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Council for Sustainable Development's Public Engagement on Long-term Decarbonisation Strategy

PURPOSE

This paper seeks to brief Members on the public engagement (“PE”) on long-term decarbonisation strategy conducted by the Council for Sustainable Development (“SDC”).

BACKGROUND

The Paris Agreement

2. In December 2015, 195 countries including China adopted the Paris Agreement (“PA”), which is an agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change dealing with greenhouse gas (“GHG”) emissions¹. More specifically, the PA seeks to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5 degree Celsius. It emphasises the principles of equity, as well as common but differentiated responsibilities for, and respective capabilities by, the

¹ Human activities such as electricity generation, transport operation, waste disposal, industrial processes, etc. produce GHG emissions. These gases act like a blanket in the atmosphere, trapping heat and keeping our planet warm. However, excessive ambient concentration of GHG causes climate change, which is disrupting national economies and affecting lives given the significant impacts arising from changing weather patterns, rising sea level, and more extreme weather events. Among the different types of GHG, carbon dioxide is the most common type released to the atmosphere. For simplicity, the term “carbon emissions” is sometimes used to represent all kinds of GHG emissions, where GHG other than carbon dioxide are translated into carbon dioxide equivalent based on their individual global warming potentials.

participating Parties, so that they can take into account the different national circumstances in mapping out their individual approach and pace in achieving the PA goals. Accordingly, the PA has not made any specification or set any rigid requirement as to how each Party shall set its mid-century carbon reduction target; setting visionary goals is also regarded as a viable option.

3. The PA came into force on 4 November 2016, and applies to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“HKSAR”).

4. To help HKSAR fulfil its commitments under the PA, the Government has invited the SDC to conduct a territory-wide PE on long-term decarbonisation strategy. Through the PE, the SDC hopes to raise public awareness of the negative impact of human induced carbon emissions, and gauge the views of the community on how Hong Kong should contribute to the global decarbonisation efforts.

SDC’s PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Preparatory Phase

5. The SDC has formed a Support Group on Long-term Decarbonisation Strategy (“SG”), convened by Mr LAM Chiu-ying, to assist in the planning and implementation of the PE exercise.

6. With the assistance of a Programme Director (i.e. Policy for Sustainability Lab, Centre for Civil Society and Governance, The University of Hong Kong), the SG held six focus group meetings last year with stakeholders from various sectors including the academia, professional organisations, youth groups, non-governmental organisations (“NGOs”), green groups, District Councils, chambers of commerce, energy audit-related organisations, energy technology-related organisations, the transport sector, property management companies, and advisory bodies on matters relating to environmental protection. More than 100 participants from 88 organisations attended the focus group meetings.

7. Having considered the views of the focus groups, the SDC has identified three key areas for more in-depth public discussion:

- (a) transition towards a low-carbon society;
- (b) reducing energy use and further decarbonising electricity generation; and

- (c) low-carbon transport in a smart city.

It has also prepared a detailed document (the PE document, at **Annex A**) and a concise leaflet (**Annex B**) for this purpose.

The Public Engagement Document

8. The PE document consists of four chapters. The first chapter introduces the concept of climate change, including the causes of climate change as well as its impacts on Hong Kong and the world, and key points of the PA. This chapter also brings out the importance of taking timely climate mitigation actions and explains the purposes of the PE.

9. The second chapter summarises the sources of carbon emissions in Hong Kong so as to help the public understand how to deal with the issue.

10. The third chapter first explains that a comprehensive package of actions in various fields needs to be taken together, including ways to adopt low-carbon lifestyles by individuals, enhance energy saving measures and pursue further decarbonisation of the energy sector, enhance energy efficiency in buildings, and transit to low-carbon transport, in order to achieve carbon reduction targets at varying levels. The chapter then quotes overseas experiences in reducing carbon emissions. Furthermore, this chapter introduces ways to promote carbon reduction in Hong Kong.

11. The fourth chapter is a views collection form.

12. There is a key message in the PE document: to meet the target under the PA, the whole society needs to step up its efforts, and everyone has to contribute by adopting low-carbon living lifestyles. In the long run, to comply with the decarbonisation target, Hong Kong will need to increase the proportion of zero carbon energy.

The Public Interaction Phase

13. The SDC released the PE document and launched a three-month public interaction phase on 14 June 2019. Activities in this phase include regional forums, visits to schools, consultations with relevant advisory bodies, meetings with different stakeholders including youth groups, NGOs, green groups, chambers of commerce and relevant trades, etc.

14. The activities are being publicised through TV and Radio Announcements in the Public Interest (“APIs”) and posters; roving exhibitions; a dedicated website, as well as the networks of about 120 supporting organisations.

15. Views and responses collected during the public interaction phase will be analysed by an independent analysis and reporting agency (i.e. The Social Sciences Research Centre of The University of Hong Kong) and taken into account by the SDC in preparing a report with recommendations to the Government.

ADVICE SOUGHT

16. Members are invited to note the SDC’s work, and comment on the issues set out in the PE document.

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