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Panel on Home Affairs

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 21 December 2017

Enhancement of programming, audience building, and renewal of permanent exhibition of public museums

Purpose

This paper summarizes the previous discussion of the Panel on Home Affairs ("the Panel") on enhancement of the programming, audience building, and renewal of permanent exhibitions of public museums managed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department ("LCSD").

Background

2. At present, LCSD manages 14 museums¹ and five other cultural venues² that provide museum services. The Administration established the Committee on Museums ("CoM") in November 2004 to advise the Secretary for Home Affairs on the management and provision of public museum services in Hong Kong. The Panel was briefed on CoM's Recommendation Report at the meeting on 8 June 2007. While CoM recommended, among others, establishing a statutory Museums Board to take on the operation and management responsibility of public museums, the Administration decided that

¹ The 14 museums include seven major museums (namely Hong Kong Museum of Art, Hong Kong Science Museum ("HKScM"), Hong Kong Space Museum, Hong Kong Heritage Museum ("HKHM"), Hong Kong Museum of History ("HKMH"), Hong Kong Museum of Coastal Defence ("HKMCD"), and Dr Sun Yat-sen Museum) and seven smaller museums (namely Flagstaff House Museum of Tea Ware, Lei Cheng Uk Han Tomb Museum, Law Uk Folk Museum, Sheung Yiu Folk Museum, Sam Tung Uk Museum, Hong Kong Railway Museum, and Fireboat Alexander Grantham Exhibition Gallery). More information is available from the public museum portal at http://www.museums.gov.hk/en_US/web/portal/about-us.html

² The five cultural venues are Hong Kong Heritage Discovery Centre, Ping Shan Tang Clan Gallery cum Heritage Trail Visitors Centre, the Hong Kong Film Archive, the Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre and the Oil Street Art Space.

public museums would continue to be managed by LCSD. At its meeting on 13 November 2009, the Panel was briefed on the improvement measures to further enhance the operation and services of the public museums under LCSD with reference to the recommendations made by CoM. Details of the improvement measures are set out in the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)232/09-10(01)).

3. At its meeting on 17 November 2014, the Panel received an update by the Administration on the progress made in the previous two years to enhance the programming, audience building, and renewal of permanent exhibitions of public museums managed by LCSD and the future plan of the Administration in these areas.

Members' concerns

Governance of public museums

4. When discussing the future development of museum services in February 2010, members had no strong view on the Administration's decision of not taking forward CoM's recommendation of establishing a statutory Museums Board. Nevertheless, members urged the Administration to introduce measures to enhance the accountability and transparency of public museums, and foster closer partnership and community participation in their operation and management. There was another view that the Administration should endeavour to promote an environment conducive to the healthy competition among different types of museums and to provide room for the organic growth of museums with a variety of missions, themes and characteristics.

5. According to the Administration, it had implemented an array of initiatives for enhancing professional and community participation in public museum services, including (a) the setting up of a Panel of Museum Advisors for each of the three streams of museums (viz. arts, history and science) to advise LCSD on the strategies for the development, promotion and management of public museums; (b) the continued engagement of guest curators to curate museum programmes; and (c) the organization of exhibitions and programmes to showcase the works of local artists to local and overseas audience.

Enhancement of museum services

6. When discussing measures to enhance museum services in March 2013, members urged the Administration to adopt a more dynamic approach in promoting museum exhibitions and activities for audience building. There was a view that LCSD museums should utilize advanced multimedia technology and enhance its online services so as to facilitate users in their access to and

searching of information about museum collections and exhibitions. There was another view that the Administration should emphasize both the publicity and marketing efforts as well as the curation and presentation of quality exhibition programmes. Concern was also raised as to whether sufficient resources had been provided in sustaining young people's interest in history and heritage. The Administration was urged to organize more exhibitions on Chinese history and Chinese traditional culture.

7. The Administration advised that the blockbuster exhibitions organized by LCSD in the past few years had enhanced the image of its flagship museums and the attractiveness of exhibitions to non-visitors, with a record breaking attendance of 5.8 million visitors in 2012. About 27% of these museum visitors were youths aged between eight and 19. The Administration undertook to continue to step up its promotion efforts targeting the youth to further expand the audience base, promote patronage and sustain community interest in visiting museums. Furthermore, LCSD was in the process of developing online or digital museum collections in order to develop a wider patronage. Resources had been allocated for the purpose of launching a museum portal carrying multi-media content and revamping individual museum websites.

Renewing permanent exhibitions and management of collection items

8. Noting that the Administration would take steps to renew the permanent exhibitions of its museums by phases, members urged the Administration to expedite the renewal exercises and to ensure that there would be sufficient space for display of the museum collections. There was a view that the Administration should take the opportunity to re-align the duplicated collections at different museums.

9. The Administration advised that it would strive to expedite the renewal exercises as far as practicable. As regards the shortage of space for museum collections, LCSD was actively pursuing the proposal of constructing a central repository as a long-term solution. The Administration also ensured members that it would realign the museum collections so as to avoid replicating the exhibit items at different museums.

