

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TUESDAY 22 MARCH 2004 AT 10.00A.M.

Agenda Item No.

6

**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 for ICT is to

- Increase public access to electronic information resources
- Standardise resources in libraries, both for staff and the public

The main priorities addressed in this report are:

- Continued expansion of ICT provision
- Rural access to electronic information resources
- Use of library ICT resources in support of education and lifelong learning especially through partnership working
- Continued improvements to problem resolution

3. Conclusion

This report provides the committee with information requested at their meeting on 10 June 2003. Members are asked to consider whether any further scrutiny of this issue is required.

4. Background

4.1 Expansion of ICT provision in libraries

- In June 2003, when the ICT strategy for libraries was last scrutinised by this Committee, there was a project to install a further 173 PCs in libraries. This is now almost complete. Final completion will be achieved by the end of March 2004 (NB. this is dependent on the project's IT staffing resources not being required for the SHARP project.) This gives a total of 443 PCs available for public use in libraries.
- All 443 PCs give access to HertsDirect.
- 371 of these PCs are installed for provision of Internet access and Microsoft Office.
- 72 of the PCs provide access to the library catalogue and self-service functions, including self-service booking of library computers.
- All libraries except Brookmans Park now have fast network connection speeds of between 2 and 10mb, significantly improving the Internet experience for customers.
- It has not proved possible to upgrade Brookmans Park Library's network connection due to problems with agreeing wayleave for the laying of cables outside of the building.

4.2 Self-service computer booking and improved security

- 206 PCs in 26 libraries can now be booked for use by the public using the new self-service booking system, NetLoan. By the end of March 2004 all 443 PCs will be bookable through NetLoan (NB. this deadline is dependent on the project's IT staffing resources not being required for servicing the SHARP project.) The new service has been widely welcomed by the public, as they are now able to book and log themselves onto public computers without requiring staff intervention.
- As part of the rollout of the self-service booking system, libraries are also receiving an upgrade to their ICT security configurations based on Windows XP. This upgrade means that customers are now able to access any computer application without requiring staff intervention, whilst the operating system remains secure from unauthorised access.

5. Rural access to electronic information resources

- A successful pilot using GPRS (mobile phone technology) has taken place on Hertford Mobile. This has resulted in an improved service to Hertford Mobile customers, as the mobile library staff now

have the same level of access to the live Concerto system (the unique library computer system) as static libraries.

- GPRS and the Concerto system will be rolled out to all the remaining mobile libraries by the end of May 2004.
- Internet access will be available on all new vehicles as they have the space and are designed to accommodate it. The first vehicles to go live will be the mobiles replacing the St Albans, Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City trailer libraries later this year.

6. Use of ICT resources in support of education and lifelong learning

6.1 ICT Support for young children

- Toddler-friendly keyboards have been ordered for all the larger libraries, which will give very young children an early introduction to electronic information resources. These keyboards will be attached to PCs in the children's libraries and will give toddlers and their parents access to book and story-related websites as part of an overall strategy for supporting children's reading development.

6.2 ICT support for homework clubs

- Homework Clubs are run in two libraries: Borehamwood and Oxhey. A total of 1,128 young people are members of these homework clubs, with 700 enrolled at Oxhey and 428 enrolled at Borehamwood. The clubs meet three times a week during term time, with between twenty and thirty young people attending each session.
- The homework clubs are designed to help meet the Government's strategy for ensuring that every young person has access to the widest range of learning opportunities to achieve his or her full potential. The homework clubs provide young people aged 11-16 years of age with the opportunity to enrich their learning voluntarily out of school hours in a neutral environment.
- Both the Borehamwood and the Oxhey homework clubs have nine PCs each. The bookstock is also used extensively. Support is given to the young people by staff from both the Library Service and the Youth Service working in partnership for this project.
- The young people use several software applications to support their homework, including Word Processing, Excel spreadsheets, PowerPoint presentations and Publisher. They scan information into documents, research and compile information for coursework from the Internet and use a variety of learning-based CD-ROMs. Photocopying and printing facilities are made available to the homework club members free of charge.
- There is a good mix of boys and girls at each session from different social and ethnic backgrounds. All age groups are represented and

older club members support younger members with difficult homework problems.

- The homework clubs have been successful in increasing the motivation and commitment of the children to learning. The Oxhey homework club is a recognised model of good practice which often receives international visitors wanting to set up similar clubs overseas.

6.3 ICT support for children's reading development

- Two new ICT-based children's book groups will be piloted at Stevenage and Oxhey Libraries, with launches currently planned for the pre-summer period. (The exact launch date is dependent on the completion of staff training, which begins at the end of April.) The new clubs will be called Stories From The Web Clubs.
- The new clubs will be run as twelve week programmes, with children aged 8-11 being encouraged to join for the full programme. Using the "storiesfromtheweb.org" website, children will learn to use and value the web as an information resource, find out about authors on the Internet and will be encouraged to write their own stories. When they have completed the programme they will be encouraged to join one of the new Chatterbooks book groups, in which they can continue to talk about and share books with other children.

6.4 ICT support for lifelong learning

- Library staff use public computers to provide introductory sessions for adults who have never before used a PC. Customers receive basic hands-on experience in a friendly, non-threatening environment. Customers who want it are then given referral information for developing their skills further in more extensive courses in colleges and IT learning centres.
- In the academic year for 2002/03 447 people received IT taster sessions in libraries. In the first term of 2003/04 (September to December 2003) 216 people received IT taster sessions.
- Basic introductions to IT are also given in libraries as part of wider community partnership projects.
- Learning sessions are run in Hitchin, Berkhamsted and St Albans Libraries in partnership with their local colleges. 54 learners have taken part in courses, including Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) and the European Computer Driving License (ECDL) in Berkhamsted as part of the Dacorum Rural Learning Project. 38 learners received similar training in Hitchin Library in partnership with North Herts College. Libraries in St Albans are important learning venues in a new project called Computer Friendly, which is being run in partnership with Oaklands College and CafeNet Ltd. The project helps to improve the employment

prospects of people, in particular from disadvantaged groups, by teaching them ICT skills.

- 48 learners attended LearnDirect courses using Stevenage Library ICT in the academic year 2002/03.
- 63 beneficiaries are progressing through training as part of the LearnEast project in Hitchin, St Albans, Watford and Welwyn Hatfield. The training includes learning how to use the Internet, word processing and job-finding skills using electronic resources.
- ICT training is particularly targeted at disadvantaged members of the community, including unemployed people, people from ethnic minority communities, disabled people and people with learning difficulties.

7. Improvements to problem resolution

- There are still some concerns on PC support arrangements, especially on major faults or ones that occur at weekends. However, problem resolution continues to improve e.g. LAN Desk has been installed on library PCs which now all have standard images. This helps fault analysis and enables some remote problem solving to take place.
- IT Support Services and Libraries are committed to working together in order to achieve continuous improvement in problem resolution issues.

8. Access to service implications

Access to ICT resources through the library service continues to improve in terms of PCs available and the use of new technology on the mobiles.

Background papers used by the author when compiling this report

Hertfordshire Libraries Best Value Review Improvement Plan 2003

Community Services Committee 10 June 2003 (Item 4) – Public Access to ICT in Libraries