

A. Introduction

The Committee noted that the Audit Commission (Audit) had conducted a review on the provision of public museum services. The review focused on the following areas:

- governance and strategic planning of museums;
- performance of Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) museums;
- acquisition and management of museum collection items; and
- operation of the LCSD museums.

2. The Committee did not hold any public hearing on this subject. However, it paid a visit to the Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Hong Kong Museum of History on 11 May 2006 to study and receive briefings on the problems relating to storage of collection items and museum publications examined in this chapter. The Committee also asked for a written response to its enquiries.

3. The responses of the **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** to the Committee's enquiries are in the letter of 7 June 2006, in *Appendix 7*. The Committee's enquiries and the Director's responses are set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

B. Acquisition and management of museum collection items

4. According to paragraph 4.14 of the Director of Audit's Report (Audit Report), as of November 2005, the number of collection items pending accession in the Hong Kong Film Archive, the Hong Kong Museum of History and the Hong Kong Heritage Museum were 436,200, 257,780 and 19,598 respectively. In paragraph 4.28(g) to (i), Audit recommended that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services should review the overall position of backlog of collection items pending accession in the LCSD museums; draw up an action plan to clear the backlog of collection items pending accession; and tighten the control over the collection items pending accession. The Director of Leisure and Cultural Services responded in paragraph 4.29(e) that the Hong Kong Film Archive had drawn up action plans to clear the backlog of collection items. Other LCSD museums would also draw up action plans to clear the backlog of their collection items within specific time frames. Moreover, the LCSD museums would tighten the control over collection items pending accession. The Committee asked:

- whether action plans had been drawn up by the various LCSD museums to clear the backlog of their collection items; if so, what the details of the plans were; and

- about the measures that had been/would be taken by the LCSD to tighten the control over collection items pending accession, as well as the implementation details.

5. In her letter of 7 June 2006, the **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** informed the Committee that:

Action plans by various LCSD museums to clear backlog items

- the accumulation of backlog items pending accession was mostly due to the large amount of donations received in recent years, in particular in the cases of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, the Hong Kong Museum of History and the Hong Kong Film Archive. With limited staff resources, the LCSD's priority of work had 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:
 - (a) *Hong Kong Museum of History*: the accessioning of collection items normally required basic conservation treatment, including the cleaning of the artefacts, pest control treatment and stabilisation of the fragile condition of field collection items. Preliminary research was 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 were old photographs on loan for a special subject study from the Hong Kong United Dockyard. Since they were not part of the permanent collection of the Hong Kong Museum of History, they would not be accessioned. The remaining 57,780 items were scheduled to be accessioned in four years;
 - (b) *Hong Kong Heritage Museum*: accessioning of the backlog of 18,750 items of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum would be completed in three years; and
 - (c) *Hong Kong Film Archive*: the accessioning of items in the Film Archive basically involved checking, cleaning and stabilisation of film reels, identification of paper materials and input of data into the computer system for public access. These procedures were quite time consuming. It would take at least four years to clear the backlog of 430,000 items;
- in order to facilitate the above registration work, plans were in hand to enlist the assistance of more university students as part of their museum internship studies in relevant subjects;

Measures to tighten control over collection items pending accession

- the LCSD museums would take the following procedures and measures to tighten the control over collection items pending accession:
 - (a) taking overall snapshot photographs of each whole lot of collection items pending accession;
 - (b) assigning a lot number for each lot of collection items in a dedicated Lots Register;
 - (c) registering the lots. Details would 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;
 - (d) sealing the lots and placing them in secure storage;
 - (e) withdrawing each lot for accessioning according to priority; and
 - (f) inspecting the condition of the items once every four months for lots pending accession; and
- a task group would be set up to monitor the implementation of the above measures in the museums and to explore ways to accelerate the task.

6. The Committee noted from the site visit on 11 May 2006 and paragraph 4.16 of the Audit Report that, due to shortage of storage space, the Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Hong Kong Museum of History had stored collection items in cargo containers. Some museums even had to turn down offers of donations of collection items from the public. In response to the audit recommendation in paragraph 4.28(j) that the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services should critically review the overall storage requirements of the LCSD museums and expedite action to develop a central museum collection repository to meet the storage needs of the LCSD museums, the Director said in paragraph 4.29(f) that a central museum collection repository in Tuen Mun was being planned. The Committee enquired about the latest development on this issue and the interim measures taken by the LCSD to resolve the storage problem.

