

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

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**Panel on Home Affairs**

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the meeting on 17 April 2009**

**Development of Public Library Services**

**Purpose**

This paper provides background information on the development of public library services and gives an account of past discussions by Legislative Council (LegCo) Members on the subject.

**Background**

2. In April 2000, the Culture and Heritage Commission (CHC) was established for advising the Government on the policies as well as funding priorities on culture and arts. The CHC submitted the "Culture and Heritage Commission Policy Recommendation Report" to the Government in April 2003, and put forward its policy recommendations on a wide range of areas relating to the long-term cultural development in Hong Kong, including the development of public library services.

3. In November 2001, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) commissioned the "GML Consulting Limited" and "GHK (Hong Kong) Limited" to conduct a consultancy study on the future development of Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL). The study sought to formulate a strategic plan for the development of the LCSD's public library services upon a review of their existing performance, and to recommend the most appropriate institutional arrangement and organisational strategy for operating public library services. The findings and recommendations of the consultancy study were presented to the Panel on Home Affairs (the Panel) at its meeting on 13 December 2002.

4. To follow up on the CHC's recommendations relating to library services and facilities as well as the recommendations of the consultancy study, the Government established the Committee on Libraries ("the Committee") in November 2004 for a tenure of two years. The Committee was tasked to advise the Secretary for Home Affairs on strategies and plans for betterment of Hong Kong's public library facilities and services, with enhance community cooperation and partnership.

### **Recommendations of the Committee**

5. On 18 June 2007, the Administration briefed the Panel on the Report of the Committee, which contained recommendations relating to the following areas: mission of HKPL, making knowledge accessible and affordable, supporting lifelong learning, bringing culture to the community, leveraging the use of information technology (IT), offering value-added services, promotion of reading and literary arts, and mode of governance. Key recommendations of the Committee are as follows -

- (a) public libraries should not just be a place for borrowing books, but also a venue for organising a variety of cultural activities. The mission of HKPL should be restructured to comprise the local community service dimension and the broader cultural dimension;
- (b) while the Administration's plan for District Councils (DCs) to participate in the management of district libraries was a significant step in enhancing community involvement in the provision of library services, it should reinforce the role of the Hong Kong Central Library (HKCL) to serve as a territory-wide public library in helping the community to establish its own cultural identity;
- (c) measures to enhance the accessibility of knowledge should be introduced. These include, for example, improvement of library environment and facilities, provision of library services at convenient locations, offer of book delivery service at a charge and regular reviews on the collection and acquisition policy of HKPL to meet the changing needs of different sectors;
- (d) library services should be strengthened to complement the educational programmes in schools, to support continuing education for the community, and to promote activities on reading and literary arts in close partnership with outside organisations and other government departments;

- (e) HKPL should formulate a strategy for the development of specific collections of cultural interest and explore collaboration opportunities with the Public Records Office on sharing of archival information and mounting exhibitions on the history of Hong Kong; and
- (f) an advisory board should be set up to advise on the overall development strategy of public libraries, in particular how the broad "cultural" dimension of HKPL's mission could be fulfilled through HKCL.

### **Members' views and concerns**

6. Views and concerns expressed by members in their deliberations of the recommendations of the Committee are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

#### Bringing library services to the local communities

7. A member asked whether the Administration would implement measures to arrange book delivery service to homes of the elderly and those with physical disabilities and to make available more books with large-print and on areas of interest to elderly users. The Administration responded that priorities would be set in the implementation of these recommendations, taking into account the availability of resources. As to members' suggestion for enhancing the book reservation service for users with disabilities, the Administration replied that the existing book reservation service could already be done through the Internet. Regarding members' enquiry about the provision of library services at shopping malls, the Administration advised that consideration would be given to this option only if there were no better alternatives and if resources permitted.

#### Better library services

8. A member asked whether consideration would be given to extending the opening hours of public libraries to facilitate the use of library services by the public. Another member suggested that public libraries should be open everyday and their opening hours should be extended on public holidays. He further suggested that more part-time staff should be recruited for such purpose. The Administration advised that it would liaise closely with DCs on the opening hours of their district libraries and, through application of DC funds, make adjustments to the hours to meet the service needs of local residents as appropriate.

9. In response to a member's enquiry about the plan for enhancing library facilities to facilitate users with physical disabilities, the Administration advised that the all new libraries constructed would comply with the requirements of the Design Manual: Barrier Free Access 1997.

#### Recruitment of professional staff

10. Some members expressed concern about the low provision in the number of full-time and professional staff for HKPL in comparison with the international standards. The Administration replied that subject to the availability of resources, it would consider recruiting additional professional staff and training up more full-time staff with the required expertise.

