

## LCQ4: Functions and services of public libraries

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chun-ying and a reply by the Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism, Miss Rosanna Law, in the Legislative Council today (May 21):

Question:

It is learnt that due to the prevalence of digitisation and changes in the reading habits of members of the public, the number of visits to public libraries and the number of materials on loan have both dropped significantly in recent years, and quite a number of overseas libraries have gradually transformed themselves from conventional institutions for collecting and lending books into diversified spaces functioning as community centres with intelligent services. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information about public libraries for the past two years: (i) the numbers of circulations of physical books, e-books and multimedia items and their year-on-year rates of change, (ii) the expenditure on purchasing such items and its percentage in the overall library expenditure, (iii) the number of visits, (iv) the number of newly registered users, and (v) the number of readers borrowing physical materials;

(2) whether it has reviewed the functions and services of public libraries to ensure that the allocation of resources can meet the needs of the community; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it has drawn on the library models of other cities to push forward the modernisation and transformation of Hong Kong's public libraries in terms of innovative design, application of intelligent technology, community services and so on, as well as to expand their functions and services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan Chun-ying is as follows:

Under the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), there are 71 static libraries, 12 mobile libraries and 3 self-service library stations that offer round-the-clock services, providing free and comprehensive library services for the public.

In the past 2 years, the number of visits to the libraries increased from 21.49 million in 2023 to 23.83 million in 2024. The number of loans of physical books increased from 28.75 million items to 28.97 million items,

while that of multimedia materials increased slightly from 616 000 items to 617 000 items. On the other hand, as more people visited the libraries and borrowed physical books, the number of loans of e-books decreased from 2.56 million items to 2.32 million items. In 2023 and 2024, the number of newly registered readers was 43 000 and 38 000 respectively, while the number of readers who borrowed physical materials was 620 000 and 600 000 respectively.

The expenditure on the acquisition of library materials maintained at about \$100 million in the financial years of 2023-24 and 2024-25, accounting for about 7 per cent of the overall expenditure of the libraries in the respective financial years.

Libraries in different regions have been facing the challenge of declining patronage due to the availability of more free information online. To facilitate the sustainable development of the libraries, the LCSD has implemented the strategic plan of libraries from 2020 to 2025 to enhance existing facilities and library networks; raise public awareness of the physical collection and electronic resources; launch large-scale reading promotion activities to promote reading interests and expand readership; and enhance library services through the application of information technology. The libraries also conduct opinion surveys through annual Reader Liaison Group gatherings to better understand the reading habits and needs of readers.

At present, the LCSD enhances its library services on various aspects, including planning, library collections, services and application of technology, etc. When planning new library facilities, the LCSD will make reference to the experience of Mainland and overseas libraries, with a view to making a library into a community gathering place. The demographics and needs of different communities will be taken into account when planning the functions, design, services and facilities of libraries to ensure that library services will meet the needs of residents of different age groups in the community. Taking Sham Shui Po Public Library commissioned in 2023 as an example, considering the greater number of young families in the district, a parent-child reading corner and a game wall are specifically provided in its children's library where the facilities are tailor-made for paired reading by young readers and families. A leisure reading area is also set up in the adult library to provide a comfortable reading environment for patrons, and a create • info zone equipped with more multimedia digital service facilities is provided for the youth. Besides, the library also caters for the needs of the elderly in the district by providing desktop video magnifiers in the newspapers and periodicals section to bring convenience to them when reading newspapers and magazines.

On library collections, the LCSD keeps gathering and analysing usage data of its library collections, including both physical and e-books, for understanding changes in reading habits and demands of readers as well as introducing new library materials that meet the needs of the public. With the ever-increasing popularity of e-reading, the libraries continue to enhance its acquisition of e-books, bringing an increase of over 60 per cent in the e-book collection from 330 000 items in 2019 to about 540 000 items currently. The usage of e-books also rose sharply from 960 000 in 2019 to

2.32 million in 2024.

Apart from the provision of book lending services in libraries, the LCSD libraries also offer outreaching services from time to time, such as block loan of library materials in the community to assist individual community organisations and housing estates with such demand in establishing community libraries for providing book services to their members or residents. Currently, 197 community libraries have been set up across the territory, including two located inside the Community Living Rooms in Sham Shui Po.

In addition, the libraries launch large-scale territory-wide reading activities and hold other activities such as book exhibitions, talks, workshops and pop-up libraries during major events organised by the LCSD to promote library collections and e-reading, with a view to extending the reach to readers.

Like public libraries in other advanced cities, the LCSD strives to enhance library services through the application of new technology, and is developing a new Smart Library System. As an integrated library system, the new system supports the daily operation of all public libraries, including collection management, borrowing and return of library materials and online electronic resources, etc, thereby providing greater convenience to the public in using library services. Thank you, President.