

**For discussion
on 25 April 2008**

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 rescheduling the starting time of Finance Committee (FC) meetings in the event that the preceding House Committee (HC) meetings have to go beyond 3:00 pm.

Background

2. At the FC meeting on 24 March 2006, it was agreed that the meeting time of FC and HC on Fridays should be swapped such that HC meetings would start at 2:30 pm and FC meetings at 3:00 pm. It was also agreed that the duration of FC meetings should be maintained at two hours without extension, and that any item not dealt with at the meeting should be carried over to the next meeting in accordance with FC Rule 11.

3. Since adoption of this arrangement from the 2006-2007 session, there had been three occasions on which HC was not able to finish its business before 3:00 pm and had to suspend the meetings so that the following FC meetings could proceed as scheduled. Some members considered such arrangement not desirable and requested the Secretariat to explore how far the present meeting arrangements could be improved after consulting the Administration.

4. In this connection, the Administration has been consulted on the feasibility of re-scheduling the starting time of a FC meeting to a fixed time after 3:00 pm or immediately after the HC meeting, whichever is later, by giving advance notice on Wednesday i.e. two days before the relevant FC meeting. The Administration has advised that it has no objection to the proposal of not suspending the HC meeting which lasts longer than originally projected, on the understanding that such occasions should be rare. However, sufficient notice is required to allow official representatives to have adequate time to re-arrange their meetings and engagements scheduled for the date of the FC meeting. The Administration therefore agrees that notice to re-schedule the FC meeting should reach the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau not later than Wednesday noon.

Matters for consideration

5. Apart from the suggestion of re-scheduling the starting time of FC meeting in the event that the preceding HC meeting has to go beyond 3:00 pm, some members have suggested reverting to the original arrangement of holding FC meeting before HC meeting.

6. To gauge members' views on the suggestions in paragraph 5, the Secretariat issued a consultation paper (LC Paper No. FC48/07-08) on 25 March 2008. The outcome of consultation reveals that the majority of members who have responded to the consultation support rescheduling the starting time of FC meeting to a fixed time after 3:00 pm or immediately after HC meeting, whichever is later, *if* it is anticipated that the preceding HC meeting will go beyond 3:00 pm. The majority of members who have responded to the consultation do not support reverting to the original arrangement of holding FC meeting before HC meeting. A summary of the responses received is given in the **Appendix**.

Advice sought

7. Members are invited to advise if the proposed arrangement set out in paragraph 6 should be endorsed and if the matter should be referred to HC for further discussion.

Appendix to FCR(2008-09)6

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

Number of response received	Yes	No
<p>Question 1 - Reschedule the starting time of a FC meeting to a fixed time after 3:00 pm or immediately after the meeting of House Committee (HC), whichever is later, if it is anticipated that the preceding HC meeting will go beyond 3:00 pm</p>		
36	26	10
<p>Question 2 - Revert back to the original arrangement of holding FC meeting before HC meeting</p>		
36	10	26