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4 January 2021

Ms Wendy JAN
Public Accounts Committee Secretariat
Legislative Council Complex
1 Legislative Council Road
Central, Hong Kong

Dear Ms JAN,

Public Accounts Committee
Consideration of Chapter 3 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 75
Acquisition and management of collection items in public museums

Thank you for your letter dated 23 December 2020 to the Director of Leisure and Cultural Services. Our responses to the questions raised are set out at **Annex.**

Yours sincerely,

(Ms Eve TAM)

for Director of Leisure and Cultural Services

c.c. Secretary for Home Affairs (email: sha@hab.gov.hk)
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**Replies to questions raised by the Public Accounts Committee on
Chapter 3 of the Director of Audit's Report No. 75**

Acquisition and management of collection items in public museums

Part 1: Introduction

- 1) According to Table 3 of paragraph 1.7, in the past five financial years, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD") acquired artefacts at a total amount of \$77.7 million. The procedures, assessment criteria and objective standards that the LCSD adopted for the acquisition of individual artefacts

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has put in place a set of procedures and assessment criteria for the acquisition of collection items. The criteria include the artistic/historical/scientific/technological merit of the proposed acquisition, relevance to museums' collections, authenticity, physical condition, price, display and education value, as well as the reputation of the artist or maker. The procedures and criteria were adopted after taking into account the advice of the Corruption Prevention Department of the Independent Commission Against Corruption. Details of the criteria have been publicised on the respective museum websites.

When conducting the assessment, the LCSD museum will consider the proposal in its Programme Committee. With the endorsement of the Programme Committee, the museum will invite Museum Expert Advisers (Advisers), who are appointed according to their areas of expertise, to give independent advice on the proposed acquisition on a rotation basis. The number of Advisers to be engaged for each acquisition depends on the price of the proposed acquisition. At least 3 Advisers have to be engaged if the price of the proposed acquisition is over \$50,000.

Staff members of the LCSD involved in the planning, assessment and approval procedures, and Advisers whose advice were sought, are required to declare their interests as specified without exception to avoid perceived or actual conflict of interests.

Part 2: Acquisition and Accession of Museum Collection Items

- 2) In Case 1 of paragraph 2.9 regarding the acquisition of donated items, how could the LCSD prevent the reoccurrence of incidents which involved prolonged periods required in the identification of storage space for donated items, resulting in the reduction, or even withdrawal of donations

The case mentioned in paragraph 2.9 was only a single case which required the Hong Kong Museum of History (Museum of History) to locate a suitable venue for fumigation of exceptionally large donated items. So far the Museum of History has had no other case which involved prolonged period required in the identification of storage space for donated items, resulting in the reduction, or even withdrawal of donation.

- 3) According to paragraph 2.17, as at 31 December 2019, there were 13 346 items pending accession in the Hong Kong Museum of History; paragraph 2.24 also pointed out that as at 30 April 2020, there were 24 314 items and 693 819 items pending accession in the Hong Kong Heritage Museum and the Hong Kong Film Archive (“Archive”) respectively. As at present, what is the latest progress of accession of collection items in each museum; the number of collection items still pending accession; whether there is any timetable for accession of collection items; if yes, the details; if no, the reasons for that

The progress of accession of collection items in the Museum of History, the Hong Kong Heritage Museum (Heritage Museum) and the Hong Kong Film Archive (Archive) is as follows:

	Hong Kong Museum of History	Hong Kong Heritage Museum	Hong Kong Film Archive
Number of items pending accession (as mentioned in Report No. 75 of the Director of Audit)	13 346	24 314	693 819
Number of items accessioned (from the respective dates in Report No. 75 of the Director of Audit up to 30 November 2020)	550	2 368	361
Updated number of items pending accession (as at 1 December 2020)	12 796	21 946	693 458

