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7 June 2006

Ms Dora WAI
Clerk
Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Ms WAI,

**The Director of Audit's Report on the
results of value for money audits (Report No. 46)**

Chapter 5 - Provision of public museum services

Thank you very much for your letter dated 24 May on the above subject.
Further written information is attached for the consideration of the Public
Accounts Committee please.

(Gerard C C TSANG)
for Director of Leisure and Cultural Services

c.c. SHA (Attn : Mr Peter C K KWOK)
Director of Audit (Attn : Ms Grace LEE)

Report No. 46 of the Director of Audit

Chapter 5 – Provision of public museum services

(a)(i) Action Plans by Various Museums to Clear Backlog Items

The accumulation of backlog items pending accession is mostly due to the large amount of donations received in recent years, in particular in the cases of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, Hong Kong Museum of History and Hong Kong Film Archive. With limited staff resources, our priority of work has been accorded to front-of-house functions including the presentation of exhibitions, publication and educational activities. Stocktaking of backlog items pending accession would be implemented as follows :-

Hong Kong Museum of History

The accessioning of collection items normally requires basic conservation treatment including the cleaning of the artefacts, pest control treatment and stabilization of the fragile condition of field collection items. Preliminary research is also required to ascertain the provenance, dating, associated history, cultural significance, and a brief description of the artefact. Of the 257,780 items, about 200,000 items are old photographs on loan for a special subject study from the Hong Kong United Dockyard. Since they are not part of the permanent collection of the Hong Kong Museum of History they will not be accessioned. The remaining 57,780 items are scheduled to be accessioned in 4 years.

Hong Kong Heritage Museum

Accessioning of the backlog of 18,750 items of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum will be completed in 3 years.

Hong Kong Film Archive

The accessioning of items in the Film Archive basically involves checking of film reels, their cleaning and stabilization, identification of paper materials and input of data into the computer system for public access. These procedures are quite time consuming. It will take at least 4 years to clear the backlog of 430,000 items.

In order to facilitate the above registration work, plans are in hand to enlist the assistance of more university students as part of their museum internship studies in relevant subjects.

(a) (ii) Measures to Tighten the Control Over Collection Items Pending Accession

The museums will take the following procedures and measures to tighten the control over collection items pending accession:

1. Take overall snap-short photographs of each whole lot of collection items pending accession;
2. Assign a lot number for each lot of collection items in a dedicated Lots Register;
3. Register the lots. Details will include the receipt date, brief description of the lot, source, mode of acquisition, estimated quantity, estimated value if any, location of the lot and file reference;
4. Seal the lots and place them in secure storage;
5. Withdraw each lot for accessioning according to priority;
6. Inspect the condition of the items once every 4 months for lots pending accession.

A task group will be set up to monitor the implementation of the above measures in the museums and to explore ways to accelerate the task.

(b) Latest Development of the Central Museum Collection Repository and Interim Measures to Resolve the Storage Problem

We have critically reviewed the overall shortage of collection storage facilities and the storage needs for the ever-growing museum collections in the next 10 years. There is a genuine need to construct a Central Museum Collection Repository, not only to address the current serious shortfall, but to find a solution to the anticipated growth of collections in future. The proposed Central Museum Collection Repository project will involve the construction of an 8-storey purpose-equipped building

amounting to some 22,000 m² in floor area at Area 47 Mong Wing Street, Tuen Mun. We are drawing up the objective, scope of work and cost estimate on the project. Subject to resource allocation according to established procedures, we plan to have the new Central Repository completed by 2010.

As an interim measure, we will make use of 1,000 m² in floor area at Cornwall House in Quarry Bay from the Government Property Agency (GPA) to address the shortage problem. This will enable rearrangement of collection items to more suitable premises.

(c) Museum Publications

We will assess future demands of museum publications, consider disposal of some unsold items, and organize periodic sales. With regard to organizing sales, on 13 and 14, May during the occasion of the International Museum Day Hong Kong 2006, we launched a discount sale of LCSD's museum publications. During the sale, the standard 25% government discount was granted. 76 titles of publications were put up for sale and 7,375 copies were sold, with revenue amounting to \$338,715. This is equivalent to the reduction of a stock value of \$451,620. Similar sales will be arranged by late 2006 and at regular intervals in the future.

Since the current 25% discount on selling price and pre-paid arrangements for consignment which apply to all Government publications have not been sufficiently attractive to book distribution/sale agents, we are reviewing this requirement with a view to improving the overall arrangements for disposal of old museum publications in the market. With the approval of the FSTB, the Department is also working with reputable book distribution/sale agents on a new consignment arrangement to settle accounts on a monthly basis instead of pre-paid arrangement in order to widen the distribution outlets.

Other measures also include exploring the possibility to sell museum publications on the Internet through Hong Kong Post and the posting of the museum publication list on the website of individual museums. Arrangements have been made whereby art and history museum publications are available for sale at bookshops of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, Hong Kong History Museum and the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Similarly, science publications will be available for sale

at the bookshops of the Hong Kong Science Museum and the Hong Kong Space Museum at the same time.

(d) Strategy for Boosting Patronage and Improving Museum Services

The Committee on Museums is studying the future development of public museums. The strategies for boosting patronage and improving museum services are among the issues being studied. The Committee is planning to submit its recommendations by the end of 2006. The Government would then consider its recommendations in formulating the strategies and working out the improvement measures.

We have been implementing various incentive schemes such as offering naming rights, private functions for donors/sponsors, etc. A major donor or sponsor of an exhibition will be entitled to hold a private reception inside the museum including private viewing of the museum exhibition with guided tours led by museum curators, in addition to the usual promotional acknowledgements.

In the meantime, we are planning to open for hire more museum facilities for holding private activities - such as wedding ceremonies and receptions. We are also studying on the possibility of opening the lecture halls of the Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Hong Kong Museum of History for hiring.

We have been reviewing the museums' opening hours from time to time. Trial schemes had been implemented in the past, but the attendance rate and cost-effectiveness for late closing were not satisfactory. We would consider extension of opening hours for special blockbuster exhibitions and events as deemed appropriate. Notable examples include the 24-hour opening of the Hong Kong Science Museum for the exhibition marking the visit of the astronaut Yang Liwei in November 2003, and the extension of the opening hours to 8:00 p.m. for the Impressionism exhibition in February to April 2005 at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. We are assessing the cost effectiveness of a proposal to extend the opening hours of the Hong Kong Museum of Art on Sundays from 6 pm to 8 pm in view of its proximity to the Hong Kong Cultural Centre so as to tie in with the timing of arts and cultural performances in the evening.