

Access to all documents pledged despite legislative delays

By Jimmy Cheung

THE government is confident it will open all government bodies to public scrutiny by the end of the year, despite possible delays caused by legislative amendments.

Governor Chris Patten pledged in his 1994 Policy Address that the public could examine documents of the entire administration by the end of 1996 under the Access to Information Scheme implemented in March last year.

The scheme has yet to cover eight departments and public bodies.

They are Government House, Chief Secretary's Office, Audit Department, Constitutional Affairs Branch, police, Independent Commission Against Corruption, Independ-

ent Police Complaints Council and the Public Service Commission.

But plans to open them up have been delayed as four bodies require legislative amendments to allow the Commissioner for Administrative Complaints (Comac) to handle appeals against refusal of information sought under the scheme.

But the head of the Efficiency Unit, Colin Sankey, said he was confident that the pledge would be honoured. "I can assure you that there will be no problem."

The amendments, together with other proposed changes to expand Comac power, are being studied by the Legislative Council.

Grace Pun Wu Kam-yin, a principal executive officer overseeing the scheme, said the government had no control over the pace of scrutiny.

"The preparation work to open up the remaining divisions has long been ready. What we're waiting for are just the amendments. But the ball is now in the Legislative Council's court," she said.

She added that departments which did not require amendments, which were the Chief Secretary's Office, Government House, Constitutional Affairs Branch and Audit Department, might be implemented first if legislators took a long time to finish the amendments.

The scheme has so far handled 1,320 requests, with 6 per cent rejected.

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