

For information
on 8 June 2012

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

Development of Public Library Services

Purpose

This paper provides an update on the development of public library services.

Background

2. At the special meeting on 14 June 2010, Members exchanged views with the Public Libraries Advisory Committee (PLAC) on the issues relating to the development of library services. At the Panel's suggestion, the Administration undertook to provide a progress report to the Panel on follow-up actions to issues raised at the meeting, and to arrange the PLAC to meet the Panel again in the future. This paper reports on the major developments in the provision of public library services and the follow-up actions taken in the past two years.

Progress and Developments

3. The Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL) is committed to providing a full range of library services to meet the community's need for knowledge, information and research, and to support lifelong learning. With the aim of developing the public libraries into an information hub and a "library without walls", the HKPL continues to enhance its facilities, services and collections within and beyond the physical boundary of libraries by leveraging on the latest technologies and community partnership.

(A) Provision of Public Libraries

4. The HKPL continues to expand its network of public libraries and library collections. In the past two years, we opened a highly popular small library at Siu Sai Wan (Eastern), upgraded a small library in Tung Chung to a district library and reprovisioned a small library in Butterfly Estate (Tuen Mun). As at April 2012, our library network consists of one central library, five major libraries, 29 district libraries, 32 small libraries (making a total of 67 static libraries) and 10 mobile libraries. In 2011, the library system had close to four millions of registered borrowers and a stock of 12.62 million library books and multi-media materials, and recorded a loan of 58.5 million items of library materials.

5. In the next five years we will see the completion and commissioning of six new library projects. They include a major library in Tin Shui Wai, two new district libraries in Tseung Kwan O and Yuen Chau Kok respectively, and the reprovisioning of two district libraries in Lam Tin and Yuen Long as well as a small library in Pak Tin. In addition, two district library projects in Tung Chau Street and Lei King Wan are under planning. Ongoing renovation programmes are being undertaken to improve the facilities and environment of the existing libraries.

6. Overall speaking, the current provision of public libraries has largely met the standards suggested by the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines that there should be a district library for every 200,000 people. While we consider that major and district libraries should remain the backbone of the library network as they provide a fuller range of library services, we will nonetheless keep under review the need to further supplement the major and district libraries with small and mobile libraries having regard to the accessibility and utilization rates of the existing library facilities, the geographic and demographic characteristics of the district, as well as the availability of resources, including exploring the feasibility of reprovisioning or upgrading existing small library facilities as well as relocating the service points or rescheduling the services of mobile libraries to better serve the local community. We will also enhance the collections of small and mobile libraries to cater for the changing information need and learning profiles of library users.

7. The library network is further supplemented by the efforts made at the neighbourhood level. In December 2005, the HKPL launched the “Libraries@neighbourhood Community Libraries Partnership Scheme” under which block loan services will be provided to non-government organizations and District Councils members to establish community libraries. The Scheme is highly successful and warmly welcomed by the community - the number of community libraries has grown to 203 by April 2012.

(B) Opening Hours of Libraries

8. The extension of opening hours of all major and district libraries to 71 hours a week since April 2009 was well received by the public. While we are aware of requests for extension of the opening hours of small libraries, we are unable to implement this suggestion at this stage given the significant manpower and financial implications of extending opening hours of 32 small libraries¹ to 71 hours per week. We will nonetheless keep the matter under review taking into account such factors as library usage and cost-effectiveness.

(C) Information Technology (IT) Infrastructure

9. Online library services have become increasingly popular in recent years as readers can access library services at home or the workplace and outside the library opening hours. In 2011, there were more than 153 million visits to HKPL’s website, and some 16 million of renewals and 0.69 million of reservations of library materials were made through HKPL’s Internet channel.

10. In December 2011, the computerised system of HKPL had undergone a major revamp - the original Library Automation System was replaced by an enhanced and upgraded **Next Generation Integrated Library System (NGILS)**. The NGILS is one of the world’s largest computerised library systems providing comprehensive automated library services. Apart from enhanced 24-hour Internet library services, online catalogue searching and reservation/renewal of library materials, the new

¹ The opening hours of small libraries range from 14 hours (for those in remote areas) to 56 hours per week.

system enables HKPL to actively promote library resources to readers through its content-rich library catalogue. In addition to the standard search functions, the new catalogue provides more advanced search functions and content such as images of the item covers and book ratings; while the personalized features enable readers to better manage and keep records of their favourite or frequently-used books. Besides, readers will receive an email notification from the system before their loaned items are due.

