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HONG KONG STOCK EXCHANGE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE CODE AND RELATED LISTING RULE CHANGES EFFECTIVE 1 JULY 2025



CORPORATE GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK FOR HONG KONG-LISTED COMPANIES

- Corporate governance obligations and disclosure requirements:
 - Main Board / GEM Listing Rules; and
 - Corporate Governance Code (Appendix C1)

Principles

Mandatory Disclosure Requirements

- compulsory for all listed companies
- non-compliance is a breach of the Listing Rules

Code Provisions

- comply or explain basis
- must give reasoned explanation for any deviation

Recommended Best Practices

Voluntary guidelines



CORPORATE GOVERNANCE CODE AND LISTING RULE AMENDMENTS

- Consultation Paper in June 2024 → consultation ended in December 2024
- Basis for Amendments:
 - Analysis of 2022 compliance by listed companies;
 - Review of governance requirements in UK, Singapore, Australia,
 Malaysia, and Mainland China; and
 - Stakeholder feedback
- Aim of the consultation: Strengthen corporate governance practices
 - Improve board effectiveness and independence
 - Increase board and workplace diversity
 - Enhance risk management and internal control provisions
 - Encourage better capital management through enhanced dividend policy and dividend decision disclosures



CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

- A majority of 261 respondents supported the amendments
- Almost all proposals adopted with modifications and clarifications
- Change in the implementation date:
 - Changed to 1st July 2025 (originally 1st January 2025)
 - Amendments will apply to corporate governance reports and annual reports for financial years starting on or after 1st July 2025
 - Note: Transition periods for certain rules related to INEDs
- Stock Exchange will publish guidance in the Corporate Governance Portal
 - To be published in first half of 2025
 - Addresses respondent requests for clarification and guidance
 - Supersedes the December 2021 Corporate Governance Guide for Boards and Directors



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DESIGNATION OF LEAD INED

- New RBP C.1.8:
 - Encourages listed companies with a non-INED board chairman to appoint a Lead INED
- Role of Lead INED:
 - Act as an intermediary for directors and shareholders
 - Provide an alternative communication channel when normal channels are inadequate
- Lead INED Proposal
 - Investor concerns → Lack of access to boards and INEDs
 - Especially in family-controlled companies or where the chairman and CEO roles are combined
- Objective:
 - Enhance communication between shareholders (especially minority shareholders) and INEDs
 - Improve transparency in INEDs' responsibilities



DESIGNATION OF LEAD INED (CONT'D)

- Majority Support
 - Majority of respondents supported the Lead INED provision
 - Some proposed making it mandatory rather than "comply or explain"
- Opposition Concerns:
 - Existing shareholder communication policies already in place (MDR L)
 - Limited benefit for companies with concentrated shareholding structures
- Lead INED provision to be introduced as a Recommended Best Practice (not a Code Provision) when the board chairman is not an INED



DESIGNATION OF LEAD INED (CONT'D)

- New Corporate Governance Guide:
 - will provide guidance on the role and functions of Lead INED
 - o will clarify the differences between Lead INED and board chair responsibilities
- Consultation Conclusions:
 - Encouraged investors to communicate their expectations on the responsibilities of Lead INEDs
 - No increased liability → Lead INEDs have the same fiduciary duties as other directors
 - No announcement required under MB Rule 13.51(2) / GEM Rule 17.50(2) for designation
 - CP B.1.2: Changes in Lead INED designation must be reflected in updated list of directors on their website and HKEX website
 - MDR B(a): Appointment of Lead INED must be disclosed in corporate governance reports

DESIGNATION OF LEAD INED (CONT'D)

LEAD INED REQUIREMENTS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

London Stock Exchange

Corporate Governance Code:

- Lead INED required on a "comply or explain" basis
- Role:
 - Provide a sounding board for the chairman
 - Act as intermediary for shareholders





Singapore Exchange

- Lead INED required on a "comply or explain" basis
- Lead INED required only if the chairman is conflicted or not independent

NASDAQ / NYSE

- No requirement for Lead INED
 - Many companies appoint one voluntarily
 - especially when CEO and chairman roles are combined
- Lead INED role developed in the 1990s to counter-balance CEO-chair duality and enhance board independence
- Scope of duties typically included in Lead Independent Director Charter

DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS REGARDING HKEX-LISTED COMPANIES' SHAREHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- New CP F.1.1:
 - Requires boards (especially INEDs) to be accessible to shareholders
 - To facilitate constructive engagement and understanding of shareholder views on:
 - Governance matters; and
 - Performance against corporate strategy
- New MDR L(d):
 - Requires disclosure in the corporate governance report on:
 - i. Nature, number, or frequency of shareholder engagements
 - ii. Groups of shareholders and company representatives involved
 - iii.The company's approach to following up on engagement outcomes



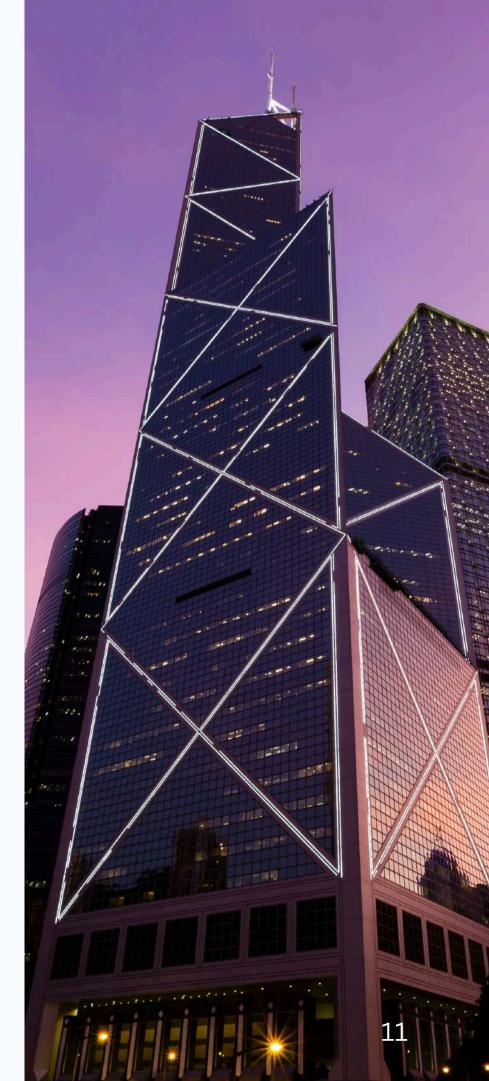
MANDATORY CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR LISTED COMPANY DIRECTORS

- New MB Rule 3.09F / GEM Rule 5.02F:
 - Directors must complete mandatory CPD annually on specified topics
 - No minimum CPD hours
 - Objective → To ensure directors stay updated on regulatory developments and ensure regulatory compliance by listed companies
- Mandatory CPD Topics (MB Rule 3.09G / GEM Rule 5.02G):
 - a. Roles, functions, and responsibilities of the board, committees, and directors and board effectiveness
 - b. Legal and regulatory obligations under Hong Kong law and Listing Rules, including updates
 - c. Corporate governance and ESG matters (e.g., sustainability, climate-related risks and opportunities)
 - d. Risk management and internal controls
 - e. Updates on relevant industry-specific developments, business trends, and strategies
- Note: Does not apply to overseas companies with secondary listings (MB Rule 19C.11)

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MANDATORY CPD FOR "FIRST-TIME DIRECTORS"

- MB Rule 3.09H / GEM Rule 5.02H:
 - First-time directors must complete 24 hours of CPD within 18 months of appointment on specific topics
- Definition of First-time Directors:
 - Never served as a director of a Hong Kong-listed company;
 - Have not served as a director of a Hong Kong-listed company in last 3 years.
- Reduced Requirement:
 - 12 hours for directors with experience on an overseas exchange in the last 3 years
- Current CP C.1.1: Requires induction training for new directors
 CPD training will be in addition to existing induction requirement



MANDATORY CPD FOR "FIRST-TIME DIRECTORS" (CONT'D)

- Resignation and Re-appointment:
 - If a First-time director resigns before completing CPD and is re-appointed within 3 years → must complete the remaining hours within 18 months of reappointment
- Training from professional organisations (e.g., solicitors, accountants) can be counted
- Training as a director of other listed companies can be counted if it:
 - Covers the specified topics;
 - Is not company-specific; and
 - Includes Hong Kong-specific requirements



MANDATORY DISCLOSURE OF DIRECTOR TRAINING

- New MDR B(i):
 - Listed companies must disclose directors' CPD details in their corporate governance reports

■ Confirmation: All directors have fulfilled CPD requirements during the reporting period

