

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(3) 408/14-15

Paper for the House Committee meeting on 30 January 2015

Suspension time of Council meetings

Purpose

This paper invites Members to give views for the President's consideration on a proposal to adjust the suspension time of Council meetings to 8:00 pm if the business on the agenda is unlikely to be finished by around 10:00 pm on the day of the meeting.

Background

2. At the House Committee ("HC") meeting on 12 December 2014, Members expressed views on the suspension time of Council meetings in the context of discussing the meeting arrangement for the Council meeting of 17 December 2014. Members considered it worthwhile to review the suspension time of Council meetings in the light of the experience from mid-October to mid-December 2014 during which Council meetings were suspended at 8:00 pm when the President was of the opinion that the business on the agenda of the meeting was unlikely to be finished by 10:00 pm on the day of the meeting. Members' views were relayed to the President for consideration.

3. The President has instructed the Secretariat to identify issues relevant to the consideration of the suspension time of Council meetings and seek Members' views on the matter.

Relevant rules

4. Rule 14(1) of the Rules of Procedure ("RoP") provides that the days and hours of Council meetings shall be determined by the President. As provided in Rule 14(5), the President may at any time suspend a

meeting or adjourn the Council. Rule 14(4) provides that when in the opinion of the President it is necessary for the proper completion of the business on the Agenda of the Council at a meeting of the Council to continue any unfinished business on another day, the President may order that the meeting shall continue on such other day for that purpose. Where the President so orders at a meeting of the Council, the meeting shall stand suspended and shall resume for the continuation of business on such other day. In determining the suspension time of a Council meeting, the President has all along taken into account the views of Members.

Evolution of Council meeting times

5. Prior to April 2005, Council meetings started at 2:30 pm and continued until all the business on the agendas had been dealt with, except for a few occasions on which the President suspended the meeting before midnight and resumed it the following day at 2:30 pm to deal with the unfinished business. As successive Council meetings in the Third Legislative Council (“LegCo”) ended around or after midnight in order to finish all the business on the agendas, Members discussed at the HC meeting on 26 November 2004 whether Council meeting times should be changed. On HC’s recommendation and after consulting the Administration, the President determined that with effect from 6 April 2005, Council meetings were to start at 11:00 am, and if the business on the agenda was unlikely to be finished by about midnight on the day of the meeting, she would suspend the meeting at around 10:00 pm and resume it the following day at 2:30 pm for the continuation of business.

6. The aforementioned Council meeting times were largely followed in the Third LegCo. Since the Fourth LegCo, it has been established that the President will suspend a Council meeting at around 10:00 pm and resume it the following day at 9:00 am for the continuation of business.¹

7. At the commencement of the 2014-2015 session, in view of the road and traffic conditions when certain roads including those in the vicinity of the LegCo Complex were occupied, the President, after consulting Members, advanced the suspension time of a Council meeting to around 8:00 pm when the business on the agenda of the meeting was unlikely to be finished by about 10:00 pm on the day of the meeting, and

¹ A Council meeting will resume at 2:30 pm on Thursday if meetings with District Council members have been scheduled in the morning.

resumed the meeting the following day at 9:00 am for the continuation of business. The suspension time of Council meetings has been reverted back to 10:00 pm after the roads were cleared in mid-December 2014.

Relevant issues

8. In reviewing the suspension time of Council meetings, Members may wish to take into account the relevant issues as set out below.

Duration of Council meetings

9. Since the Fourth LegCo, the duration of Council meetings² has been getting longer, with the average duration of each meeting increasing from 11 hours in the 2008-2009 session to 19 hours in the 2013-2014 session. Over the same period, Council meetings which lasted more than one day rose from 23% to 57% of the total number of Council meetings. The increase of the membership of LegCo from 60 to 70, the asking of more quorum calls and the filibustering of certain proceedings in the Fifth LegCo largely account for the longer duration of Council meetings. The details of the relevant statistics are in the **Appendix**.

10. Based on past experience, more business in particular legislative proposals will be transacted in the Council in the last session of a LegCo term. The duration of Council meetings is projected to be even longer in the remainder of the Fifth LegCo.

Impact on other Council business

11. The duration of Council meetings has impact on the transaction of other Council business. In the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 sessions, committees cancelled/rescheduled a total of 45 meetings scheduled for Thursdays because of the continuation of Council meetings. In anticipation of Council meetings continuing on Thursdays, since the Fifth LegCo, most committees have avoided scheduling meetings on Thursdays to obviate the need for cancellation or rescheduling of meetings. Since the Fifth LegCo, only 12 committee meetings scheduled for Thursdays have been cancelled/rescheduled because of the continuation of Council meetings. In planning LegCo business, both

² Excluding the Chief Executive ("CE")'s Question and Answer Sessions and the meetings at which CE presented the Policy Address and the Financial Secretary presented the Budget.

Wednesdays and Thursdays are now reserved for holding Council meetings.

