

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

CSTB215

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Head: (95) Leisure and Cultural Services Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (5) Public Libraries

Controlling Officer: Director of Leisure and Cultural Services (Vincent LIU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism

Question:

In tandem with the National Security Law, the Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL) has re-examined and updated the guidelines on purchasing library materials and accepting donations of books and periodicals. Safeguarding national security has been included as one of the considerations to ensure that materials contrary to the interests of national security will not be included in library collections. Any library material suspected of breaching the law will be removed from library shelves immediately, and will be re-shelved only when it is ascertained upon careful examination that it does not violate the law. In this connection, please inform this Committee of:

- the manpower deployed for the examination of the contents of library materials;
- the number of complaints received from the public about books with undesirable notions or endangering national security in the past 3 years;
- the number of books examined by the HKPL in the past 3 years; the proportion of these books in the entire library collection; and the estimated time required to complete the examination of all books;
- the number and details of library materials which were suspected of breaching the law and immediately removed from shelves in the past 3 years;
- whether a list of books identified as questionable will be provided for schools and publishers for earliest removal from shelves; and
- the procedures that the HKPL has in place for ensuring that it will not purchase books which are unsuitable for young readers (such as books with contents that exaggerate violence, pornography, vulgarism and undesirable notions, or propagate ethnic/religious hatred).

Asked by: Hon LEE Tsz-king, Dominic (LegCo internal reference no.: 25)

Reply:

The review of library books is a routine and ongoing task of the Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL). Libraries in various districts have already included the safeguarding of national security as one of the considerations in their daily collection management work to ensure that library collections for loan/use by members of the public free of charge conform to the laws of Hong Kong. At present, the relevant work is carried out with the existing resources of the Department and no additional manpower is deployed.

The number of complaint cases received by the HKPL about books which contain undesirable notions or may be in breach of the Hong Kong National Security Law in the past 3 financial years is around 1 100. Most of them are repeated cases or complaints involving the same books/authors.

The HKPL has a collection of library materials with over 2 million titles. National security covers many major fields and the library materials involved are extensive and not limited to books on politics, history and social science. At present, the HKPL has completed a preliminary review of its library materials, including publications of those authors or publishers that have been suspected of publishing books on “Hong Kong independence” previously, with a view to ensuring that materials contrary to the interests of national security will not be included in the library collection. The HKPL is continuously reviewing its library materials, which is a dynamic and ongoing process. It also organises training and experience sharing sessions to enhance the knowledge of its staff on the relevant work.

The HKPL does not make announcement or provide other organisations with the relevant information and the list of books removed from library shelves for allegedly breaching the Hong Kong National Security Law or related legal requirements or for being contrary to the interests of national security, because such announcement may lead to wide publication or circulation of such books by individuals, organisations or institutions in different media and is thus unfavourable to safeguarding national security.

Library materials of the HKPL are selected and acquired by the professionally trained Librarian grade staff, who form different subject groups, including the “Young Adult” Subject Group for the selection and acquisition of suitable library materials for young readers. Library materials with healthy and educational content will be selected and acquired for readers with reference to publishers’ new book catalogues, authoritative book reviews, as well as sample books.

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