11. We are now engaged in the planning for the second phase of NGILS, under which more new service functions will be introduced. These include a self-help printing service where readers can make computer printouts of their work with Octopus payment and pay library fines/charges online using credit cards or PPS. There will also be a new virtual reference service through which the librarians can provide more instant response to readers' enquiries. The whole NGILS project is targeted for completion by 2013.

12. To further increase the efficiency of delivering library services and collection management, HKPL launched the pilot application of **Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology** in six selected libraries in December 2011 together with NGILS (two major libraries (Sha Tin and City Hall), two district libraries (Lockhart Road and Lai Chi Kok), and two small libraries (Shun Lee Estate and Tin Shui Wai North) are covered). Under the scheme, the RFID technology is deployed at various service points such as self-charging terminals, self-returning stations and book sorter systems of the libraries. In addition, a 24-hour self-return service for returning loan materials any time outside the library premises is being piloted at the Sha Tin Public Library. After reviewing the RFID pilot scheme, we will conduct a feasibility study to examine the cost-effectiveness and benefits of full implementation of RFID at public libraries. Subject to the outcome of the study, we will decide whether to recommend the deployment of RFID technology in all public libraries.

13. Other IT projects to improve electronic library services include development of mobile applications to provide instant library services for the growing population of smart phone users and revamping the HKPL homepage to provide a centralized single sign-on framework to enhance the delivery of library services and promotion of library events. These

projects are expected to be completed by 2014. Moreover, the **Multimedia Information System (MMIS)** is being upgraded to improve the development and retrieval of digital content, enhance navigation capabilities, and provide additional channels for the public to access library resources through wireless and mobile technology. The project is expected to be completed by 2013.

(D) Development of e-resources

14. Providing electronic resources, such as ebooks, e-databases and digitized materials stored in the MMIS, and making them available to the public as conveniently as possible are important aspects of HKPL's collection development strategy. At present, HKPL offers over 60 online databases and more than 130,000 ebooks, covering a wide range of subjects including quick reference encyclopedic resources, news, current affairs and statistical information, macro-economic data, popular magazines, business periodicals and scholarly journal articles. All ebooks are available for remote use by library cardholders. The MMIS now contains about 5,000 hours of digitized audio-video materials and over two million pages of digitized documents, including old Hong Kong newspapers, maps, posters, clippings, books, house programmes, photos, manuscripts, etc. Most of these digitized items are related to local heritage and culture. Library users can easily access the e-resources collection through the computer workstations at public libraries or the MMIS. Some of these online databases and e-books can be read on mobile devices, such as smart phones, PDAs and tablet computers.

15. HKPL will continue to digitize library materials for research and study as well as enhance collaboration with other libraries and higher educational institutions in e-resources development. It will continue to promote the use of its e-resources by conducting user education sessions and collaborate with educational institutions and schools in encouraging students' use of e-resources for projects.

(E) Self-service beyond the library premises

16. At the meeting held on 14 June 2010, Members suggested that the Administration consider setting up self-service book lending/returning services at the Mass Transit Railway (MTR) stations on a trial basis. In late September 2011, we launched a trial book drop service at three major MTR interchange stations, namely, Central, Kowloon Tong and Nam Cheong to make it more convenient for people to return borrowed library materials outside library premises. The trial book-drop service has been running smoothly since its launch. A monthly average of 22,000 library books were returned through the book drops at the three MTR interchange stations. The average number of books collected from the three stations on each weekday is around 900, while the daily average on weekends and public holidays is around 400. The higher usage rate during weekdays shows that users of the book drops are mainly the working population.

17. The Administration has undertaken to review the trial service one year after its launch (i.e. in late 2012) to assess the public's response to and cost-effectiveness of the scheme, as well as its long-term manpower and financial implications. Based on the initial experience gained in the first eight months, we note that while the usage of the trial book drop service has been steadily on the rise since its launch last September, the monthly usage is nonetheless only about 25% of the planned capacity (86,400 items per month). It seems that a relatively small portion of our readers have chosen to return their borrowed items at the bookdrops at MTR stations, which supplement the bookdrops available at the extensive network of 67 public libraries located across the territory. Indeed, most readers still prefer to return books at the libraries so that they can borrow books on the same occasion.