Moreover, the Museum of History, the Heritage Museum and the Archive have plans to further review and streamline the accessioning process (such as upgrading the collection management system to expedite approval process, simplifying information required for accession and workflow, etc.), with an anticipation that the time required for completing accession could be reduced by one-third. The expected time for the remaining collection items to complete accession is as follows:

Museum	Expected time required to complete accession
Hong Kong Museum of History	About 3 years
Hong Kong Heritage Museum	About 3 years
Hong Kong Film Archive	Around 7 to 8 years (the target completion time would be further shortened, subject to review on the effectiveness of the enhanced measures and manpower plan)

- 4) According to paragraphs 2.18 and 2.19, the LCSD originally planned to complete the accession of some 10 000 items acquired in the 1980s of the Hong Kong Museum of History before the end of 2010. However, as at 31 December 2019, 1 714 items were still under the registration process, and there were an estimate of 137 items with accession not yet commenced. Whether the LCSD has completed the accession of the items acquired in the 1980s; if not, the number of items which are still under registration or with accession not yet commenced; the reasons for the concerned items acquired 40 years ago still pending accession

The items concerned were acquired in the 1980s when computerised collection registration system was non-existent. The Museum of History therefore encountered difficulties in tracing their source and related records after it moved to its present premises. In this connection, it took time to stocktake each and every item, examine and verify their details, as well as take photos and document their condition. Registration of the whole batch of items is in progress, and as at 31 December 2020, 137 outstanding items pending accession have already moved into the initial registration stage, making a total of 1 851 items now under the process of registration. The Museum of History targets to complete accession for the whole batch of items this year.

5) In paragraph 2.29(e)(v) regarding the backlog of items pending accession in the Archive, the LCSD replied that temporary additional manpower would be secured to handle the collection items pending accession; and in paragraph 3.15(c)(i) in the aspect of stocktaking of film-related items in the Archive, LCSD replied that temporary additional manpower would be secured to expedite the stocktaking exercises and shorten the time required. Please advise:

(a) the existing manpower of the Archive; the number of staff responsible for accession and stocktaking of collection items

Collection items of the Archive are acquired mainly through donations from the film industry and the public, and are available for access by researchers and the public after being filed and catalogued. Activities such as film screenings, exhibitions and seminars, etc., are held on a regular basis and monographic volumes are published to enhance public awareness on the history and culture of Hong Kong films.

As at 1 October 2020, there were 52 civil servants in the Archive responsible for acquisition, cataloging, organisation of exhibitions and film screenings, research and publication. In addition to the inspection, documentation, conservation, and digitisation of films, as well as management of the collection stores, they were also tasked with venue operation and management, and venue-related duties such as hiring and ticketing, etc. At present, accessioning and stocktaking duties are mainly performed by 7 staff in the Archive and 17 temporary staff.

(b) whether the existing manpower has been reviewed and evaluated to see if it is sufficient to cope with the work of accession and stocktaking of collection items

For management of collection items, some staff are deployed specially for film digitisation to ensure the items are well-preserved for promotion and research purposes. The significant increase in the number of donated film items (i.e. film reels) and film-related items (i.e. photos, magazines and posters, etc.) resulting from the gradual transition of the use of digital media in the film industry was far beyond estimation. Between 2007 and 2020, the number of collection items of the Archive has increased by 65%, i.e. more than 500 000 items. All these factors, coupled with the very time-consuming

process of collection management and accession, lead to the increasing number of collection items pending accession.

The Archive has reviewed its manpower resources with plans to engage over 30 temporary staff this year, making the number of staff increase from 17 to over 50, with 6 of the additional temporary staff to be in place, with an aim to expedite the accessioning and stocktaking process of existing and new donated items. Additional manpower will be further engaged and the number of temporary staff is expected to increase gradually to over 60, subject to the review on the effectiveness of the new measures and new working teams.

