

Legislative Council Panel on Home Affairs

**Provision of Public Libraries
in Hong Kong and Overseas Countries**

PURPOSE

This paper reports on the comparison of the provision of public library services in Hong Kong with those in major overseas metropolitan cities based on the findings of the Consultancy Study on the Future Development of Hong Kong Public Libraries completed in November 2002.

BACKGROUND

2. In the briefing on the report of the Consultancy Study on the Future Development of Hong Kong Public Libraries, at the Panel meeting on 13 December 2002, Members requested the Administration to provide an information paper on the comparison of the provision of public library services in Hong Kong with those in overseas countries examined by the consultants.

PUBLIC LIBRARY SYSTEMS CHOSEN

3. In the course of the Consultancy Study, the consultants selected the following public library systems in six major metropolitan cities for comparison with the Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL):

- New York Public Libraries;
- Toronto Public Libraries;
- National Library Board Singapore;
- Public Libraries in Tokyo;
- Public Libraries in Greater London; and
- Public Libraries in Sydney.

4. Except for London, Sydney and Tokyo, the other three cities operate a single public library system. For London, the consultants combined 34 independent public library systems in the London Borough and the City of London proper. For the case of Sydney, public libraries provided by separate library authorities in the Business District of the City of Sydney and the Greater Sydney region were grouped together for comparison. As for Tokyo, the public libraries provided by the 23 wards (Ku), 26 cities and 5 towns were combined for comparison. Statistics for the year 2000 were used as the basis for comparison as they were the latest available figures for the cities selected at the time of the Consultancy Study.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5. The consultants' findings on the comparison of HKPL with the public libraries in the six selected metropolitan cities are given in Appendix I.

6. Hong Kong has experienced major development in public library services in recent years. The opening of the Hong Kong Central Library and seven new libraries since 2000 (Tsing Yi, Tin Shui Wai, Tseung Kwan O, Lei Yue Mun, Chai Wan, Fu Shan and Fanling Public Libraries) have greatly enhanced the library facilities and services and brought about significant increase in library use. Hence, the 2002 statistics on usage and provision of resource for HKPL are also provided in Appendix I for Members' reference.

7. The relevant findings and recommendations of the consultants are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Overall Services

8. The consultants are of the view that HKPL have been active over the past four decades in developing public library services through the building of new library facilities and introducing new services. The consultants have also pointed out that since taking over the management of public libraries from the

former Municipal Councils in 2000, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has been effective in maintaining adequate library materials and providing services for the public. Compared to other international public library systems, HKPL have facilities and services that meet high international standards, particularly those at the Hong Kong Central Library.

Use of Library Stock and Services

9. The statistics show that HKPL have, over the years, built up an effective stock with the highest turnover (loans per item) among the cities compared. HKPL are the busiest libraries with the highest loans per opening hour and average population served per library. In terms of a single public library system, it has the largest number of books on loan in a year. Since the opening of the Hong Kong Central Library in May 2001, the usage of the libraries has increased substantially. In 2002, HKPL registered the second highest loans per capita and per registered user.

Branch Libraries

10. As compared to the other six cities, HKPL have been operating

effectively at the lowest cost per capita and per registered borrower. In Hong Kong where the population is dense and highly centralized in a small area well served by public transport network, public libraries are, on the whole, easily accessible to members of the public. Hence, on average, they serve a larger number of population than those in the six cities compared.

11. Compared with the public libraries in the other six cities, HKPL have a much shorter history and are still undergoing expansion. At present, HKPL have 62 static libraries and 8 mobile libraries, and have plans to provide 12 new libraries, five of which are currently under construction.

12. While the consultants have recommended HKPL to concentrate efforts on further enhancing the quality of library services, they have also suggested HKPL to lower the current ratio of population served per district library from 1:200,000 to 1:150,000 and to increase the floor area of new district library from the present standard of 11m² per 1,000 population to 19.3m² per 1,000 population. In addition, the consultants have also recommended the provision of small and mobile libraries in densely populated areas to provide a better spread of library service points throughout Hong Kong.

Stock Provision

13. At present, HKPL acquire some 700,000 items of library materials per year at an expenditure of \$103 million. The provision of library materials per capita of HKPL was 1.27 in 2000, and has been increased to 1.41 in 2002. The provision is the lowest among those of the six cities and is slightly lower than the range recommended in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) guidelines, i.e. 1.5 to 2.5 items per capita. However, it must also be noted that libraries in the six countries have much longer history than HKPL. For example, the New York Public Library system has been in existence since 1895 whilst the first public library in Hong Kong was opened only in 1962.

