

Press Releases

LCQ16: Services and development of public libraries

Following is a question by the Hon Frederick Fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (April 16):

Question:

Last year, the Audit Commission and the Committee on Libraries respectively put forward a number of recommendations on the services and development of public libraries. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the progress of the regular checking of inventories of library materials and the details of the work in this respect, the missing rates of library items in various libraries and the measures to reduce such rates;

(b) whether it has reviewed the reference proportions of and the acquisition policy for library materials; whether it will consider enhancing the provision of library services for specific groups of persons and the elderly (e.g. providing more large print books in libraries situated in areas where more elderly people live; providing home delivery service of library materials for the elderly and persons with disabilities; providing materials in the languages of the ethnic minorities in libraries situated in areas where more such ethnic minorities live; providing more materials on vocational skills and language learning in libraries situated in areas with more low-income families, as well as extending library opening hours so as to facilitate the use of library services by the working people);

(c) of the progress of the involvement of various district councils in the management of public libraries, the progress of the Community Libraries Partnership Scheme and the details of the work in this respect, and whether it will substitute public libraries with community libraries; if not, whether the government departments concerned will co-ordinate their efforts so as to expeditiously set up a public library in the West Kowloon New Reclamation Area (i.e. the area around Hoi Lai Estate, AquaMarine and Fu Cheong Estate);

(d) whether it will consider making more use of public libraries to promote civic education by, for example, allowing non-profit-making organisations and social enterprises to rent libraries for holding promotional and sales activities in this respect; and

(e) of the number of professional librarians and their percentage in the existing staff establishment of public libraries, whether it will set a target for raising the percentage to international standards and the implementation timetable in this respect?

Reply:

Madam President:

(a) Since mid July 2007, stock-taking of library collection have been conducted in various public libraries under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) according to a prescribed schedule and the sampling approach recommended by the Audit Commission. Forty-five libraries have completed the exercise by now, and the average success rate of stock-taking is 98.6%. It is expected that the stock-taking of all the 76 libraries under the public library system will be finished in a year. Libraries will,

pursuant to the established mechanism, follow up and deal with as early as possible those items which cannot be successfully taken stock. All libraries are now installed with book detection systems and closed circuit television surveillance systems for enhancing the security of library materials. The status of individual items is also regularly monitored through status reports and the annual stock-taking exercise. The LCSD has planned to conduct a pilot scheme on the use of the Radio Frequency Identification Technology for better management of library materials in six libraries in 2010. The result of the pilot scheme will help the Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL) to formulate services improvement plans.

(b) The HKPL has been following the principles laid down in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto in acquiring library materials for the building up and continued development of a balanced and diversified library collection to meet the community's needs for information, research, self-learning, and profitable use of leisure. To align with the overall direction of collection development, the libraries in drawing up their annual plans for acquiring materials do not only assess the reading needs and interest of the community, but also take into consideration the relevant social, economic, and population factors of their respective districts. In addition, the public libraries make reference to statistics on library usage, analysis of library users' reading interest, demographic data, readers' suggestions on library purchase, views of customer liaison groups and district organisations, etc.

The development of library collection supports the provision of lending, newspaper and periodical reading, and reference services. The materials acquired should cover as many subjects as possible and cater for the self-learning needs of the community. In planning for the provision of library materials, individual libraries will take into account the population mix and needs of their respective districts and make appropriate adjustments to the proportion of library materials to be acquired. Examples of such adjustments include the increase of reading materials suitable for the elderly in accordance with the proportion of the elderly population in the district, and the provision of newspapers and periodicals in the languages of the ethnic minorities in libraries located in districts with a high population of ethnic minorities.

All branch libraries maintain close liaison with schools and local organisations in their respective districts. Apart from providing lending services of library materials to schools and non-profit making organisations including those voluntary agencies serving the disabled, the branch libraries join hands with local organisations to promote the services and development of libraries through the scheme of involving District Councils (DCs) in the management of libraries. The branch libraries also collaborate from time to time with other organisations in providing library extension services, such as organising activities suitable for the youth, elderly, and ethnic minorities in libraries or local organisations.

On the issue of library opening hours, the Government has provided all DCs with additional resources for their involvement in the management of district facilities. Individual DCs may, in the light of specific local needs, extend the opening hours of public libraries in their respective districts in consultation with the LCSD. The extra expenditure incurred from the change of library service hours may be funded by the additional resources provided to the DCs.

(c) The scheme to involve DCs in the management of district libraries in all the 18 districts was implemented in January 2008. In the past three months, district libraries have submitted their extension activity programmes for 2008-09 to their respective DCs, and the proposals and relevant funding applications have been

endorsed by the DCs. A total amount of \$710,000 for funding these programmes has been granted to the 65 district libraries.

Furthermore, the LCSD is actively studying and following up the various suggestions raised by individual DCs, including extending library opening hours and setting up community libraries. Subject to compliance with relevant Government policies, the district libraries will, in the light of the resources and manpower available, provide all possible support and assistance to the DCs with a view to delivering library services that better meet the needs of local residents.

To further develop the district libraries as community learning and reading centres for their respective districts and to extend library services to various sectors of the community, the HKPL introduced the "Libraries@neighbourhood - Community Libraries Partnership Scheme" in December 2005. The total number of materials on loan since the introduction of the scheme has amounted to about 1,000,000, and 54 community libraries are currently serving residents in various districts.

Under close collaboration with the District Facilities Management Committee of the Tuen Mun District Council and with additional resources provided through the pilot scheme, the HKPL set up four new community libraries in the district. The services provided have been well received so far. In Sai Kung District, nine community libraries have also been set up by seven local organisations under the funding of the Sai Kung District Council to provide book lending services to the local residents.

Since libraries of different types complement one another in their provision of services to different types of readers, the HKPL has no intention to substitute public libraries by community libraries. It will nonetheless join force with district bodies, including the DCs and local organisations, to continue to make use of existing resources to implement, in an extensive scale, the "Community Libraries Partnership Scheme" to promote reading in the community.

Regarding the planning of library facilities, the LCSD plans new libraries in accordance with the standards set out in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines (HKPSG) by the Planning Department, which stipulate that there should be a district library for every 200,000 persons and that planning should be made on a district basis so that at least one district library is provided for each district.

The population of Sham Shui Po District now stands at about 370,000. In this district the LCSD currently operates two district libraries (Lai Chi Kok and Po On Road Public Libraries), two small libraries (Pak Tin and Un Chau Street Public Libraries), and three mobile library service points (located in Hoi Lai Estate, Tai Hang Tung Estate, and Fu Cheong Estate). Generally speaking, the LCSD has conformed to the standards set out in the HKPSG in its provision of public library facilities in Sham Shui Po District. In addition, preparatory work for reprovisioning Pak Tin Public Library within the district to upgrade its facilities and to provide room for a larger library collection is in full steam. The LCSD is also preparing for the establishment of the third district library in the proposed Tung Chau Street Complex. Upon the completion of the project, there will be three district libraries, two standard small libraries, and three mobile library service points in Sham Shui Po District. As such, the Government does not have any plan to set up public libraries in the West Kowloon New Reclamation Area around Hoi Lai Estate, AquaMarine and Fu Cheong Estate for the time being.

(d) The promotion of civic education is an integral part of the pluralistic cultural programme of public libraries. The HKPL

organises cultural activities and seminars on a regular basis, for example, forums on "New Vision in the 21st Century: Outstanding Young Persons' Discourse on Globalisation, China Fever and Technology Revolution", subject seminars on "Cosmopolitan Hong Kong", talk series on "China and Hong Kong by Renowned Scholars and Celebrities" and on "The Development of Hong Kong - Past and Future", etc. These activities help young people and students enhance their community awareness and sense of identity.

In addition, the exhibition gallery, lecture theatre, and activity rooms of the Hong Kong Central Library are available for hire by community organisations for holding activities relating to arts, education, literary arts, library services, and government services, while the activity rooms of major and district libraries are available for hire by groups as venues of cultural activities. The HKPL will continue to work closely with community organisations so as to achieve synergy in the promotion of civic education.

(e) At present, a total of 294 staff from the Librarian grade are responsible for the management of the HKPL. They are all trained professionals with practical experience. The ratio of professional staff is about 20%. Since library services and facilities vary from one city to another, the staff composition and ratio of libraries in other cities should only be taken as a reference. The HKPL will continue to strengthen the professional skills of its library staff through training and internal deployment with a view to providing the general public with quality library services.

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