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Panel on Home Affairs

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the special meeting on 14 June 2010**

Development of Public Library Services

Purpose

This paper gives an account of discussions held by members on the development of public library services at the Panel meeting on 9 April 2010. For previous deliberations on the subject, members may wish to refer to LC Paper No. CB(2)1203/09-10(02) issued on 7 April 2010.

Background

2. In June 2007, the Administration briefed the Panel on the key recommendations of the Recommendation Report of the Committee on Libraries ("CoL")^(note). To take forth these recommendations, the Public Libraries Advisory Committee ("PLAC") was set up in May 2008 to advise the Administration on the overall development strategy of Hong Kong Public Libraries ("HKPL"). The Administration last updated the Panel on the implementation of CoL's recommendations in April 2010, a summary of which is set out in the ensuing paragraphs.

Provision of libraries

3. The provision of public libraries in Hong Kong is made with reference to the current Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines ("HKPS&G") which states that one district library should be provided for each district and that there should also be a district library for every 200 000 persons. At as April 2010, the 7.03 million people in Hong Kong are served by 66 static libraries and 10 mobile library vans. To enhance space provision in new libraries, the standard space provision for district library and major library has been increased to 2 900 and 6 200 square metres respectively, as compared to the corresponding old standards of 2 200 and 3 310 square metres.

Note: The CoL was established in November 2004 for a tenure of two years to advise the Secretary for Home Affairs on strategies and plans for betterment of the Hong Kong public libraries' facilities and services. It completed its term and submitted its Recommendation Report to the Secretary for Home Affairs in May 2007.

4. For new facilities, three district libraries and a small library are under planning. The three district libraries are in Tseung Kwan O, Yuen Chau Kok and Tung Chau Street, and the small library is in Siu Sai Wan. In addition, the Administration is planning the reprovisioning of one major library, two district libraries and three small libraries to larger premises. There are also ongoing phased-renovation programmes to improve the facilities and reading environment of libraries which have been in service for 10 years or more.

Community libraries

5. The Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD") has since 2005 introduced the Libraries@neighbourhood – Community Libraries Partnership Scheme to supplement the existing library services to meet the increasing demand in the community. Under the Scheme, participating non-governmental organisations ("NGOs") are provided with free block loan of library materials and professional advice for the setting up of community libraries to bring library services closer to the community. As at April 2010, 139 community libraries are operating across 18 districts.

Application of information technology in public libraries

6. LCSD has launched an array of initiatives to tie in with the expansion of the library system. These measures include: the upgrading of the Library Automation System ("LAS") (one of the world's largest library computer systems with both Chinese and English capabilities) by phases from mid-2011 onwards; the conduct of a pilot test on the application of the Radio Frequency Identification ("RFID") sub-system to further enhance efficiency of the lending/returning of library materials and sorting/shelving/inventory management of library items at six libraries by the end of 2011; and the major upgrading of HKPL's Multimedia Information System ("MMIS") to enable the provision of enhanced digitised information services across the library network via the Internet by 2012.

Strategic plan of Hong Kong Public Libraries 2009-2018

7. For the planning and development of library services in the coming decade, the Administration has, in consultation with the PLAC, developed the Strategic Plan of Hong Kong Public Libraries 2009-2018. The Plan, which was presented to the Panel in April 2009, sets out the key missions and strategies for guiding the planning of library developments, including: (a) providing a wide network of public libraries to serve all residents of Hong Kong; (b) supporting and encouraging lifelong learning; (c) promoting a knowledge-based community through reading; (d) providing a gateway to information and knowledge; (e) enriching the documentary heritage of the history and culture of Hong Kong; (f) promoting Hong Kong literature; (g) leveraging on new technology and the use of information technology to enhance public library services; and (h) enhancing public involvement and partnership in public library services. According to the Administration, it will devise business plans to implement the missions and meet the strategic goals, and review the Plan at three-yearly intervals.

Views and concerns of Panel members

8. During the discussion on the provision of public library services at the Panel meeting on 9 April 2010, members raised concerns and suggestions on various aspects of public library services. The Panel passed a motion urging the Administration to (a) review afresh HKPS&G in relation to public library services with a view to lowering the population standard for the provision of public library facilities; (b) provide additional public libraries and extend library opening hours with reference to the views of various District Councils ("DCs"); and (c) consider setting up library outlets at mass transit railway stations and ferry piers on outlying islands for convenient access by the public. The key views and concerns expressed by members are summarised in the ensuing paragraphs.

Provision of libraries at district level

9. Some members expressed concern at the discrepancies between the proposals for additional library facilities from DCs and the actual provision made by LCSD. These members enquired how the Administration would address the situation.