Availability of time for Members to discharge LegCo-related duties

12. The duration of Council meetings also has a bearing on the time available for Members to discharge LegCo-related duties. The longer the Council meetings, the lesser time Members will have in attending to other duties in their capacity as Members. It is not unusual for Members to concurrently carry out other LegCo-related duties while Council meetings are in progress, such as meeting with their constituents/public officers or conducting interviews with members of the public/organizations or the media in the LegCo Complex. With the suspension of Council meetings at 10:00 pm, Members currently have practical difficulty to arrange or attend LegCo-related activities outside the LegCo Complex on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

In-house support services for Council meetings

13. Staff in various divisions of the LegCo Secretariat including Council Business Division 3, Legal Service Division, Administration Division, Public Information Division and Translation and Interpretation Division provide in-house support services for Council meetings. For a regular Council meeting, at least three hours before the start of the meeting are required for setting up the Chamber, testing the Electronic Voting System and other supporting audio-visual systems, tabling the relevant papers and attending to all other meeting-related matters. After the suspension of a Council meeting which is to resume on the following day, another hour is needed for dealing with technical and logistical matters. Should any issue arise on the day of the meeting which needs to be resolved before the resumption of the meeting the following day, the staff concerned have to stay longer. With more and more Council meetings lasting more than one day in the Fifth LegCo, the Secretariat staff concerned have been consistently working long hours.

Impact on other relevant parties

14. In-house staff aside, support services for Council meetings are also provided by outsourced parties, including simultaneous interpreters, sign-language interpreters and technicians. Their service hours are linked to the duration of Council meetings. The work hours of public officers attending the meetings, reporters covering LegCo news and Members' staff providing assistance for Members may also be affected by the

duration of Council meetings as they need to stay in the LegCo Complex until the suspension of the meeting or the adjournment of the Council.

Proposal

15. In the light of the two-month experience in mid-October to mid-December 2014, having regard to the aforementioned relevant issues and in anticipation of the continuous trend of Council meetings lasting more than one day, Members may wish to examine the merits of recommending an adjustment of the suspension time of Council meetings for the President's consideration. It is proposed that the suspension time of Council meetings be adjusted to 8:00 pm if the business on the agenda is unlikely to be finished by around 10:00 pm on the day of the meeting. This proposal has the merits of:

- (i) sparing time for Members to attend other LegCo-related activities held outside the LegCo Complex after 8:00 pm on Wednesdays and possibly Thursdays; and
- (ii) facilitating a healthy work-life balance for Secretariat staff, service providers, public officers, LegCo beat reporters and Members' staff.

16. It is envisaged that the proposal should create no adverse impact on other Council business. Under this proposal, a total of 22 meeting hours are available on Wednesday (11:00 am to 8:00 pm) and Thursday (9:00 am to 10:00 pm). According to the records of the Fifth LegCo, 15 out of 70 Council meetings lasted longer than 22 hours. Of these 15 meetings, seven Council meetings dealt with the Appropriation Bills. Given that the average duration of a Council meeting is 17 hours and 19 hours respectively in the first two sessions of the Fifth LegCo (Appendix), most Council meetings could end on Thursdays without the need for continuation of business on Fridays should the proposal be implemented. Committees may schedule meetings for Fridays as under the present Council meeting arrangement.

17. In line with the existing practice, where a variation from the established meeting arrangement is considered appropriate for a specific Council meeting, the President will consult Members before making his decision.

Advice sought

18. Members are invited to give views on the proposal as set out in paragraph 15 above. Should Members agree to recommend the proposal for the President's consideration, the views of the Administration will be sought. Subject to Members' views and the President's determination, the proposal may be implemented from March 2015 onwards.

Council Business Division 3
Legislative Council Secretariat
28 January 2015

Duration of Council meetings

(all figures rounded to the nearest integers)

5th Term

Session	Total no. of meetings*	Total meeting hours <i>(% change from previous year)</i>	Average duration of a meeting <i>(% change from previous year)</i>	No. of Council meetings lasting : <i>(% of total no. of meetings)</i>	
				1 day	more than 1 day
2014-2015 <i>(as at 31.12.14)</i>	10	162 hr	16 hr	3 <i>(30%)</i>	7 <i>(70%)</i>
2013-2014	30	568 hr <i>(+10%)</i>	19 hr <i>(+12%)</i>	13 <i>(43%)</i>	17 <i>(57%)</i>
2012-2013	30	519 hr	17 hr	11 <i>(37%)</i>	19 <i>(63%)</i>

4th Term

Session	Total no. of meetings*	Total meeting hours <i>(% change from previous year)</i>	Average duration of a meeting <i>(% change from previous year)</i>	No. of Council meetings lasting: <i>(% of total no. of meetings)</i>	
				1 day	more than 1 day
2011-2012	31	635 hr <i>(+35%)</i>	20 hr <i>(+33%)</i>	12 <i>(39%)</i>	19 <i>(61%)</i>
2010-2011	31	470 hr <i>(+14%)</i>	15 hr <i>(+7%)</i>	16 <i>(52%)</i>	15 <i>(48%)</i>
2009-2010	30	411 hr <i>(+19%)</i>	14 hr <i>(+27%)</i>	21 <i>(70%)</i>	9 <i>(30%)</i>
2008-2009	30	344 hr	11 hr	23 <i>(77%)</i>	7 <i>(23%)</i>

* Excluding the Chief Executive ("CE")'s Question and Answer Sessions and the meetings at which CE presented the Policy Address and the Financial Secretary presented the Budget.