

## LCQ10: Role and operation of public libraries

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Following is a question by the Hon James To and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (January 30):

Question:

Regarding the role and operation of Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL), will the Government inform this Council:

- (a) given that the Committee on Libraries completed in the middle of last year a report putting forth a number of recommendations on the development of HKPL, of the follow-up actions taken by the Government so far concerning those recommendations and their progress;
- (b) given that the Committee has put forth a number of recommendations (including strengthening HKPL' s role as a cultural base for the community, supporting life-long learning and bringing culture to the community), yet some residents in Kowloon have reflected to me that the activities organised by various public libraries in Kowloon are significantly fewer than those organised by the Hong Kong Central Library, whether the Government has conducted any review in this regard;
- (c) of the current number of public libraries situated in the properties leased to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) by the Hong Kong Housing Authority, The Link Management Limited or other private owners;
- (d) of the number of organisations participating in the Community Libraries Partnership Scheme each year since the Scheme was launched by LCSD in December 2005, and whether any organisations have withdrawn from the Scheme; if so, of the number of withdrawal each year and the reasons for withdrawal;
- (e) given that some organisations have reflected to me that LCSD had not provided adequate support to participating organisations of the above Scheme,

whether the Government has conducted any review in this respect and on the other arrangements of the Scheme; and

(f) given that the Government has indicated that Wi-Fi facilities will be provided in public libraries and other government facilities, of the timetable for providing such facilities in public libraries and the progress of the works concerned?

Reply:

Madam President,

(a) The Government accepts in principle all the recommendations of the Committee on Libraries, and is progressively implementing and taking forward the recommendations. For instance, with regard to the recommended restructuring of its mission into one encompassing both the “local community service” and “cultural” dimensions, the HKPL has been stepping up liaison with schools and local organisations in various districts through its branch libraries, as well as collaboration with local organisations to enhance library services and development through the scheme of involving District Councils (DCs) in the management of public libraries.

On the promotion of reading and literary arts, the HKPL endeavours to provide the best support with its existing resources for such activities and to incorporate the Committee’s recommendations in this area at the planning stage of its programme of activities. The Hong Kong Central Library (HKCL) has been hosting large-scale and diversified cultural activities and talks, developing its reference and information collections and related services, and forging closer cultural ties and cooperation with public libraries outside the territory, including those in the Pearl River Delta region, so as to distinguish itself as a metropolitan cultural centre.

(b) As an integral part of the HKPL, extension activities are organised on a regular basis to serve the purposes of familiarising the public with the public libraries, encouraging the use of library facilities and resources for lifelong

learning, and incubating reading habits in the community. The various types of HKPL extension activities are broadly classified into two categories – district-based and territory-wide activities.

To meet the needs of residents in the districts, the HKPL organises at the district libraries different kinds of activities, including storytelling for children, book displays and exhibitions, subject talks, workshops, library visits, user education sessions, and the like to induce reading interests, to nurture reading habits, and to encourage extensive reading. Suitable library activities are also tailored to support other events in the districts. In 2007, the libraries in the Kowloon region organised over 5 600 activities of various kinds to cater for the needs of readers therein.

Committed to serving all the people in Hong Kong, the HKCL provides general library services as well as specialised collections and services like Young Adult Library, Map Library, Arts Resource Centre, User Education Unit, etc. Different sections of the HKCL organise diversified activities throughout the year to promote their respective collections and services. In 2007, a total of over 1 700 activities were held in the HKCL.

In addition, the HKPL undertakes for the entire public library system the systematic planning and organisation of activities targeted at territory-wide participation. Examples of such activities are talk series on culture, lifestyle, history, and IT knowledge; workshops; exhibitions; and territory-wide events for promotion of reading and literature, including literary awards and writing competitions, writing workshops, “Hong Kong Literature Festival” , talks hosted by writers, etc. This category of activities is usually staged in HKCL venues with large seating capacity. Some may also take place in major, district, and small libraries in the districts, such as Chinese Medicine talks, meet-the-author sessions, storytelling sessions, IT education – computer workshops, IT talks, Chinese classics talks, literary writing workshops, Chinese poems and ci talks, etc.

Extension activities are planned and arranged in accordance with the established objectives and development directions of the public libraries, with

consideration being given to the needs and interests of the people. A review of the overall arrangements of library extension activities is carried out yearly while, for the purposes of future improvement and planning of activity content, individual post-activity evaluations are conducted to examine the effectiveness and attendance of the respective activities, and the comments or opinions of participants collected through questionnaires or other channels.

(c) LCSD operates a library network of 66 static libraries and 10 mobile libraries. Among the 66 static libraries, 11 are situated in the leased properties of the Hong Kong Housing Authority, five in the leased properties of The Link Management Limited, one in the leased property of the Hong Kong Housing Society and three in private buildings. Details are at Annex I. The remaining 46 libraries are located at government buildings.

(d) One community library was set up in 2005 after the scheme kicked off in December the same year. Another 23 followed in 2006 and 30 in 2007. Two of these libraries withdrew from the partnership scheme in early 2007 due to unsatisfactory response from members of the organisations concerned.

(e) As shown from the figures in (d), the number of newly set up community libraries increases every year. In addition to offering block loans of library materials, librarians of public libraries provide participating organisations with professional advice on the selection of books and the establishment and operation of a community library. LCSD will continue to encourage more local organisations to set up community libraries.

Since the introduction of a pilot scheme to involve DCs in the co-management of district facilities last year, new elements have been added to the forms of collaboration for community libraries. In Sai Kung and Tuen Mun, for example, suitable organisations interested in participating in the partnership scheme were granted additional resources by the respective DCs to subsidise the purchase of bookshelves, books, and library computer software; payment for delivery of books, etc. This contributes towards a more effective implementation of the partnership scheme.

With the full implementation of the DC co-management scheme in all the 18 districts, every DC is allowed to develop, in accordance with the district characteristics, more community libraries that better meet the needs of

residents. LCSD will enhance its liaison and collaboration with local organisations to jointly bring library services to every corner of the community and to promote reading extensively and intensively.

(f) The Office of the Government Chief Information Officer plans to install Wi-Fi facilities at the 66 static public libraries across the territory for providing public wireless access to the Internet. The project commenced in January 2008, and the first batch of 20 public libraries is scheduled to launch the service in late March 2008. Details are at Annex II.

Ends/Wednesday, January 30, 2008

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