- <u>First-time Directors:</u> Confirmation of minimum CPD hours completed (MB Rule 3.09H/ GEM Rule 5.02H)
- Details for Each Director:
 - 1. Total CPD hours completed
 - 2. Format/mode of CPD (external, internal, or self-study)
 - 3. Number of hours completed for each mode
 - 4. Training topics covered
 - 5. Description of training provider(s) (name/type, where applicable)
- Flexibility in CPD Format:
 - o Companies can choose external, internal, or self-study formats
 - HKEX Recommendation:
 - Use internal training for company- or industry-specific topics
 - Use external providers for regulatory and legal topics



BOARD PERFORMANCE REVIEW

- New CP B.1.4:
 - Listed companies must conduct a formal board performance review at least every 2 years
 - o replace current RBP encouraging "regular" evaluations
 - o rationale: will help boards identify areas for improvement
- Disclosure Requirements for Board Performance Reviews
 - a. Confirm whether a review was conducted during the reporting period
 - If not, disclose when the next review will occur
 - b. <u>Disclose details of the review:</u>
 - i. Whether conducted internally or by an external provider;
 - ii. Scope of the review and participants; and
 - iii.If external review → disclose the relationship between the provider and the company/directors
 - c. <u>Disclose findings of the review:</u>
 - i. Significant areas of improvement identified
 - ii. Measures taken or planned as a result of the review

BOARD PERFORMANCE REVIEW (CONT'D)

- New CP B.3.1(e):
 - Nomination committee must support the regular evaluation of the board's performance
- New Corporate Governance Guide:
 - HKEX will provide guidance on the scope of reviews and level of detail required in disclosures
- Key Features of Board Performance Reviews:
 - Review of the board's performance as a whole, not individual directors
 - o Companies can choose to conduct reviews internally or externally
 - Reviews can be structured to suit the company's specific circumstances



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BOARD PERFORMANCE REVIEW (CONT'D)

- London, Australian, and Singapore Stock Exchanges:
 - Board performance reviews and disclosure on a "comply or explain" basis

UK

- Reviews required annually
- External reviews recommended regularly
- FTSE 350 companies → must conduct external reviews at least every 3 years

US

• Corporate governance guidelines of the companies listed on NYSE must require annual self-evaluation of board performance

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DISCLOSURE OF LISTED COMPANY BOARD SKILLS MATRIX

- New CP B.1.5:
 - Listed companies must maintain and disclose a board skills matrix in their corporate governance reports
- Minimum Information to Include:
 - Current mix of skills on the board;
 - Explanation of how the board's skills, experience, and diversity support the company's purpose, values, strategy, and desired culture;
 - Additional skills the board aims to acquire;
 - Plans to acquire those skills;
 - o Progress on acquiring additional skills in previous years
- Amended CP B.3.1:
 - Nomination committee must assist the board in maintaining the skills matrix



CAP ON CONCURRENT DIRECTORSHIPS FOR LISTED COMPANY INEDS

- New MB Rule 3.12A/ GEM Rule 5.07A:
 - Hard cap of 6 on number of concurrent Hong Kong-listed company directorships for INEDs
 - o Includes executive, non-executive, and INED roles
- Rationale:
 - 31 December 2023 → 23 INEDs held 7+ directorships on 181 listed company boards
 - Concerned that INEDs are serving on too many boards → insufficient time to serve each board
 - INEDs are expected to scrutinise listed companies' performance
 - The demands on listed company boards have become more complex and time-consuming



CAP ON CONCURRENT DIRECTORSHIPS FOR LISTED COMPANY INEDS (CONT'D)

- Three-Year Transition Period:
 - INEDs with more than 6 directorships must comply by the end of the <u>first AGM after 1 July</u>
 2028
- Current Requirements (Until 30 June 2028):
 - Companies proposing to appoint an INED with ≥7 directorships must explain how the INED can devote sufficient time in the shareholder circular or explanatory statement (CP B.3.4(b))
- New Listing Applicants (<u>From 1st July 2025</u>):
 - No listing applicant can have an INED with more than 6 HKEX listed company directorships
 - Applicants must ensure proposed INEDs have no more than 5 other HKEX listed company directorships



CAP ON CONCURRENT DIRECTORSHIPS FOR LISTED COMPANY INEDS (CONT'D)

- Most exchanges (e.g., Australia, Singapore, UK, US) do not impose a cap on directorships.
 - o they require disclosure of material directorships
- Some NASDAQ and NYSE impose caps → different for each company:
 - Apple Inc.: Caps directorships at five.
 - Microsoft Corporation: Caps directorships at four