7. The **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** responded that:

- the LCSD had critically reviewed the overall shortage of collection storage facilities and the storage needs for the ever-growing museum collections in the next ten years. There was 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 would involve the construction of an eight-storey purpose-equipped building amounting to some 22,000 m² in floor area at Area 47 Mong Wing Street, Tuen Mun. The LCSD was drawing up the objective, scope of work and cost estimate on the project. Subject to resource allocation according to established procedures, the LCSD planned to have the new Central Repository completed by 2010; and

- as an interim measure, the LCSD would make use of 1,000 m² in floor area at Cornwall House in Quarry Bay from the Government Property Agency to address the shortage problem. This would enable rearrangement of collection items to more suitable premises.

C. Operation of the LCSD museums

8. The Committee noted from paragraph 5.13 of the Audit Report that, in November 2005, the total number of unsold museum publications in six LCSD museums was 209,046 with a total selling price of \$24.7 million. 67% of the unsold publications had been kept in the museums for five years or more. The Hong Kong Museum of Art had used two cargo containers to store some of its unsold publications. The Hong Kong Museum of History also had insufficient storage space for keeping the unsold publications. The Committee also noted from the brief introduction given by the LCSD representatives during the site visit on 11 May and paragraph 5.26(h) that the current 25% discount on selling price and pre-paid arrangement as specified by the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (FSTB) had not been attractive to book distribution/sales agents. The LCSD would consider the disposal of some unsold items, organise sales with special discounts and critically assess the demand for publications in future. The Committee asked about the LCSD's proposals in this regard.

9. The **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** replied that:

- the LCSD would assess future demands of museum publications, consider disposal of some unsold items, and organise periodic sales. With regard to organising sales, on 13 and 14 May 2006 during the occasion of the International Museum Day Hong Kong 2006, the LCSD launched a discount sale of the 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 was equivalent to the reduction of a stock value of \$451,620. Similar sales would 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 applied to all government publications had not been sufficiently attractive to book distribution/sale agents, the LCSD was 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 LCSD was 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; and
- other measures included exploring the possibility of selling museum publications on the Internet through Hong Kong Post and the posting of the museum publication list on the website of individual museums. Arrangements had been made whereby art and history museum publications were available for sale at bookshops of the Hong Kong Heritage Museum, the Hong Kong Museum of History and the Hong Kong Museum of Art. Similarly, science publications would be available for sale at the bookshops of the Hong Kong Science Museum and the Hong Kong Space Museum at the same time.

D. Performance of the LCSD museums

10. The Committee noted that, in response to the audit recommendations in paragraph 3.26(a) and (f) of the Audit Report, the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services said in paragraph 3.27(a) and (f) that the LCSD would, in consultation with the Committee on Museums, formulate an overall strategy for boosting patronage and improving museum services. The LCSD would also consider rescheduling the opening hours of its museums.

11. In response to the Committee's enquiry about the latest development on the above matters, the **Director of Leisure and Cultural Services** advised that:

- the Committee on Museums was studying the future development of public museums. The strategies for boosting patronage and improving museum services were among the issues being studied. The Committee on Museums was 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;
- the LCSD had been implementing various incentive schemes such as offering naming rights, private functions for donors/sponsors, etc. A major donor or sponsor of an exhibition would 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, the LCSD was planning to open for hire more museum facilities for holding private activities, such as wedding ceremonies and receptions. The LCSD was also studying the possibility of opening for hire the lecture halls of the Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Hong Kong Museum of History; and
- the LCSD had been reviewing the opening hours of its museums from time to time. Trial schemes had been implemented in the past, but the attendance rates and cost-effectiveness of late closing were not satisfactory. The LCSD would consider extending the opening hours for special blockbuster exhibitions and events as deemed appropriate. Notable examples included 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 pm for the Impressionism exhibition in February to April 2005 at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. The LCSD was assessing the cost-effectiveness of a proposal to extend the opening hours of the Hong Kong Museum of Art on Sundays from 6:00 pm to 8:00 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.

E. Follow-up action

12. The Committee notes the reply of the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services and wishes to be kept informed of the progress made in implementing the various audit recommendations.