10. The Administration advised that in planning library facilities, the Administration would endeavour to strike a balance between quantity and quality to ensure the standard of library services. In terms of quantity, since LCSD took over the management of library services in 2000, it had put in place 15 new libraries and two mobile libraries, and the planning/development of another five public libraries was underway. The present provision of 66 static libraries and 10 mobile library vans across the territory had either met or exceeded the standard suggested in HKPS&G. Moreover, these services were complemented by the operation of 139 community libraries across 18 districts. In terms of service quality, the Administration had adopted an enhanced space provision for new libraries (viz. 6 200 square metres for major libraries and 2 900 square metres for district libraries). New facilities such as Express Check-in Counter, Young Adult Library and Leisure Reading Corner were also provided in new libraries where appropriate to further enhance the efficiency and comprehensiveness of library services. Equal weight was given to the software support for library services, particularly through the application of information technology, such as the development of "wall-less" library, upgrading of the LAS and MMIS.

Review of HKPS&G

11. Some members enquired whether the Administration would review the planning standard in relation to public libraries prescribed in HKPS&G in view of the change in the concept and mode of operation of library services in recent years. Other members were doubtful as to whether the planning standard for public libraries had taken into account Hong Kong's special circumstances such as its crowded living environment and the strong public demand for studying and reading space. A member urged the Administration to refer to the planning ratio

recommended by the former Urban Council, viz. the provision of a district library for every 100 000 persons.

12. The Administration advised that the planning standards for public libraries provided in HKPS&G were last reviewed by the then CoL in 2006. While CoL did not propose any change to the planning standards, it had recommended strategies and plans for betterment of the facilities and services of HKPL. To take forth the CoL's recommendations, the PLAC was set up in 2008 to advise the Government on the overall development strategies of HKPL. Based on PLAC's Strategic Plan for HKPL 2009-2018, the Administration would devise business plans (to be reviewed at three-yearly intervals) to implement the missions and meet the strategic goal of the Plan. At the request of the Panel, the Administration/PLAC undertook to provide a written explanation on the considerations in drawing up the planning standards for libraries in HKPS&G.

Extension of library opening hours

13. Some members were concerned that the opening hours of major public libraries had failed to address the needs of the working population and students. To optimise public use of library facilities, these members suggested that the Administration should earmark extra resources for operating an evening shift, say until 10:00 pm at major public libraries. A member enquired about the timeframe for the Administration to review the effectiveness of the arrangement implemented since April 2009 to extend the opening hours in 33 public libraries in serving the public needs.

14. The Administration explained that to meet the public's demand for library services, 33 major and district libraries had extended their opening hours to 71 hours a week since April 2009 to provide seven-day-a-week library services. To cater for the needs of the working population, these libraries operated until 8:00 pm during weekdays. The Administration would review the arrangement and revert to the Panel on the findings towards the end of 2010. The Administration further advised that individual DCs could consider allocating DC funds to extend the opening hours of libraries at the district level.

Services of the community libraries

15. A member suggested that to better utilize the services of community libraries, the Administration should make available information on the location of these libraries on the Internet, and enrich the scope of their services to include Internet access, as well as book lending and returning services for collection items of the HKPL. The Administration undertook to arrange for the uploading of information on community libraries onto the Internet.

Promoting reading habit

16. Regarding members' enquiry on measures taken by the Administration to promote reading habit in the community, the Administration advised that HKPL had collaborated with publishers and schools in organising various educational activities,

such as reading programmes, book displays and exhibitions. HKPL also played an active role in organising literary awards and competitions, the annual Hong Kong Literature Festival and a wide range of literary activities throughout the year.

Application of information technology to library services

17. A member considered that the Administration should leverage on the use of information technology for the development of a knowledge-based society. The member called for more Government efforts in promoting the use of e-books, exploring different sources for the provision of e-book resources, and resolving the related copyright and licensing issues. Another member urged the Administration to give serious consideration to the feasibility of setting up convenient library outlets at mass transit railway stations through the application of the RFID sub-system.

18. The Administration explained that while the provision of e-books at public libraries would involve complicated copyright and licensing issues, it envisaged that this would be the future direction in the development of library services. HKPL had already made available 48 000 titles of e-books and a collection of free e-resources for access via the Internet by HKPL card holders. The Administration further advised that the new RFID technology should facilitate the extension of selected library services at major transportation outlets, if the result of the pilot test on the application of the technology at six public libraries was found to be satisfactory.

Latest development

19. At the suggestion of Hon Emily LAU and Hon WONG Kwok-hing, the Panel will meet with members of PLAC to exchange views on the development of public library services at its special meeting on 14 June 2010.

Relevant papers

20. A list of relevant papers with their hyperlinks at the LegCo website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
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Panel on Home Affairs

Relevant documents on development of public library services

Committee	Date of meeting	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
Panel on Home Affairs	9.4.2010	Administration's paper on provision of public libraries at district level	CB(2)1203/09-10(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0409cb2-1203-1-e.pdf
		Background brief on development of public library services	CB(2)1203/09-10(02) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0409cb2-1203-2-e.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1673/09-10

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