DISCLOSURE RE. ASSESSMENT OF DIRECTORS' TIME COMMITMENT

- Amended MDR E(d)(iii):
 - Nomination committee must annually assess each director's:
 - i. Time commitment;
 - ii. Board contribution; and
 - iii. Ability to discharge responsibilities effectively
 - Disclose results of the assessment in the corporate governance report
 - No need to make disclosure for each director by name
- Factors to consider in the assessment:
 - a. Nature of the director's involvement on the board;
 - b. Professional qualifications and work experience;
 - c. Other Hong Kong-listed company directorships;
 - d. Significant external time commitments
 - e.g., directorships of companies listed on other overseas exchanges, full-time roles, major consultancy work, public service, directorships of statutory bodies, directorships of non-profit organisations



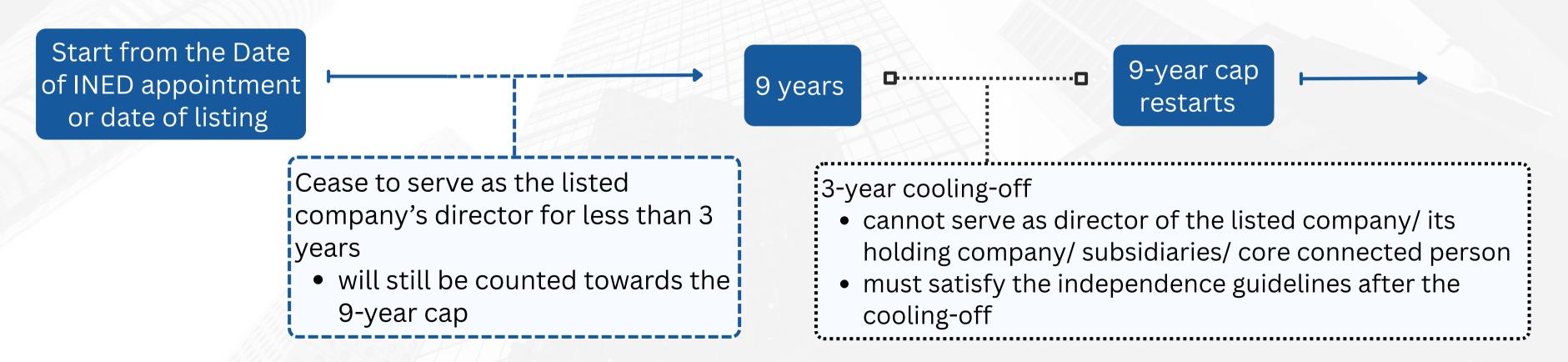
NEW 9-YEAR CAP ON LISTED COMPANY INEDS' TENURE

- New MB Rule 3.13A / GEM Rule 5.09A:
 - 9-year hard cap on INED tenure for Hong Kong-listed companies
- Supporting respondents: ensures periodic board refreshment and brings fresh perspectives to the board
- Opposing respondents: Long-Serving INEDs bring valuable insights based on experience and knowledge of the listed company
- As of December 2023:
 - 1,500 directorships held by Long-Serving INEDs
 - 810 listed companies (31% of all Hong Kong-listed companies) had Long-Serving INED(s)
 - o 30 listed companies had Long-Serving INEDs only
- HKEX: Long-Serving INEDs may lose independence and objectivity



NEW 9-YEAR CAP ON LISTED COMPANY INEDS' TENURE (CONT'D)

- Aims to encourage board refreshment and prevent "groupthink"
- New MB Rule 3.13A/ GEM Rule 5.09A:
 - o not allowed to have INEDs who have already served > 9 years as an INED
 - must remove Long-Serving INEDs at the first AGM after the 9th year



NEW 9-YEAR CAP ON LISTED COMPANY INEDS' TENURE (CONT'D)

- Transition Period → Note 1 to MB Rule 3.13A / GEM Rule 5.09A:
 - Two-phase approach over 6 years:
 - By 1st AGM after 1 July 2028: Majority of INEDs must have served less than 9 years
 - By 1st AGM after 1 July 2031: No Long-Serving INEDs allowed
- Current requirements will continue to apply during the transition:
 - CP B.2.4: Companies with all Long-Serving INEDs must disclose tenure lengths and appoint a new INED at next AGM
- For AGMs held <u>on or before 30 June 2031</u> → CP B.2.3:
 - Long-Serving INEDs must be re-appointed via a separate shareholders' resolution
 - Shareholder papers must explain why the INED is still considered independent



Independence of INEDs

NEW 9-YEAR CAP ON LISTED COMPANY INEDS' TENURE (CONT'D)