In addition, the Archive will outsource part of its stocktaking exercises to service provider this year on a trial basis. Subject to the effectiveness of the trial, the Archive will consider extending outsourcing to other areas of stocktaking exercises to further shorten the time required for stocktaking of collection items.

(c) whether the LCSD plans to engage temporary staff to expedite the processing of related work; if yes, the details and the estimated time for training, additional expenditure and cost for each new temporary staff

After securing more workspace and equipment, the Archive plans to engage over 30 temporary staff this year, with 6 of the additional temporary staff to be in place, with an aim to expedite the accessioning and stocktaking process of existing and new donated items. The number of temporary staff is expected to increase gradually to over 60 in order to further expedite the work process efficiently, subject to the review on the effectiveness of the new measures and new working teams.

It takes around 3 to 6 months of on-the-job training for the new temporary staff to familiarise with the basic requirements on different areas of work, such as collection management, registration and research, as well as film conservation and cataloging, etc., so that they could assist in expediting the processing of related work. The cost of hiring each temporary staff is around \$200,000 per annum. The expenditure incurred will be absorbed by the existing resources of the LCSD.

(d) there is serious backlog and delay in the accession, conservation and stocktaking of collection items in the Archive. Whether the LCSD is satisfied with the progress of the related work; if not, what enhanced measures has the LCSD taken and their effectiveness

A number of factors attributed to the delay in the progress of accession, conservation and stocktaking of collection items. The significant increase in the number of donations received in recent years is far beyond expectation. Also, the accession of collection items involving inspection and consolidation of vast amount of information is a very time-consuming process. For large scale donations of diversified items, extra time is required. Handling of donated items has to be performed under a secure and temperature-humidity controlled environment equipped with collection management system facilities. Among the donations, many are fragile film reels which require additional processing time and careful inspection. Additionally, digitisation of films has to be proceeded at an accelerated speed to timely preserve Hong Kong film heritage and facilitate public's appreciation at the same time while accession is undergoing. Therefore, it is difficult for the Archive to complete the accession, conservation and stocktaking arising from the huge increase in collection items in a short period of time with its existing manpower, workspace and equipment. The Archive has been striking a balance among the needs of different areas of work as far as possible by conducting the accession and stocktaking of collections in phases without sacrificing the provision of service to the public. The delay will be largely improved after the implementation of a series of measures and engagement of additional manpower.

(e) what other effective measures will the LCSD take to shorten the time required for stocktaking, and the details of those measures; whether the LCSD will consider outsourcing part of the stocktaking exercises as mentioned in paragraph 3.15(c)(ii)

The Archive has put in place a series of measures, such as streamlining stocktaking procedures, drawing up timetables of stocktaking exercises, reporting stocktaking progress on a monthly basis, and recruiting temporary staff for stocktaking, etc. To further shorten the time required for stocktaking, the Archive has arranged to outsource part of the stocktaking exercises this year on a trial basis. However, taking into consideration the complexity of procedures and the expertise required for preliminary categorisation and verification of information of the collection items, only

part of the collection items could be included in the trial run to be carried out this year. Subject to the review of the outcome, the Archive will consider extending the scope of the outsourcing to further shorten the time required for stocktaking.

Part 3: Stocktaking and Storage of Museum Collection Items

- 6) According to paragraph 3.15(e), the LCSD has planned to review the practices of regular stocktaking and surprise checking for all museums starting from 2021, and take remedial measures where necessary. The details of the remedial measures

The LCSD has planned to review the practices of regular stocktaking and surprise checking, as well as the number of collection items to be included in each checking with a view to enhancing efficiency. Measures include streamlining the procedures, deployment of additional manpower, outsourcing and setting up of a regular reporting mechanism, etc.