18. On whether we could provide self-service lending or pick-up service at the MTR interchange stations in addition to book drops, it should be noted that the provision of such services requires a sophisticated back-end infrastructural support including online verification and updating of books and readers' records. We will examine the suggestion more fully in the context of the feasibility study on the full implementation of RFID technology at all libraries.

(F) Promotion of literary arts and reading habits

19. The HKPL continues to promote a strong reading culture at different levels of the community through a rich variety of library extension activities catering for all age groups both inside and outside libraries. On outreaching activities, we collaborate with community organisations to organize reading programmes with local characteristics. These include a variety of reading ambassador programmes launched in partnership with schools and local organisations such as the “Reading Seeds Scheme: Little Reading Ambassadors” for primary students in Wanchai; the “Ambassadors for Reading@Community” for young adults in Kwun Tong and the “READ Ambassadors Programme” for parents in Sai Kung.

20. The District Councils (DCs) are highly supportive of the promotion of reading in the districts. Apart from rendering advice on the management and operation of library services, the DCs allocate funding for upgrading library facilities, organizing regular extension activities such as storytelling, talks and workshops and subsidising community libraries to improve their facilities and services. These activities serve to foster a reading habit among the children, promote parent-child reading, encourage the youths to widen their scope of reading and knowledge, and promote reading among the elderly.

21. Apart from district programmes, the HKPL organizes territory-wide literary programmes such as the Hong Kong Biennial Awards in Chinese Literature, Competition on Story Writing in Chinese for Students, Chinese Poetry Writing Competition, the Awards for Creative Writing in Chinese which are highly popular events. The 9th biennial Hong Kong Literature Festival will be launched from 28 June to 15 July 2012 with the theme “Affections Between the Lines”.

(G) Surveys on Library users

22. The HKPL organizes customer liaison workshops annually during which readers are invited to give views on library services, as well as conduct regular public opinion surveys. The latest opinion survey covering users and non-users of public library services was completed in

2010. As requested by Members, we have provided the Panel with an executive summary of the 2010 survey report, with the full report deposited at the LegCo Library for reference. The next public opinion survey will be conducted in 2013.

(H) PLAC membership

23. The new two-year term of the PLAC has commenced on 1 May 2012. There are a total of 15 non-official members for the new term. We have increased the female members from 4 to 6, representing an improvement from 26.7% to 40% in female composition. The agenda and a summary of discussion of the PLAC meetings have been uploaded to the HKPL website as from 30 September 2011.

(I) Knowledge hub and cultural exchange

24. We aim to position the Hong Kong Central Library (HKCL), which has a collection of 2.4 million items, specialized reference and information services as well as a wide range of facilities, as the territory-wide institution for learning, knowledge, archive preservation and cultural exchange. With the dedication and joint efforts of scholars, authors, patrons, cultural organisations, tertiary institutions and professional bodies, HKCL has since 2001 launched two major document collection campaigns, namely the Document Collection Campaign and the Music Collection Campaign. The two campaigns have collected over 210,000 items of important materials of cultural and heritage importance. In celebration of its 10th anniversary in 2011, the HKCL organized a wide array of programmes to highlight its established role as the hub of information, culture and heritage of Hong Kong. One of the highlights was the “Exhibition of Rare Books and Special Collections from the National Library of China” featuring precious cultural relics in China’s long history to promote the Chinese civilization and heritage.

25. The HKPL continues to strengthen ties with its Mainland and overseas counterparts. Under the auspices of the Greater Pearl River Delta Cultural Co-operation Meeting, creative writing competitions to celebrate the “4.23 World Book Day” are jointly held with the Shenzhen Library each year and winning entries of the competitions are displayed in libraries of both cities. Such collaborative efforts will be extended to the

Sun Yat-Sen Library of Guangdong Province and Macao Central Library.

Way Forward

26. With the steadfast support of the PLAC, the DCs and the community organisations, HKPL will strive to enhance its facilities and services on a continuous basis, leveraging on the technological advancement and collaboration with its local and overseas/Mainland counterparts, so as to meet the changing needs of the society.

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