

**立法會**  
**Legislative Council**

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**Panel on Home Affairs**

**Minutes of special meeting  
held on Monday, 14 June 2010, at 10:45 am  
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

- Members present** : Hon IP Kwok-him, GBS, JP (Chairman)  
Hon KAM Nai-wai, MH (Deputy Chairman)  
Hon James TO Kun-sun  
Hon CHEUNG Man-kwong  
Hon Mrs Sophie LEUNG LAU Yau-fun, GBS, JP  
Hon WONG Yung-kan, SBS, JP  
Hon Emily LAU Wai-hing, JP  
Hon WONG Kwok-hing, MH  
Prof Hon Patrick LAU Sau-shing, SBS, JP  
Hon Cyd HO Sau-lan  
Dr Hon LAM Tai-fai, BBS, JP  
Hon CHAN Hak-kan  
Hon CHEUNG Kwok-che  
Hon Paul TSE Wai-chun  
Hon Tanya CHAN  
Hon WONG Yuk-man
- Members absent** : Dr Hon Philip WONG Yu-hong, GBS  
Hon Timothy FOK Tsun-ting, GBS, JP  
Hon CHEUNG Hok-ming, GBS, JP  
Hon WONG Sing-chi
- Public officers attending** : Home Affairs Bureau  
Ms Florence HUI Hiu-fai, JP  
Under Secretary for Home Affairs

Mrs Avia LAI WONG Shuk-han  
Principal Assistant Secretary for Home Affairs  
(Culture)<sup>2</sup>

Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Mrs Betty FUNG CHING Suk-ye, JP  
Director of Leisure and Cultural Services

Mr CHUNG Ling-hoi, JP  
Deputy Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Culture)

Mr LEE Yuk-man  
Assistant Director (Libraries and Development)

Public Libraries Advisory Committee

Professor John LEONG Chi-yan, SBS, JP  
Chairman

Mr CHEUNG Chi-kong  
Vice-chairman

Professor LEE Kam-keung  
Member

Mr Gerry MA Kwai-yung, JP  
Member

Dr Johnny NG Kit-chong  
Member

**Clerk in attendance** : Ms Betty FONG  
Chief Council Secretary (2)<sup>2</sup>

**Staff in attendance** : Ms Louisa YEUNG  
Senior Council Secretary (2)<sup>2</sup>

Miss Vivien POON  
Council Secretary (2)<sup>2</sup>

Miss Cerry YU

Legislative Assistant (2)2

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**I. Development of public library services**

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1781/09-10(01) and (02)]

Chairman of the Public Libraries Advisory Committee ("Chairman of PLAC") highlighted the main areas of the development of library services that the Public Libraries Advisory Committee ("PLAC") had deliberated on, including enhancing the quality of library services, increasing space provision for new public libraries, meeting the need of the community for diversified library services, and leveraging on information technology ("IT").

Provision of public libraries

2. Ms Emily LAU expressed concern about the Administration's reluctance to provide additional resources to meet the ongoing demand from the respective District Councils ("DCs") for additional library facilities and extension of library service hours, despite Hong Kong's huge fiscal surplus. She considered that the planning standards for libraries suggested in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines ("HKPS&G"), to which the Administration would make reference in the provision of library facilities, had failed to take into account Hong Kong's crowded living environment, and address the need of the public for more reading spaces. Ms LAU enquired whether PLAC was aware of DCs requests, and whether the then Committee on Libraries ("CoL") had set any framework in the provision of library facilities, which PLAC was obliged to follow.

3. Professor Patrick LAU opined that PLAC should review the planning standards for public libraries periodically to ensure that they were aligned with the growing needs for library facilities. He further suggested that the views of planners and architects should be sought in the planning and design of libraries. He also considered that many heritage buildings could be ideal venues for small libraries as their design and layout would complement the cultural ambience of libraries. Mr WONG Yung-kan considered that in the redevelopment of old districts, the Urban Renewal Authority should reserve spaces for the provision of library facilities in these districts.

4. Chairman of PLAC assured members that PLAC was not bound by any preset framework in recommending measures for the development of library services. He further explained that given the changing need of the community and the advancement of IT, modern libraries were not merely physical premises, but also establishments for the provision of an array of comprehensive and diversified services. In the planning of library facilities, there is a need to strike a balance between quantity (viz. the number of libraries) and quality

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(such as the application of multimedia and internet access) to ensure the standard of library services. Chairman of PLAC welcomed planners and architects' suggestions in the planning and design of public libraries, and reiterated PLAC's commitment in enhancing the space provision, facilities and reading environment of these libraries.

5. Director of Leisure and Cultural Services ("DLCS") supplemented that the Hong Kong Central Library, together with the five major libraries, 28 district libraries, 32 small libraries and 10 mobile libraries constituted a five-tier library network providing a diversified range of library services. The present provision of public libraries had generally met the standards that there should be a district library for every 200,000 persons. Apart from the aforesaid guidelines, the Government also took into account the geographical and demographic characteristics as well as the infrastructural development of a district in determining the library facilities to be provided for the district. For instance, a district library was provided to the Tung Chung area with a population of around 80,000 on account of its special circumstances. As a general rule, the target was to provide each district with a large-scale and fully-equipped library, which would serve as a platform for a comprehensive range of library services for the district. As the opening of new libraries had substantial resource implications, such requests would need to be carefully considered and justified to ensure the prudent use of public money.

6. Ms Emily LAU remained unconvinced of the PLAC and the Administration's response on DCs' requests for additional libraries. She considered that more resources and proactive efforts should be devoted to meeting the demand of districts for library facilities.

Small/community libraries

7. The Deputy Chairman urged the Administration to exercise flexibility in addressing the demand of the local community for more small libraries at district level. He stressed that these facilities, which were relatively inexpensive to operate, not only satisfied the need of local residents for lifelong learning, but also served as a focal point for social and leisure activities of the community. Mr WONG Kwok-hing urged the Administration to take heed of the special geographical and demographic circumstances of individual areas in considering the establishment of small libraries. He further pointed out by making knowledge and information more accessible to residents of remote and poverty-stricken areas, these libraries would facilitate the narrowing of poverty gap in the society.

8. Chairman of PLAC said that increasing resources had been dedicated to enhancing the quality of library services in recent years to keep pace with the changing living mode of society. For instance, space provision of district and major libraries was increased to facilitate the provision of new facilities and a larger seating capacity, as well as the organization of an array of reading and

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cultural activities; IT was widely applied to various aspects of library services, such as the upgrading of the Multimedia Information System, pilot-testing of the radio frequency identification ("RFID") technology, and enhancement of e-resources collection. Whether the provision of small libraries was a good option for enhancing the quality of library service would be further studied by PLAC.

9. Vice-chairman of PLAC said that given the quality services provided by HKPL, there had been an ongoing demand for library services/facilities, which PLAC had endeavoured to keep track of. Comprehensive and diversified library facilities and programmes had been put in place. Efforts were also made to extend the distribution points and networks for library services through the growing number of community libraries. He said that PLAC would continue to advise the Government to further improve the services of public libraries through a variety of means.

10. DLCS supplemented that 154 community libraries had been set up under the Libraries @ neighbourhood - Community Libraries Partnership Scheme through collaboration with non-profit-making and local organisations. Community libraries offered convenient, accessible library services across 18 districts to complement the services of the Hong Kong Public Libraries ("HKPL") in meeting the local residents' demand for library services in the neighbourhood. A case in point was the community library at the Yat Tung Estate, which was operated on a larger scale than a general community library in terms of scope of services and collection of books, showcasing a new mode of operation for community libraries.

11. Mr Gerry MA thanked members for their views and suggestions on the development of library services, which were also shared by members of PLAC during their discussion on the issue. He considered that in the long run, more libraries should be built to meet the demand of the public for such facilities. He also acknowledged the role of small libraries in serving the local community, particularly the elderly and disadvantaged groups. Professor LEE Kam-keung said that PLAC and the Administration had proactively solicited the views of the community on library services, including the adequacy of existing facilities to meet their needs. Reference would be made on the feedback from library user surveys to identify areas for further improvement. He considered that HKPL and museums could bring in the expertise of professional scholars in enhancing their work in the promotion of knowledge and culture.

Opening hours of public libraries

12. Mr WONG Kwok-hing and Mr WONG Yung-kan enquired whether the opening hours of public libraries in remote new towns could be extended until 10 pm to facilitate access to library services by the working population. Professor Patrick LAU suggested that volunteers should be deployed to render

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assistance to frontline staff during the extended opening hours to alleviate the pressure on staff costs. Ms Emily LAU urged the Administration to consider the request for extending the opening hours of the Peng Chau Public Library to cater for the need of the local residents.

13. Chairman of PLAC advised members that the extension of opening hours for the major and district libraries since April 2009 was well-received by the public and further improvement might be considered. DLCS and Deputy Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Culture) advised that the Administration would liaise with the DCs concerned in considering the requests for extending the opening hours of public libraries at remote areas (including Peng Chau) by using DC funds on a case-by-case basis.

14. DLCS further advised that at present, volunteers were mainly engaged in supporting duties that did not involve the handling of personal data. The Administration would consider the feasibility of widening the scope of duties for volunteers in its current review of manpower deployment for library services. In response to Mr WONG Kwok-hing's enquiry as to whether additional copies of local newspapers could be provided at small and community libraries, Vice-Chairman of PLAC said that multiple copies of local newspapers were already provided at these libraries.

Self-service facilities beyond the library premises

15. Quoting the examples of Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen where 24-hour self-service book lending/returning machines had been introduced at busy transport interchanges at modest costs, Mr CHEUNG Man-kwong suggested that the Administration and PLAC should consider setting up similar facilities for the lending of popular collections and returning of library items at Mass Transit Railway ("MTR") stations on a trial basis to facilitate the accessibility of library services to the public, particularly the working population. Mr WONG Yung-kan added that library facilities should also be set up near outlying island ferry piers for the convenience of commuters.

16. Chairman of PLAC advised that the feasibility of the proposal had been studied by PLAC taking into account a number of considerations, such as the latest technology required for the provision of such service, choice and size of collections, locations of the facilities and related rental costs. DLCS assured members that the Administration was receptive to the suggestion of providing self-service book return and pick-up services at major MTR stations, subject to the outcome of the pilot test on the RFID Sub-system, which was expected to further enhance the efficiency in major library processes, including lending and returning of library materials, sorting, shelving and inventory management of library items.

Promotion of e-materials

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17. Mr James TO enquired about HKPL's plan to promote the use of e-books and make available e-version of overseas periodicals and newspapers for public viewing. Chairman of PLAC said that promoting the use of e-resources, such as e-books from "Amazon Kindle", was one of the main directions in developing a "library without walls", despite the various licensing and technical issues involved. He added that the new mode of delivery of library services would help resolve the space shortage problem for HKPL.

Role and membership of PLAC

18. Ms Cyd HO enquired about the role and term of PLAC, and the Administration's response to PLAC's recommendations on the development of public library services. Mr WONG Kwok-hing considered that PLAC should comprise representatives from LegCo and DCs in order to follow up public views and suggestions on the provision of library services directly. Ms Emily LAU urged the Administration to consider appointing more female members to PLAC to keep up with the Administration's gender benchmark target of 30% for appointment to advisory and statutory bodies. Ms LAU and the Deputy Chairman further suggested that PLAC should enhance the transparency of its deliberations and make available records of its meetings to the public.

19. Chairman of PLAC said that PLAC was a standing committee to advise the Government on the overall strategies in the provision of library services. He added that PLAC had worked in close collaboration with the Administration in the formulation of guidelines and strategic plans for taking forward the recommendations of the then CoL on the development of library services. The Administration had been receptive to PLAC's recommendations. Chairman of PLAC had an open mind on enhancing public access to the deliberations of PLAC meetings. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of PLAC welcomed this kind of direct exchange session with LegCo members. Under Secretary for Home Affairs ("USHA") said that like other advisory bodies, the Government sought to ensure a balanced and professional composition in the appointment of PLAC members.

20. Mr Gerry MA and Dr Johnny NG said that the wide spectrum of background of PLAC members, including academic, cultural, IT, government and business sectors, had enabled PLAC to provide balanced and comprehensive views on issues related to the development of library services.

Survey on library services

21. Ms Cyd HO enquired whether the Administration would conduct comprehensive surveys on library users and non-users, and compile qualitative and quantitative indicators on library services, such as the number and profile of active users, use of library materials, and patronage of library services etc. She further suggested that arrangements should be made for public access to library materials at local universities through HKPL's networks. USHA

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advised that to better understand public views on library services, surveys on the needs of library users were conducted, arrangements were made to exchange views with LegCo Members, and relevant views of DCs together with the Administration's response were conveyed to PLAC for reference. Assistant Director (Libraries and Development) ("AD(LD)") supplemented that opinion surveys were conducted for both users and non-users of library services from time to time. At the request of the Panel Chairman, AD(LD) undertook to provide members with the report on the 2010 user opinion surveys on HKPL services when available.

Promotion of literary arts and reading habits

22. Mr WONG Yuk-man considered that members of PLAC should capitalize on its knowledge and expertise and focus its resources in cultivating and enhancing the cultural quality of people through library services. Mr WONG Kwok-hing enquired about the Administration's long-term plan to promote literary arts. Mrs Sophie LEUNG suggested that HKPL should collaborate with community organizations to promote reading habits among students, as well as publishers and authors on book launching activities. She also highlighted the need to enhance the professional training for library staff.

23. AD(LD) informed that to enhance the promotion of literary arts, the Hong Kong Literature Festival was organized by LCSD on a bi-annual basis to promote literature appreciation and creative writing through a variety of activities. The Hong Kong Biennial Awards for Chinese Literature and various writing competitions were also organized to enhance literary creativity and extensive reading. To promote reading habits, HKPL organized reading festivals and related thematic activities with the participation of publishers, non-profit-making organizations and students/parents from time to time.

The way forward

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24. The Chairman thanked PLAC for the fruitful exchanges at the meeting. The Chairman and the Chairman of PLAC welcomed the suggestion for the Panel and PLAC to meet again in the future to further exchange views on issues relating to the development of library services. DLCS also undertook to provide a progress report to the Panel on follow up actions to issues raised at the meeting in due course.

25. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:40 pm.

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
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