Singapore

• 9-year cap

Malaysia

• 12-year cap

Mainland China

• 6-year cap

Australia

- No cap
- tenure over 10 years may impact independence

UK

- No cap
- tenure over 9 years may impact independence

NASDAQ/NYSE

- No cap, but companies may impose their own limits
- Examples:
 - JP Morgan Chase: Lead Independent Director served over 20 years
 - Apple, Microsoft, Nvidia: Highlight benefits of long-serving directors

DISCLOSURE OF ALL LISTED COMPANY DIRECTORS' TENURE

- Amended MDR B(a):
 - Must disclose the length of tenure and current period of appointment of <u>all</u> directors by name in the corporate governance report



AT LEAST ONE DIRECTOR OF A DIFFERENT GENDER ON THE NOMINATION COMMITTEE

- Current Requirements:
 - Listed companies must have a board diversity policy
 - At least one female director must have been appointed by 31
 December 2024

• New CP B.3.5:

 At least one director of a different gender must be appointed to the nomination committee

• Rationale:

- To improve board diversity and broaden exposure to potential director candidates
- Current Statistics (December 2023):
 - 17% of Hong Kong-listed company directors are women
 - 19% of Hong Kong-listed companies have all-male boards



WORKFORCE DIVERSITY POLICY

- MB Rule 13.92(1)/ GEM Rule 17.104(1) / MDR J(b)
 - Listed companies must maintain and disclose a workforce diversity policy
 - To promote inclusion and diversity across the entire workforce
- Disclosure Requirements:
 - Full policy or summary in the corporate governance report, including:
 - i. Any plans or measurable objectives (e.g., numerical targets, timelines);
 - ii. Progress on achieving objectives; and
 - iii. Mitigating factors (if applicable)
- Note: Setting measurable objectives is not compulsory
 - o May be challenging for some companies due to size and industry



ANNUAL REVIEW OF LISTED COMPANY BOARD DIVERSITY POLICY

- MDR J(a):
 - Must review their board diversity policy <u>annually</u> and disclose results
- Disclosure Requirements:
 - a. Measurable objectives to promote gender diversity (e.g., numerical targets, timelines);
 - b. Measures to develop a pipeline of potential successors;
 - c. Review results, including:
 - Progress in achieving the objectives
 - How the conclusion is reached
- Note: Annual reviews will still be required even if the listed company has already achieved its current board diversity objectives
- Rationale: to ensure adherence to and meeting of diversity goals





SEPARATE DISCLOSURE OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND WORKFORCE GENDER RATIOS

- MDR J(c):
 - Separate disclosure of gender ratios of senior management + workforce (excluding senior management)
- To provide investors clearer insights into the effectiveness of diversity strategies



CODIFICATION OF ARRANGEMENTS DURING TEMPORARY DEVIATIONS

- MB Rule 13.92(2)/ GEM Rule 17.104(2):
 - Codifies existing guidance on temporary deviations from gender diversity requirements

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- When unable to have at least 1 director of a different gender:
 - Immediate announcement explaining the breach;
 - Reasonable endeavours to re-comply as soon as possible;
 - Must re-comply within 3 months

RISK MANAGEMENT AND INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEMS

EMPHASIS ON BOARD RESPONSIBILITY FOR RISK MANAGEMENT & INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEMS AND MANDATORY ANNUAL REVIEW

- New MDR H:
 - Annual Review: Listed companies must conduct at least an annual review of risk management and internal control (RMIC) systems
- Amendments to Principle D2 and CP D.2.1:
 - Board Responsibility for RMIC
 - Require annual reviews (at least) to be conducted
- Rationale:
 - To ensure timely identification and remediation of risks
 - To provide shareholders with greater insight into RMIC



RISK MANAGEMENT AND INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEMS

EMPHASIS ON BOARD RESPONSIBILITY FOR RISK MANAGEMENT & INTERNAL CONTROL SYSTEMS AND MANDATORY ANNUAL REVIEW (CONT'D)

- MDR H: Key Disclosures in Corporate Governance Reports:
 - a. Board Statement → Board's responsibility for RMIC + confirm that the RMIC systems are appropriate and effective;
 - b. RMIC system features → Processes for identifying, evaluating, and managing risks;
 - c. Significant changes in the assessment;
 - d. Presence or absence of an internal audit function;
 - e. Responsibilities of internal departments and external providers;
 - f. Frequency and methodology of reviews;
 - g. Confirmations from management, committees, auditors, and external providers on the board's conclusion;
 - h. Review scope; and
 - i. Control failings, weaknesses, and remedial actions