10. At the Panel meeting on 17 November 2014, members in general expressed support for the Administration's proposal to renew the permanent exhibitions in HKScM, HKHM, HKMH and HKMCD. Some members requested the Administration to arrange exhibitions on the four local intangible cultural heritage ("ICH") items which had been inscribed onto the national list of ICH, so as to enhance public awareness of and interest in local ICH. Some members also urged the Administration to press ahead with the renewal of the permanent exhibitions of HKScM and HKMCD as they considered that the

information on display for many exhibits as well as the presentation technology employed in these two museums were not in pace with the modern times. In response to members' enquiry about the plans and timeline for renewing the permanent exhibitions and curating thematic exhibitions for public museums, the Administration provided the following information:

- (a) the Administration planned to revamp HKHM's New Territories Heritage Hall and Orientation Theatre respectively into Hong Kong Culture Gallery and Jin Yong (Louis Cha) Gallery. In addition, LCSD would continue to promote local ICH items through activities of HKHM and other LCSD museums or venues such as the Hong Kong Central Library;
- (b) apart from renewing its permanent exhibitions, thematic exhibitions (which normally lasted for only a few months and provided varied programmes of diverse topics of interest with the aim to encourage repeat visits and widen the range of museum's audience) would continue to be held in HKHM;
- (c) LCSD would renew the permanent exhibitions of its museums at suitable intervals (say within 15 to 20 years) which was in line with professional practice of museums worldwide; and
- (d) HKScM planned to convert part of the existing Life Sciences Hall and Occupational Safety and Health Gallery to a Palaeontology Gallery and Earth Science Gallery respectively. It would be followed by the renewal of the existing Transportation Hall, Home Technology Hall and Food Science Hall. Preparatory work of the renewal would be launched in 2015 and was expected to be completed by mid-2020.

11. The Administration advised that the proposed renewal of permanent exhibitions would draw reference to the revamping exercise carried out recently in the Imperial War Museum in London concerning the permanent exhibition on the First World War with a cost of £40 million. While the two projects were similar in scale, it was the Government's plan to adopt likewise advanced multimedia technology to bring fun and exciting experience to visitors to the exhibitions. Interactive exhibits and multimedia programmes would be developed for this purpose.

12. Some members urged the Administration to ensure that its museums were providing inspiring, experimental and educational exhibitions through the development of interactive exhibits and multimedia programmes that could help

nurture creativity amongst youngsters and foster their interest in science, history and heritage. The Administration undertook to work towards this end.

Audience building

13. Some members held the view that the Administration should explore initiatives/measures to attract more visitors to LCSD's museums, in particular, HKMH and HKMCD, given the low attendance rates and the large sums of money to be spent on renewing the permanent exhibitions of these two museums. These members suggested that collaboration with the education and commercial sectors should be pursued for the purpose of building up and enlarging the audience base. There was also a suggestion that the Administration should bring art exhibitions to the diverse audience outside the museums by organizing outreach programmes and exhibitions. In response, the Administration informed the Panel that:

- (a) the total attendance of the public museums had been on the rise in the past two years, from 5.18 million in 2011 to 6.13 million in 2013, representing an increase of 18%;
- (b) since its opening in 1998, the exhibitions of HKMH, which were both entertaining and educational, had attracted more than seven million visitors and been acclaimed as one of the must-see attractions in Hong Kong by many travel agents over the years. In 2013 alone, the total number of visitors to HKMH was about 0.86 million;
- (c) given the scale and complexity of the works involved, the estimated project cost for the renewal of HKMH was about \$466 million. The renewal works would include commissioning academic research, revamping the design and layout of the exhibition, fabrication of exhibits, development of interactive exhibits and multimedia programmes, removal, fabrication and installation works, etc.; and
- (d) it was the Government's future direction to utilize advanced technology to bring fun and exciting experience to visitors to public museums, where possible.

14. In response to the enquiry of some members about efforts made on gauging visitors' views on the provision of museum services, the Administration advised that in addition to the liaison meetings with customers which were conducted regularly, LCSD conducted biennial opinion survey by interviewing museum goers to collect their views and suggestions on museum services and

facilities. According to a survey conducted with 5 118 visitors in 2013, more than 90% of the visitors were satisfied with the programmes and services offered by the public museums. Through monitoring the results of subsequent surveys, LCSD could keep track of the demographics of visitors and museum service satisfaction level so as to establish exhibition-specific visitors' profile, which would help the museums to identify their target audience for coming years, curate thematic exhibitions and design the promotion strategy accordingly.

15. Some members enquired whether the Administration had set any target for the number of visitors to public museums under LCSD's management. The Administration advised that its objective was to attract as many visitors as possible such that the facilities and resources of the museums could be fully utilized by the general public.

Latest development

16. The Administration will brief members on the enhancement of programming, audience building, and renewal of permanent exhibitions of public museums at the meeting on 21 December 2017.

Relevant papers

17. A list of relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

**Relevant papers on
Enhancement of programming, audience building, and renewal of
permanent exhibition of public museums**

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Home Affairs	5.2.2010 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
	22.3.2013 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
	12.5.2014 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
	17.11.2014 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes