

## LCQ6: Opening hours of public libraries

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Following is a question by the Hon Andrew Cheng and a reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, in the Legislative Council today (June 7):

Question:

Will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) whether it will extend the opening hours of all public libraries in Hong Kong on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays to facilitate the use of library services by the public in the evening during public holidays and weekends;
- (b) whether it will standardise the opening days of all public libraries in Hong Kong by requiring them to operate seven days a week, and extend their opening hours to 12 hours a day; if so, of the details of their opening hours; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (c) of the expenditure and manpower involved in implementing the measures mentioned in (a) and (b)?

Reply:

Madam President,

My reply is as follows -

(a) & (b) The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) currently operates a total of 74 public libraries, providing a wide range of library services to the public. The total number of weekly opening hours of public libraries in the urban areas and the New Territories are more or less the same. The major and district libraries in the urban areas open seven days a week for a total of 61 hours. They are open from 10am until 7pm from Mondays to Thursdays whereas on Fridays, their opening hours are extended to 9pm for the convenience of readers who are unable to use library facilities during normal opening hours. As for the major and district libraries in the New Territories, they are open six days a week for a total of 62 hours, and their daily opening hours are from 9am until 8pm. The Hong Kong Central Library is open seven days a week for a total of 74 hours. Opening hours of various types of libraries are set out at Annex.

The major and district libraries in the New Territories close one day a week for carrying out the necessary work of collection maintenance, cleansing and repair. The two

patterns of opening hours have their respective advantages. There is no closing day for the major and district libraries in the urban areas, but their daily opening hours are shorter. On the other hand, though the major and district libraries in the New Territories close one day a week (on either Monday or Thursday), they offer longer daily opening hours, which can fit in better with the life pattern and rest breaks of those readers working in the urban areas and residing in the New Territories.

The major and district libraries in the urban areas offer the same opening hours from 10am to 5pm on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays while those in the New Territories open from 9am to 7pm on Saturdays and from 9am to 5pm on Sundays and public holidays. With the exception of seven public holidays, namely New Year's Day, the first three days of the Lunar New Year, Good Friday, Christmas Day and the first weekday after Christmas Day, all public libraries are open to the public during the hours listed above on public holidays.

The LCSD provides a variety of services outside the opening hours of public libraries. At present, a total of 49 libraries (including the Central Library, all five major libraries, the majority of district libraries and some small libraries) are equipped with book drops for returning books borrowed from various public libraries after opening hours. Besides, the Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL) provide readers with value-added services including 24-hour online services for renewal and reservation of library materials, viewing of electronic books, retrieval of information in databases and searching of library categories, as well as telephone renewal service.

In addition, from April 2000 onwards, the study rooms of all public libraries have been running on separate opening hours whereby their opening hours on weekdays are extended to 10pm for use by students sitting public examinations and those in need of study room services. During the examination period from March to May every year, all study rooms of public libraries throughout the territory are open seven days a week (including the closing day of libraries) from 8am until 10pm.

The HKPL conduct public opinion surveys on a regular basis to gauge public views on library services. According to a survey conducted in 2004, more than 70% of the library users surveyed were satisfied with the current opening hours of public libraries in various districts. The LCSD will closely monitor the utilisation of public libraries and public views in order to review the opening hours of various libraries in a timely manner.

As mentioned in the Consultation Document on "Review on the Role, Functions and Composition of District Councils" promulgated by the Government in April this year, to actively involve District Councils (DCs) in the management of some district facilities, we

propose to set up a District Facilities Management Committee (DFMC) under each DC to steer and oversee the work involved. Under this proposal, the management of all district public libraries (i.e. with the exception of the Hong Kong Central Library and the Basic Law Library) will be brought under the purview of DFMCs. DFMCs will be invited to provide input on matters concerning the management of district libraries, which include customer service improvement initiatives, collection development programme and extension activities. As such, DFMCs could propose how best to improve the services of the district libraries (including the opening hours) having regard to the needs of the relevant district communities.

(c) To open all the public libraries for seven days a week for 12 hours a day would incur an additional expenditure of approximately \$200 million per annum. This estimated additional cost includes mainly extra primary costs of staff and electricity. It does not, however, include secondary attributes such as expenditure to defer cleansing and maintenance work to after library opening hours, shift duty allowances of permanent staff, added costs of delivering transit books resulting from increased demand, administrative cost, etc.

Ends/Wednesday, June 7, 2006

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