

LCQ13:Public library service

Following is a question by the Hon Cheung Hok-ming and a written reply by the Secretary for Home Affairs, Mr Tsang Tak-sing, in the Legislative Council today (January 12):

Question:

It has been reported that public libraries had made little effort in recovering overdue fines for late return of books and their accounts were messy. A member of the public also claimed that although she had already returned the book she borrowed, this was not recorded in the computer system of the public library concerned and, as a result, she was asked by the library to pay a fine for late return of the book. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the amount of fines recorded for late return of books in each of the past three years, and among such fines, the amount yet to be recovered to date;

(b) what mechanism the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has put in place for recovering overdue fines for late return of books;

(c) of the details of the arrangement for conducting regular inventory checks of library materials, and of the measures in place to ensure the accuracy of readers' loan records; and

(d) given that public libraries in general have bookdrops installed near the entrances to facilitate readers to return books when the libraries are closed or after the library opening hours, and that some books were found to be missing earlier, apart from installing closed-circuit televisions near the bookdrops, what other measures LCSD has put in place to enhance safety in order to prevent theft of books?

Reply:

President,

(a) The number of overdue library materials and the amount of overdue fines involved (including the collected amount and the outstanding amount) as recorded by public libraries in the past three years are detailed in annex.

(b) The Libraries Regulation requires that all library materials borrowed from a library must be returned to the library within 14 days after the day upon which it was borrowed, and an overdue fine will be imposed on all overdue library materials. The Hong Kong Public Libraries reserve the right to take legal action to recover any outstanding fines or costs of unreturned items. The relevant requirements are displayed within the precincts of all libraries and shown on all library materials available for loan for the attention of borrowers. With regard to enforcement, in the event that a library item is not returned on the due date, the library will make use of the computer system to issue an "overdue notice" 15 days after the due date, demanding the borrower to return the overdue library material immediately and pay the overdue fine. If, on the 45th day after the due date, the borrower still fails to return the loan item and pay the overdue fine, a "final overdue notice" will be issued indicating the amount of overdue fine calculated as at the date of the notice and the replacement cost of the loan item in case of loss. The borrower is also reminded that if he fails to pay the overdue fine, or report loss of the loan item and pay the replacement cost as well as the overdue fine within two weeks from the date of the notice, his library card will be temporarily suspended. If the borrower still fails to return the loan item and pay the overdue fine, a "payment notice" will be issued in accordance with the relevant procedures to urge the borrower to pay the outstanding amounts payable. Legal action will be considered on a case-by-case basis to recover the outstanding amounts payable by the borrower.

(c) Inventory checks of library materials are conducted annually in all LCSD libraries in the way as recommended by the Audit Commission. Generally, the computer system will generate an inventory checklist for individual libraries by drawing a certain number of library materials from their respective catalogues of library collections. All libraries are required to complete the inventory checks within one month.

Services relating to patron registration as well as circulation and searching of library items in LCSD libraries have been fully automated. The computer system, which is also widely adopted by major libraries overseas, serves to provide strong support in handling readers' information, lending services, library catalogue and online public access catalogue services in the past decade. The department also carries out system maintenance on a regular basis to ensure the effective provision of library services and the accuracy of the information (including readers' loan records) kept in the system. To cope with the provision of new services and the use of Radio

Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, LCSD is carrying out an upgrading exercise of the computer system and the whole process is expected to complete in 2013.

(d) Book drops are provided in 64 LCSD libraries to facilitate the return of non-overdue books outside library opening hours. The design of the book drops has taken into account security factors. The slots only allow patrons to deposit books but not to take away any item. Library staff will make a thorough check to ensure that no book is left behind when they collect the books from the book drops. They will scan the barcodes of the books immediately to update the computer records and repeat the scanning procedure to ensure that every item has been recorded correctly. Apart from installing closed-circuit televisions near the book drops with due regard to the physical environment of individual libraries, LCSD engages contractors for regular maintenance and inspection to ensure the proper service of book drops. In addition, library staff are deployed to empty the book drops during long holidays when libraries are closed to ensure that the book drop service operates effectively.

To remind patrons the proper way to use the service and deposit books for return, users' guide and points to note are posted on each book drop for patrons to follow and to deposit books into the book drops according to the instructions. To avoid damage or loss of books, patrons are also reminded not to force books into or leave books outside book drops when the book drops are full.

Ends/Wednesday, January 12, 2011

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