14. Building up of library stock is a gradual and continuous process, which is very often subject to the availability of accommodation and resources. The consultants have recommended HKPL to continue building up the library stock and if resources permit, HKPL could make reference to the IFLA guidelines to increase the existing 1.41 items of library materials per capita to 1.56 items per capita in 5 years' time at an additional expenditure of \$19.96 million per year.

Full-time and Professional Staff

15. The number of full-time and professional staff in HKPL is lower than those of the other six cities. In spite of the lower provision of library staff, the services provided by HKPL have achieved a high level of public satisfaction as shown by an independent public opinion survey conducted in December 2001 which indicated that 81.2% of the library users were satisfied with the overall facilities and services of HKPL and 16.2% rated them average. In addition, about 98% of the users of the Hong Kong Central Library were satisfied with the overall services.

WAY FORWARD

16. The Government will take into account the findings and recommendations of the consultants, comments from staff and the public, resources available, and other relevant factors in formulating a strategic plan for future public library services.

PRESENTATION

17. This paper is presented for Members' information.

Leisure and Cultural Services Department

March 2003

COMPARISON OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN HONG KONG WITH THE 6 OVERSEAS COUNTRIES

	HONG KONG 2002	2000						
		HONG KONG	TORONTO	NEW YORK	LONDON	SINGAPORE	TOKYO	SYDNEY
Population	6,773,200	6,711,500	2,385,421	3,070,302	7,200,000	4,151,264	11,700,000	3,600,000
Area (sq. km)	1,098	1,098	631.96	290	1,620	647.5	621	12,407
Number of static public libraries	61	58	98	85	369	67	359	122
Number of mobile public libraries	8	8	1	-	33	-	-	2
Number of registered users	2,770,230	2,322,522	1,242,284	1,782,593	2,198,635	1,860,309	4,457,700	1,854,000
Circulation of library materials	53,272,154	34,527,300	25,382,467	12,842,278	54,700,891	25,034,444	79,210,000	24,264,000
Total stock	9,562,691	8,350,786	9,163,004	10,258,570	19,096,719	7,293,638	69,470,000	9,000,000
Reference enquiries	3,763,688	1,140,126	3,101,047	6,419,072	10,208,401	653,333	N/A	N/A
USAGE INDICATORS								
Loans per capita	7.87	5.15	10.64	3.88	7.51	6.23	6.77	6.74
Loans per registered user	19.23	14.87	17.72	7.20	24.88	13.46	17.76	13.08
Total library visits per capita	6.22	4.91	6.84	3.71	6.71	5.25	N/A	3.72
Membership (% population)	40.90%	34.62%	60.06%	53.80%	30.18%	46.30%	38.10%	51.50%
Loans per item (turnover)	5.57	4.06	2.77	1.25	2.86	3.43	1.14	2.69
Reference enquiries per capita	0.56	0.17	3.63	1.94	1.40	0.16	N/A	N/A
Loans per opening hour	270.01	186.99	101.59	76.66	59.02	159.55	N/A	73.24
RESOURCE INDICATORS								
Total stock per capita	1.41	1.27	3.84	3.10	2.62	1.82	5.92	2.50
Provision of terminals/computers per registered user	0.0003	0.0003	0.0006	0.0011	0.0015	0.0003	N/A	0.0002
HUMAN RESOURCE INDICATORS								
Ratio of full-time equivalent staff to population	0.026%	0.023%	0.076%	0.072%	0.053%	0.023%	0.038%	0.036%
Ratio of professional staff to population	0.004%	0.004%	N/A	0.052%	0.016%	0.012%	0.009%	0.012%
COST INDICATORS								
Total costs per capita (HK\$)	\$106.76	\$76.12	\$246.01	\$317.58	\$232.00	\$175.69	\$274.97	\$131.61
Total costs per member (HK\$)	\$261.03	\$219.87	\$409.60	\$590.34	\$768.68	\$379.43	\$721.70	\$255.54
Total costs per visitor (HK\$)	\$17.17	\$15.51	\$35.95	\$85.62	\$34.60	\$33.46	N/A	\$35.39
Total costs per library (HK\$)	\$10,479,971	\$7,737,303	\$5,927,770	\$12,380,344	\$4,204,148	\$10,535,256	\$7,248,888	\$3,807,027
Costs per title catalogued (HK\$)	\$60.05	\$60.05	\$64.05	\$102.58	\$88.50	\$96.78	\$46.47	\$52.59
OTHER INDICATORS								
Average population served by Branch	111,036	113,702	24,341	38,983	19,742	59,966	26,362	36,231
Average size of Branch library	1,759	1,190	1,548	N/A	701	1,208	1,283	N/A