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Subcommittee on Designation of Libraries Order 2010

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Administration's legislative proposal to designate the Students' Study Room on the first floor of Tung Chung Municipal Services Building (the Building) as a library with effect from 1 March 2010, and sets out the views of Legislative Council (LegCo) Members on the provision of library facilities in Tung Chung, in particular the request made by deputations for the retention of the existing public library at Yat Tung Estate following the commissioning of the new district library at Tung Chung.

Background

2. To meet the immediate needs of the growing population in the Tung Chung area, the Administration set up on a temporary basis a small library of 745 square meters in the Yat Tung Shopping Centre of Yat Tung Estate in 2004, pending the provision of a new permanent district library (i.e. the Tung Chung Public Library (the new Library) to be located on the ground floor and first floor of the Building). The new Library will occupy a floor area of about 2 700 square meters to accommodate a full range of services and facilities at district level, and will replace the interim library at Yat Tung Estate to better meet the information needs of local residents as well as the population in the district. According to the Administration, construction work of the Building is now at its final stage and the new Library is tentatively scheduled for commissioning mid this year.

3. In view of the demand for study room facilities which are currently not available at the library at Yat Tung Estate, the Administration has arranged for the early opening of the Students' Study Room located on the first floor of the new Library on 1 March 2010. To facilitate the operation of the aforesaid

Study Room, the Administration has introduced the Designation of Libraries Order 2010 (the Order) to designate the Study Room as a library. By virtue of the Order, the management and control of that library (i.e. the Students' Study Room) is vested in the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services, and the Director may exercise other statutory functions under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) in respect of that library.

Views and concerns on library facilities at Yat Tung Estate

4. Residents of Yat Tung Estate have raised objection to the Administration's plan to cease the operation of the library at Yat Tung Estate upon the commissioning of the new district Library. Their request for the retention of the existing library has been followed up by Duty Roster Members under the LegCo Redress System since December 2009. Members have met with the Administration and deputations (viz. Lantau Island Residents Association (大嶼山居民協會) and Tung Chung Livelihood Monitor (東涌民生監察組)) to discuss the issue in case conferences held on 18 January 2010, and 2 and 10 February 2010 respectively. The key views and concerns of deputations and Members are summarised in the ensuing paragraphs.

Views of deputations

5. The deputations pointed out that the existing library at Yat Tung Estate was well-received by local residents, and had virtually become the focal point of the local community where many basic recreation and social facilities were either lacking or underprovided. Local residents could make use of the library to enhance their knowledge, perform job search, and enrich their leisure time. The library also served as a safe haven for young children (who constituted an exceptionally high proportion of the local population) to read and learn, especially when they were not attended by their parents. With an attendance rate of over 400,000 in 2009, the deputations considered that there was a genuine need for the retention of the facility. Deputations also raised concerns about the high transport expense for travelling to the new Library.

Views of LegCo Members

6. Members in general considered that the residents' request merited special consideration on the following grounds: (a) the Estate had a large population of young children and Comprehensive Social Security Assistant recipients, who depended solely on the facilities and resources provided by the existing library for reading, studying, learning and job searching; (b) travel expenses to the new Library would aggravate the financial burden of local residents; and (c) the cost for maintaining the library (at round \$3 million a year) was not substantial.

7. Members held the view that the Administration should take heed of the special circumstances of the Yat Tung Estate which was this exceptionally remote and impoverished, and consider the request of the local residents in a flexible and compassionate manner, and not impose the standing planning parameters for library facilities across-the-board indiscriminately. They suggested that the Administration should explore the feasibility of providing funding support to maintain the operation of the existing library, and engage local schools and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the provision of library-related services in the Estate. They also urged the Administration to give due consideration to the cost-saving measures for sustaining the operation of the existing library, as proposed by the deputations. These measures included scaling down the facilities at the new Library so as to spare resources to support the existing library, shortening the opening hours of the existing library, and engaging volunteers in its daily operation.

Response of the Administration

8. On the suggestion to retain the public library at Yat Tung Estate, the Administration advised that the planning of new libraries was made in accordance with the standard set out in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines issued by the Planning Department. The Guidelines stipulated 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 was provided for each district. To better meet the information needs of Tung Chung residents, a new district library would be provided for the area which had a population of 80 000. In the light of the planning requirement and resources constraints, it would be difficult for the Administration to maintain the operation of two libraries in the Tung Chung area.

9. To address the needs of local residents at Yat Tung Estate, the Administration advised that it was actively liaising with NGOs to explore the feasibility of setting up new reading/study facilities for the use of local residents upon the closure of the existing library facility. In addition, the frequency of mobile library services to the Estate would be increased to twice a week. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department would also strengthen the collaboration with schools and local organisations/bodies to promote the use of library facilities and encourage the block-loaning of reading materials, with a view to addressing the needs of local residents for self-enhancement. With the support of the Hong Kong Outlying Islands Women's Association Jockey Club Women Integrated Services Centre and the YMCA of Hong Kong (Tung Chung Centre), community libraries would be set up at Yat Tung Estate to enable residents, in particular children, teenagers, housewives and elderly to enjoy convenient and accessible library services.

10. On the cost-saving measures for sustaining the operation of the existing library, the Administration explained that the proposal for scaling down the

facilities in the new district Library was not advisable, as it would inevitably affect the quality of its service. Moreover, volunteers were deployed mainly to perform supporting duties which did not involve the handling of personal data of library users and collection of service charges, and their role was primarily supportive in nature.

Latest development

11. Following the case conference on 10 February 2010, Duty Roster Members concerned have decided to conduct a visit on 30 March 2010 to study the routing between the existing public library at Yat Tung Estate and the new Tung Chung Public Library.

12. At the meeting of the House Committee on 5 March 2010, Members agreed that a subcommittee should be formed to study the Order.

Council Business Division 2
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