

Commentary 2:
Five Pillars for Implementation

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November 2026

Commentary 1 examined mainland experts' expectations for Hong Kong's First Five-Year Plan (FFYP): sustained direction, reform, new growth, more widely shared benefits and accountable implementation. What arrangements will help turn these ambitions into results?

HKUST's climate governance work identified five connected pillars applicable across policy areas:

- Direction;
- Leadership and Accountability;
- Integration;
- Finance and Market Creation; and
- Transparency and Engagement.

They offer a framework for government to organise implementation, identify obstacles and improve delivery.

1. Direction

Direction requires clear outcomes to guide decisions. Departments, businesses and other institutions need to understand how individual initiatives contribute to the intended change.

Milestones and a credible sequence of actions are essential. Investment may depend on infrastructure, standards, skills, operating practices or demand. Understanding these dependencies helps government judge when and how to act.

Reform may span more than one five-year cycle. Annual Policy Addresses and budgets should therefore be assessed by how they advance longer-term objectives.

2. Leadership and Accountability

Shared outcomes need clear responsibility for the whole, especially where policies take years to develop, implement and adjust.

Leadership brings the relevant parts of government together, assigns responsibilities and resolves obstacles beyond individual departments' authority. Whether leadership is individual or joint, those responsible need the authority and support to coordinate decisions, with a clear route for resolving outstanding problems.

Accountability requires evidence of progress towards shared outcomes and of individual units' performance. Officials also need the authority to correct an unsuccessful approach, explaining why adjustments are necessary and how they should improve results.

3. Integration

Integration aligns policies, resources and decisions. Interactions between land, transport, energy, technology, skills and environmental conditions must be considered early enough to shape design and investment.

University towns in the Northern Metropolis, for example, connect teaching, research, enterprise, housing, mobility and surrounding communities. Decisions about each affect the others. Shared objectives and assessment of the combined result are as important as a common timetable.

Connections across policy fields also matter. Energy efficiency can support building renewal; ecological protection can improve development quality and resilience. Recognising these relationships helps government use resources well and reconcile competing objectives.

4. Finance and Market Creation

Implementation requires viable funding and investment arrangements. Alongside public spending, government can use procurement, standards, regulation, concessions, incentives, subsidies, guarantees, tax measures and risk sharing to encourage investment.

New industries and technologies may face insufficient demand, high initial costs, uncertain performance or financing difficulties. Policy needs tools suited to these barriers.

Building retrofits illustrate the challenge. Owners, technology providers, contractors and financiers need workable arrangements linking expenditure to measurable improvements and allocating responsibilities over time. Creating this market gives practical meaning to the combination of "an effective market" (有效市場) and "a capable government" (有為政府).

5. Transparency and Engagement

People need to understand intended outcomes, assess progress and contribute knowledge. Reporting should explain

milestones, difficulties and adjustments, using indicators clearly linked to the changes sought.

Engagement strengthens implementation. Businesses understand operational and investment constraints; professionals and universities contribute technical knowledge and evaluation; communities explain everyday impacts and whether benefits reach them. Continuing dialogue between government and stakeholder reveals obstacles, unintended effects, and solutions.

Accessible information also helps businesses plan investment, universities develop programmes and community organisations prepare services. Participants need to understand policy direction and opportunities to contribute.

Using the pillars together

The pillars reinforce one another. Direction gains credibility from clear responsibilities and resources. Integration improves investment conditions. Transparency supports assessment, while engagement helps identify necessary changes and generate better solutions. Weakness in one pillar can limit the others.

Together, they provide practical questions for considering government undertakings: is the outcome clear; what are the barriers; who is responsible; which decisions need coordination; what makes investment and participation viable; and how will progress be assessed?

Such an approach would naturally build on existing policies, institutions and initiatives, examining how well they combine around shared results and where stronger arrangements would help. Facilities and schemes are milestones; their value lies in what they enable and who benefits.

References

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