in influencing public perceptions or starting a new community movement. In order to impress upon the community the importance the Council attaches to the use of English and to maintaining good English standards, I suggest that the Council establishes a convention of holding its fully open Council meeting regularly, say, once a month, in English.

The same practice should apply in Committee or Panel meetings. Individual Members may, of course, speak always in Cantonese or Putonghua if they so decide at these meetings. I stress again that this is entirely my humble suggestion and the decision is entirely for the Council to make."

Issues for consideration

4. The motion on "Promoting the Use of English in Hong Kong" was passed by the Council on 22 January 2003 indicating that Members are in general agreement that the use of English should be encouraged. In considering CS's suggestion, Members should have regard to Rule 2 of the Rules of Procedure, which provides that a Member, including a Member in the Chair, may address the Council in either Putonghua, Cantonese or the English language. Any arrangement which, for instance, requires the Chair of a certain committee to conduct meetings in English at a specific frequency may not be in keeping with Rule 2.

5. Another factor to consider is practicability. Some committees, such as Panels, hold regular meetings once a month. If CS's suggestion is to be implemented, all the regular meetings of such committees would have to be conducted in English. It should be pointed out that these committees may meet with Cantonese-speaking deputations from time to time, and the Chair and individual members may prefer to speak in Cantonese.

Members' advice

6. Members are invited to consider CS's suggestion.

Legislative Council Secretariat

20 February 2003

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