- 7) According to paragraph 3.32, the construction of the Heritage Conservation and Resource Centre project has taken some 15 years and it is still at the pre-construction stage. Whether the LCSD has estimated the additional cost (including conservation of deteriorated collections, maintenance of off-site stores and other additional expenses) incurred by the delay in commencement of the project

Pre-construction activities for the Heritage Conservation and Resource Centre are now underway and due for completion in the middle of this year. Funding approval for the construction work will be sought in a timely manner from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council after completion of the pre-construction activities, in order to finalise the project cost and completion date. No additional cost has been incurred so far. The LCSD has been maintaining the museum collections well all along. Maintenance work for off-site storages was conducted according to actual needs, with expenditure absorbed by the existing resources of the LCSD.

- 8) According to paragraph 3.34(f), the LCSD has planned to revise the plan of the Heritage Conservation and Resource Centre to secure support from the local community. Whether the LCSD has estimated the additional time required for the revision of plan (including the nature of facilities and scope); whether the LCSD has identified other locations as an alternative, in order to

avoid the plan of the Heritage Conservation and Resource Centre from being potentially rejected again due to the deteriorating relationship between the Government and the District Council

The project was presented at the Yuen Long District Council in 2019 and a few members raised their concerns on the lack of public vehicle parking facilities. After the meeting, the LCSD enhanced the overall strategic development of the project to combine with the adjacent sports centre, with a view to providing public vehicle parking facilities as required. The LCSD plans to submit the revised proposal to the Yuen Long District Council again this year, and believes that the revised plan will garner their support.

Part 4: Other Related Issues

9) According to paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6(a), permanent exhibitions of the two science-related museums (i.e. the Hong Kong Science Museum and the Hong Kong Space Museum) of the LCSD are often designed to last for 10 to 15 years. However, 10 out of 17 permanent exhibitions in the two above mentioned museums have been staged for more than 15 to 29 years. Please advise:

(a) the reasons of no renewal work for the 10 permanent exhibitions having been staged for more than 15 to 29 years

The themes of 10 permanent exhibitions in the Hong Kong Science Museum (Science Museum) have been kept unchanged in the past 15 to 29 years. As the themes of these exhibition galleries are related to the timeless fundamental principles in science which are suitable for teachers and students to undertake learning activities, there is a need to retain the displays on a more permanent basis. Although the main content remains unchanged, the Science Museum will update, refurbish and introduce new exhibits continuously, which is in line with the arrangement of overseas science museums and technology centres.

(b) whether the LCSD has conducted internal evaluation to understand if the outdated exhibits will become much less appealing and affect Hong Kong's image

The Science Museum attaches great importance to its service quality and exhibition content, and makes reference to the experience of renowned overseas science museums and technology centres to evaluate the contents of exhibitions. As the themes of these exhibition galleries are related to the timeless fundamental principles in science which are suitable for teachers and students to undertake learning activities, the majority of exhibits related to fundamental science have remained unchanged. Meanwhile, the Museum updates the presentation style and contents of exhibits, and replaces individual obsolete exhibits from time to time to maintain the quality of services. Moreover, the Museum makes every effort to collect public opinions through different channels. Every year, the Museum conducts two visitor liaison sessions and a meeting with Museum Expert Advisers, and actively liaises with experts in the education sector. Apart from briefing them on the content and progress of the refurbishment, the Museum also gauges their opinions on the themes and contents of exhibitions. According to the findings of previous opinion surveys on museum services conducted in the past 10 years, the overall satisfactory rate of the Science Museum was close to 90% among local, Mainland and overseas visitors. Moreover, the Science Museum has all along been the most popular museum under the LCSD with the highest attendance for years.

Regarding new exhibitions, in order to keep up with the latest technological advancements and sustain their appeal to the public, the Science Museum has been making efforts on different fronts to update its exhibits. For instance, the Museum keeps abreast of the development of new technology, and applies mature new technologies, such as augmented reality, virtual reality technologies and artificial intelligence in the production of exhibits. It also steps up cooperation with local universities and scientific research institutes on promoting science knowledge behind new technology and its future application. Ties with overseas science museums, science centres and scientific research institutes are being strengthened to bring in new and inspiring interactive exhibits. Staff training has also been enhanced to encourage application of new technology and development of new exhibits. To enhance public understanding of robots and artificial intelligence, the Science Museum jointly organised the “Robohelpers” exhibition with Robotics Catalysing Centre, Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation in November 2020 to feature local research projects and application of robot technologies in the construction and commercial field.

