

# WEST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL CABINET

9<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2024

## CLLR DAN LISTER –CABINET MEMBER FOR LOCAL ECONOMY, CULTURE AND LEISURE – COUNCILLOR DAN LISTER

Report Title	Capital approval for replacement of public access computers (People’s Network) across the library estate
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### List of Approvers

Monitoring Officer	Catherine Whitehead	12 <sup>th</sup> June 2024
Chief Finance Officer (S.151)	Martin Henry	12 <sup>th</sup> June 2024
Other Director	Jane Carr	21 <sup>st</sup> May 2024
Communications Lead/Head of Communications	Becky Hutson	12 <sup>th</sup> June 2024

### List of Appendices

#### Appendix A - People’s Network WNC business case v2

#### 1. Purpose of Report

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- 1.1. This report is to inform members and seek approval for the capital project to replace the People’s Network public access computer system in libraries. This will require a capital investment of £125k.

## **2. Executive Summary**

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1.2. This report details the importance of the People's Network public access system that is available from all statutory and community managed libraries across Northamptonshire. It sets out the challenge of an 8-year-old system that is becoming increasingly defunct as digital technology becomes more advanced leading to customer dissatisfaction, a reduction in the ability to self-serve and the inability for the most vulnerable to access digital services. It introduces the business case to use capital funding to replace the failing hardware and system that is currently used across the library estate and sets out the risks and effects of not replacing the current system for the council, partner organisations and the residents of West Northamptonshire.

## **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 It is recommended that the Cabinet:
- a) Approve the request for £125k capital funding to replace the People's Network public access computers across the library estate.

## **4. Reason for Recommendations**

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- WNC has a statutory duty to provide a “comprehensive and efficient library service” in accordance with the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and is subject to Judicial Review by the Secretary of state. The provision of access to digital resources and services is considered an essential part of this statutory duty.
- If the People's Network is not replaced it will continue to become defunct as the current system and equipment is now 8 years old and is no longer compatible with many digital services.
- It contributes to the sustainability plan, corporate strategy, and service plans, specifically, improved life chances, connected communities and thriving villages and towns.
- The WNC Library Strategy 2023-2027 states that all digital systems should be updated at 5 yearly intervals to enable the service to remain up-to-date, efficient, and secure.
- The recommended course of action is the most cost-effective
- The most vulnerable members of the community who are often digitally disenfranchised will have continued free access to the internet and digital services with assistance from Library staff.

## **5. Report Background**

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5.1 The Public Internet Access system (People's Network) has provided online access to the public since 2001 and has had 3 refreshes to ensure that the equipment and systems are suitable to meet the needs of an ever-increasing digital society. The last refresh was in 2016. Since then we have introduced loanable tablets in our statutory libraries as customer's needs and preferences continue to change. We have a core customer base who still require PC access for both internet and Office applications to support with their lives when accessing council and other services online.

5.2 The Peoples Network enables us to provide a quality offer from all libraries including Community Managed Libraries (CML's) and provides us with ways to help promote and support Council campaigns and consultations which are now largely carried out online. We propose to refresh

the PC network across all 34 libraries ensuring we are able effectively to deliver the statutory duty of providing a comprehensive and efficient library service. This will enable us to continuing to meet our service level agreements with the CMLs who provide local access to council services via this network supporting Local Area Partnerships (LAPs).

- 5.3 North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) currently share this network as part of the hosted service IAA and costs for this project will be shared. NNC have already provided executive approval for their contribution of £125k to this shared capital project which will be managed and delivered by WNC.
- 5.4 We have 160 Pcs currently and in the last year we had circa 87,000 bookings equating to 70,000 hours of use.

## **6. Issues and Choices**

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- 6.1 Due to the age of the current system and associated equipment, the key applications and many websites are no longer accessible, and staff are continually required to support customers to find ways to use the systems to carry out their online transactions and to print their documents. This is frustrating for customers and takes staff away from helping those who need other support as per the Prevent agenda.
- 6.2 It also reduces the customer's ability to channel shift to a self-serve model. As time passes, more websites are becoming inaccessible through the current People's Network and this will lead to reputational damage for the council.
- 6.3 This also reduces the income libraries can make from customer printing which is circa 22% of our overall income.
- 6.4 As part of this refresh project, we want to continue the work that council the has achieved on their sustainability journey. We are keen to procure new "greener" IT that covers the manufacturing, use, management and disposal of information technology in a way that minimises the impact on the environment.
- 6.5 We will not need to purchase like for like. By identifying each libraries local needs we will be able to increase the use of tablets reducing the number of desk top PCs. This solution will be more efficient and reduce our carbon footprint and we will be able to repurpose old equipment.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1 The total capital costs breakdown is £250,000 of which £125,000 has already been agreed for spending from the capital programme for NNC. We are requesting the remaining £125,000 for WNC libraries. This largely covers replacing hardware in libraries.
- 7.1.2 The current People's Network of public PCs were designed, implemented and maintained by our internal DTI team Northants County Council (NCC). We have started discussing requirements with DTI for the replacement system.
- 7.1.3 This project will require support from WNC DTI colleagues, specifically digital architect, business analyst and project manager.
- 7.1.4 The project will require support from the Library Service Systems Co-ordinator and the Project support team.
- 7.1.5 The service is reliant on the People's Network system to provide public print facilities. This accounts for 22% of income for the Library Service.

7.1.6 This proposal has already been approved by ELT and endorsed by the Capital Asset Board.

## 7.2 **Legal**

7.2.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the proposals.

## 7.3 **Risk**

7.3.1 Failure to provide digital access through an efficient People's Network could lead to failure to meet the statutory duty and subsequently lead to judicial review.

7.3.2 Not replacing the current system will lead to continued customer dissatisfaction, complaints and reputational damage to the council.

7.3.3 Failure to replace the current system will necessitate additional staff resource as customers are unable to effectively self-serve.

7.3.4 Not replacing the current system will prevent the most vulnerable and digitally disenfranchised residents from accessing the internet and digital services with the support of Library staff.

7.3.5 There is a significant risk that the service will not meet its income generation requirements if the system fails to support public printing as this accounts for 22% of generated income.

## 7.4 **Consultation and Communications**

7.4.1 Providing online access to the public through the libraries network supports the Council's communications principles to help reduce digital exclusion through better connected communities.

## 7.5 **Consideration by Overview and Scrutiny**

7.5.1 N/A

## 7.6 **Climate Impact**

7.6.1 The current People's Network hardware is 8 years old and much less efficient than modern alternatives. We are keen to procure new "greener" IT that covers the manufacturing, use, management and disposal of information technology in a way that minimises the impact on the environment. By providing communal equipment and access to digital resources, we are able to reduce the amount of personal equipment residents might need, for example, desktop printers.

## 7.7 **Community and Poverty Impact**

7.7.1 A modern and efficient People's Network enables the library service to supporting council services, the growth of local businesses and collaborative working with our internal and external

partners locally. This in turn helps to bridge the digital divide being experienced by many of our customers and will help prevent further digital poverty.

7.7.2 The People's Network supports the WNC vision of making West Northamptonshire a great place to live, work, visit and thrive by offering communities digital access in a safe, trusted and welcoming space.

7.7.3 Libraries are a place where children are given the best start in life and where young people grow up and are inspired to succeed through online access and digital resources. This eases the burden on families where the rise in cost of living has impacted on them having their own devices.

7.7.4 Many adults use our computer facilities to learn basic IT skills and libraries offer support to apply for blue badge and bus passes. Partners also use our facilities to provide employment support sessions including job searching and CV writing.

## **8. Background Papers**

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8.1 N/A