

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 10 JUNE 2003 AT 10.00A.M.

Agenda Item No.

4

**UPDATE ON PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN LIBRARIES**

Report of the Director of Community Information

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1. Purpose of report

To provide members with a progress report on ICT in libraries.

2. Summary

This report provides the Committee with updated information on the main priorities that are currently being addressed in taking forward Community Information's ICT strategy.

The strategy continues to be:

- To increase public access to electronic information resources
- To standardise resources in libraries, both for staff and the public

The main priorities addressed in this report are:

- Introducing a new self-service computer booking system
- Addressing the key issues identified in the report presented to the Scrutiny Committee on the 11 June 2002. These included:-
 - Upgrading the network connection
 - Upgrading the electronic infrastructure
 - Expansion of ICT provision
 - Improvements to the problem resolution process
 - Improvements to ICT security

3. Conclusion

This report provides the Committee with information requested at their meeting on 11 June 2002. Members are asked to consider whether any further scrutiny of this issue is required.

4. Background

4.1 Electronic information resources in libraries

- There are now 450 PCs allocated for free public use by library customers. This is a 72.5% increase on last year in the number of PCs available to the public for information and educational use and represents a significant advance towards the Government's nationwide People's Network strategy.
- 205 of the PCs are already installed in libraries for provision of Internet access and Microsoft Office
- A further 173 PCs are being installed in libraries as part of a planned rollout programme to further the People's Network in Hertfordshire. These will all be in libraries by December 2003 and will also provide access to the Internet and Microsoft Office.
- 72 of the PCs provide access to the library catalogue and self-service functions. These terminals will also provide access to HertsDirect in the coming months.

4.2 UK online centres

- Most of our libraries have been given the status of being UK online centres. The few smaller libraries that have not yet received this status will receive it within the next few months.
- Being an UK online centre means that people who have never used the Internet before can visit their local library in the knowledge that they will receive friendly assistance from trained staff in a neutral, supportive environment.
- Certain criteria had to be met in order for libraries to get the UK online centre status. This included:-
 - Supporting the Government's strategy for e-government
 - Providing learner support from skilled workers
 - Giving people the opportunity to gain hands-on experience of using ICT
 - Providing extra support for people with particular needs in the community, such as disabled people and people with learning difficulties
 - Having a fast Internet connection in order to provide a good experience for those people new to the Internet

4.3 New electronic services in libraries

New electronic services are now being introduced in libraries as part of a rolling programme over the next few months.

- Internet access is now free of charge for all customers, whether or not they are library members. This is an important part of the Government's People's Network strategy.

- In addition to MS Word, MS Excel and MS PowerPoint, libraries will also be offering access to further new applications, including MS Publisher and Paint Shop Pro.
- A scanner will be available in larger libraries.
- All public PCs are being upgraded from Windows 95 to Windows XP

4.4 Self-service computer booking

- Self-service computer software is currently being piloted in St Albans Central and Hitchin Libraries. It will be rolled out to all libraries by December 2003.
- The new software is called NetLoan. It will enable customers to book a computer in a library either over the telephone, via the Internet or in person using the self-service facility.
- Customers will also be able to log themselves onto a computer without requiring staff assistance.
- This new service will enable staff to spend more time assisting customers in using the electronic information services, rather than on administrative functions related to the provision of the service.

5. Upgrades to network connection

- Last year the Internet connection speed was slow, with most libraries having a connection of only 256k. This often led to frustration for library users and staff.
- This issue has now been addressed by upgrading the network connection speed in all libraries to a minimum of 2mb, using New Opportunities Fund (NOF) People's Network funding. Six libraries are still due to be upgraded early in 2003/04 as soon as wayleave (i.e. permission from the landlord for works to be undertaken) agreements have been reached or building work completed.
- This has led to a noticeable improvement in the speed of access to the Internet in libraries, with fewer complaints from customers about the quality of the connection.

5.1 Upgrades to electronic infrastructure

- Electrical upgrading work has been carried out in those library buildings where electrical and data wiring were already operating to full capacity. This work was necessary in order to allow additional PCs to be installed in libraries.

6. Expansion of ICT provision

- An additional 189 PCs have been bought for public use since June last year, using NOF People's Network funding.
- The majority of these PCs are being installed in large and medium-sized libraries, leading to a significant increase in ICT provision for communities.

- As a result of this expansion in provision, fourteen libraries will have larger, fully-equipped IT suites consisting of eight or more Internet PCs. This compares with five such equipped libraries last year.

7. Improvements to problem resolution

- Following the introduction of new PC support service arrangements for HCC, there has been an improvement in the resolution of technical problems and faults.
- There is now clear ownership of the problem taken by IT Net, with progress in the resolution being regularly checked and followed up.
- The speed of response from IT Net is good, with a same day response being typical.
- However, some problems can still take too long to resolve, sometimes several weeks in the case of major faults.
- Logs are kept by libraries for managing problem resolution and difficulties in the process are passed to the Corporate ICT Service Manager for investigation.
- Fault resolution over weekends, when libraries are open on Saturdays, is not as speedy or as coherent as during the week. Possible ways of improving this situation are being discussed.

8. Improvements to ICT security

- A new security configuration is being rolled out to all libraries based on Windows XP. This will enable us to provide a better experience for customers using library computers, whilst still preventing users from gaining access to core elements of the operating system.
- The existing security configuration has been based on Windows 95, supplemented with a third party desktop management tool called WinU. The problem with this system has been that customers have been prevented by the security configuration from migrating from one computer application to another. For example, a customer wishing to switch from word processing to the Internet in the course of their computer session cannot do so without requesting staff intervention.
- The updated security configuration means that customers will be able to access any computer application at will without requiring staff assistance, whilst the essential element of the operating system will remain secure from unauthorised access.
- The new security configuration will be installed in all libraries by December 2003.

9. Rural Implications

A pilot using GPRS (mobile phone technology) is currently taking place in order to automate the mobile fleet. Ultimately this will enable equitable access to the library computer system. It will also provide mobile internet access to rural locations.

10. Financial Implications

The additional public PCs, network upgrades and mobile automation project were funded from NOF (New Opportunities Fund). Other enhancements came from within the existing Libraries ICT budget. An increase in revenue budget to cover the operating costs of the upgraded network has been agreed.

Background papers used by the author when compiling this report

Hertfordshire Annual Library Plan