Amended CP D.2.1:

- Should cover all material controls of listed companies and their subsidiaries including financial, operational and compliance controls
- Must ensure adequate resources are allocated to the review

DIVIDEND-RELATED PROPOSALS

DISCLOSURE OF DIVIDEND POLICY AND BOARD DIVIDEND DECISIONS

- New MDR M:
 - If a listed company has a dividend policy, it must disclose:
 - The policy or a summary of it;
 - Aim or objective of the policy;
 - Board's key considerations for dividend decisions; and
 - Confirmation of adherence to the policy or explanation of any deviations
 - If no dividend policy:
 - Disclose reasons for not having one
- If the board has declared a dividend:
 - Must explain material variations in dividend rate compared to the previous period
- If no dividend is declared:
 - o Disclose reasons and any alternative measures to enhance investor returns





DIVIDEND-RELATED PROPOSALS

DISCLOSURE OF DIVIDEND POLICY AND BOARD DIVIDEND DECISIONS (CONT'D)

- Rationale:
 - To help investors make informed investment decisions about listed companies
- Tokyo and South Korean stock exchanges:
 - Taken steps to encourage listed companies' management to increase shareholder value

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Encourages focusing on cost of capital and profitability

OTHER MINOR LISTING RULE CHANGES

NEW REQUIREMENT TO SET A RECORD DATE

- MB Rule 13.66(1) / GEM Rule 17.78(1):
 - Codifies guidance on setting record dates for shareholder eligibility for attending meetings and entitlements
 - Need to announce record date and any change to announced record date
- Announcement Requirements:
 - <u>Rights Issues:</u> Announce record date at least 6 business days in advance
 - If books will be closed → book closure & record date must be announced at least 6 business days before book closure
 - Other Cases: Announce record date at least 10 business days in advance
 - If books will be closed → book closure & record date must be announced at least 10 business days before book closure
- Encourages setting record dates close to general meetings or entitlement payment dates



Other Minor Listing Rule Changes

MODIFIED AUDITORS' OPINIONS DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS

- Current Rules:
 - Must provide detailed information if financial statements do not give a true and fair view of company's affairs
 - O No specific disclosure requirements for modified auditors' opinions
- Amended MB Rule Appendix D2, Para 3.1/ Note to GEM Rule 18.47:
 - o Information to be disclosed in annual reports if the listed company receives a modified auditors' opinion:
 - i. Details of modifications and impact on financial position;
 - ii. Management's position and basis for major judgmental areas;
 - iii. Difference in the views of the management and the auditors
 - iv. Audit Committee's view;
 - v. Proposed plans to address modifications
- Aims to provide critical information to shareholders
 - <u>"Major judgmental areas"</u> → e.g. management disagreed with the auditor's request for information or audit evidence



OTHER MINOR LISTING RULE CHANGES

PROVISION OF MONTHLY FINANCIAL INFORMATION TO THE LISTED COMPANY BOARD

- Amended CP D.1.2:
 - Management should provide directors with monthly management accounts and updates (if available) on:
 - finances, operating performance, future prospects
- Directors have the right to and should request this information if not provided by management

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OTHER MINOR LISTING RULE CHANGES

ALIGNMENT OF LISTED COMPANIES' NOMINATION, AUDIT AND REMUNERATION COMMITTEE REQUIREMENTS

- 1
- Written terms of reference requirement for nomination committee
 - New MB Rule 3.27B / GEM Rule 5.36B:
 - Nomination committee must have written terms of reference setting out its authority and duties

- 2
- Arrangements on temporary deviation from mandatory committee requirements
 - New MB Rule 3.27C/ GEM Rule 5.36C:
 - If the Company is unable to meet requirements to set up a nomination committee or meet the composition requirements or have written terms of reference
 - Must publish an announcement and re-comply within 3 months
 - Weighted voting rights → MB Rule 8A.28A

- 3
- Changes to the provisions on audit and remuneration committees
 - To align the requirements in the case of a temporary deviation from the requirements for these committees



OTHER COMMENTS RECEIVED AND OTHER CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

- Other comments from respondents→ may be considered in the future:
 - o Increase minimum INEDs from one-third to a majority of the board;
 - Require nomination committee to be chaired by an INED (aligning with audit and remuneration committees);
 - Conduct a market survey on INED remuneration and set requirements in the Listing Rules to ensure appropriate compensation