11. Hon James TO and Hon Frederick FUNG raised questions on the progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the Committee and issues relating to the development of public libraries at the Council meetings on 30 January 2008 and 16 April 2008 respectively. The Administration's responses were as follows -

- (a) the Administration accepted in principle all the recommendations of the Committee and was progressively implementing and taking forward the recommendations;
- (b) the Scheme to involve DCs in the management of district libraries in all the 18 districts was implemented in January 2008. HKPL had been stepping up liaison with schools and local organisations in various districts through its branch libraries, as well as collaboration with local organisations to enhance library services through the Scheme, and suitable organisations interested in participating in the Community Libraries Partnership Scheme were granted additional resources by the respective DCs to subsidize the purchase of bookshelves, books, and library computer software, payment for delivery of books, etc.;
- (c) HKCL had been hosting large-scale and diversified cultural activities and talks, developing its reference and information collections and related services, and forging closer cultural ties and cooperation with public libraries outside the territory, including those in the Pearl River Delta region, so as to distinguish itself as a metropolitan cultural centre; and
- (d) district-based and territory-wide extension activities were organised on a regular basis to familiarize the public with the public libraries, encourage the use of library facilities and resources for lifelong learning and incubate reading habits in the community.

## **Other developments**

### Public Libraries Advisory Committee

12. In May 2008, the Public Libraries Advisory Committee (PLAC) was set up, as recommended by the Committee on Libraries, to advise the Government on the overall development of HKPL, including the formulation of strategies and measures for the development of library facilities and services to achieve the broader culture mission of HKPL; the role, functions and management of HKCL; and measures to encourage community support and partnership with different sectors in promoting reading, lifelong learning and literary arts.

### Major upgrade of IT system

13. In December 2008, the Administration presented to the Panel the proposal to upgrade the Multimedia Information System (MMIS) of HKPL to enable the system to be more user-friendly in particular on data searching functions. Members were in general supportive of the proposal which would enhance public accessibility to and usage of library resources. They however urged the Administration to strengthen the contents and publicity of MMIS in view of its low usage rate. The proposal was approved by the Finance Committee on 16 January 2009.

### Extension of opening hours of public libraries

14. To address public demand for the extension of the opening hours of public libraries, 33 major and district libraries under the management of LCSD have been open seven days a week since 1 April 2009. According to the Administration, the weekly opening hours of public libraries have increased from 61 and 62 hours to 71 hours under the new arrangement. To enable public libraries to handle the extra workload so arising, additional resources have been earmarked for LCSD to create 17 Assistant Librarian and 58 Assistant Clerical Officer posts, and to engage service bureau staff to assist front-line staff. In addition, LCSD will as far as possible streamline the workflow for front-line staff, re-engineer operations, redeploy resources and re-arrange work priorities.

### Further discussion on the development of library services

15. The Administration will brief the Panel at its meeting on 17 April 2009 on the strategic plan for the development of HKPL in the coming 10 years, as recommended by PLAC.

## **Relevant papers**

16. A list of relevant papers with their hyperlinks at the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

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## Appendix

### Relevant documents on recent development of public library services

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper/Minutes	LC Paper No.
Panel on Home Affairs	18.6.2007	Administration's paper on "Committee on Libraries : Recommendation Report"	CB(2)2042/06-07(03) <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0618cb2-2042-3-e.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0618cb2-2042-3-e.pdf</a>
		Minutes of meeting	CB(2)251/07-08 <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha070618.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr06-07/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha070618.pdf</a>
Council meeting	30.1.2008	Written question raised by Hon James TO on "The role and operation of public libraries" and the Administration's reply	<a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0130-confirm-ec.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0130-confirm-ec.pdf</a> (pages 51-59)
	16.4.2008	Written question raised by Hon Frederick FUNG on "Services and development of public libraries" and the Administration's reply	<a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0416-confirm-ec.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr07-08/chinese/counmtg/floor/cm0416-confirm-ec.pdf</a> (pages 38-41)
Panel on Home Affairs	12.12.2008	Administration's paper on "Major Upgrade of Multimedia Information System for the Hong Kong Public Libraries"	CB(2)427/08-09(04) <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1212cb2-427-4-e.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1212cb2-427-4-e.pdf</a>
		Supplementary information note provided by the Administration on major upgrade of Multimedia Information System (MMIS) for Hong Kong Public Libraries	CB(2)582/08-09(01) <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1212cb2-582-1-e.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1212cb2-582-1-e.pdf</a>

		Minutes of meeting	CB(2)817/08-09 <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20081212.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20081212.pdf</a>
Finance Committee	16.1.2009	CAPITAL WORKS RESERVE FUND HEAD 710 - COMPUTERISATION Leisure and Cultural Services Department New Subhead "Major upgrade of Multimedia Information System for the Hong Kong Public Libraries"	FCR(2008-09)57 <a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/fc/fc/papers/f08-57e.pdf">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/fc/fc/papers/f08-57e.pdf</a>
		Record of decisions	<a href="http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/fc/fc/results/fc20090116.htm">http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/fc/fc/results/fc20090116.htm</a>
Panel on Home Affairs	Paper issued on 27.3.2009	Papers in relation to a complaint about working hours lodged by "a group of public library staff" which had been submitted to the Panel on Public Service	CB(2)1179/08-09(01)

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