- (c) whether the LCSD or the two museums mentioned above have received any complaints about exhibits and facilities being outdated and less appealing. If yes, what are the number and details of the complaints, and the follow-up actions taken

In the past 10 years (between 2011 and 2020), the LCSD received around 10 cases on average per year in relation to exhibits and facilities of the Science Museum and the Hong Kong Space Museum (Space Museum), including views on the information and themes of exhibitions, as well as on exhibits. In this connection, permanent exhibition galleries of the Science Museum and the Space Museum were refurbished, and new exhibits were introduced over the years. Examples include the Biodiversity Gallery and the Children's Gallery which completed their refurbishment in 2016 and 2017 respectively, the two permanent exhibition galleries of the Space Museum which reopened in 2018 after refurbishment, as well as the Earth Science Gallery which opened on 20 November 2020 for test run. The LCSD has plans to continue refurbishing the permanent exhibition galleries of the Science Museum by phases, and updating and introducing new exhibits to the two museums in a timely manner. Details are as follows:

- (i) Paleontology Gallery: expected to open in 2021 after renewal works;
- (ii) Transportation Hall, Home Technology Hall and Food Science Hall: refurbishment work will be conducted together, and is expected to complete in 2023;
- (iii) Motion Hall, Light Hall, Sound Hall, Electricity and Magnetism Gallery, and Mathematics Hall: the Museum has drawn up plans to renew the contents of the exhibitions, replace worn-out interactive exhibits, as well as apply new modes of presentation to bring new experience to visitors. The relevant work has already commenced, and is expected to complete in 2023-24; and
- (iv) Telecommunications Gallery: will be converted into the InnoTech Gallery and is expected to complete in 2024-25.

- 10) According to paragraph 4.14(a), the LCSD has planned to renew the permanent exhibitions and exhibits in a number of museums in the coming years. What are the details and timetable of the renewals; and whether the LCSD will consider conducting large-scale consultation and research to understand views, taste and needs from the public, so as to ensure proposals for renewal would address their needs to make the exhibitions more appealing

The renewal plans of permanent exhibitions in other major museums, apart from the Science Museum (Q.9), are detailed as follows:

- (i) The Heritage Museum is planning for a permanent exhibition themed on Hong Kong popular culture, showcasing distinctive features of Hong Kong Culture from a macro perspective, which is scheduled for opening in the first quarter this year. In the course of exhibition renewal, the Museum has established an expert advisory panel comprising academics and professionals in related fields, as well as consulted the Museum Expert Advisers (Advisers) and the Museum Advisory Committee to garner views from various channels.
- (ii) The renewal of the permanent exhibition and the historical trail of the Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence, as well as the enhancement work for its ancillary facilities are now underway. It is expected to re-open in 2021-22. While planning for the new permanent exhibition, advice of the Advisers as well as primary and secondary school teachers have been sought.
- (iii) The permanent exhibition “The Hong Kong Story” of the Museum of History is currently under large scale renewal. Given the sizable area of the exhibition gallery (7 000 sq. meters), massive structural alterations with complex installations, as well as the upgrading of ancillary facilities, it is anticipated that the renewal will take more than two years to complete. While planning for the new permanent exhibition, the Museum has undertaken a series of consultation to gauge views from museum visitors, Advisers, academic groups, youth groups, the education sector and disability groups, complemented by two public consultation sessions. Furthermore, an expert advisory panel comprising experts in Hong Kong history and educators was specially formed to advise the Museum in formulating the contents and design of the new permanent exhibition.