

Description of Business Challenge/Opportunity

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.

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. 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 Peoples Network and this will lead to reputational damage for the council. This also reduces the income libraries can make from customer printing which is circa 22% of our overall income.

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 continue to meet our service level agreements with the CML's who provide local access to council services via this network supporting Local Area Partnerships (LAPs).

The current Peoples 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. 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.

We have 160 Pcs currently and in the last year we had circa 87,000 bookings equating to 70,000 hours of use.

Contribution to the Sustainability Plan/Corporate Strategy/Service Plans

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.

We understand the need for computers, tablets and technology to help address digital poverty but also as a library service we are keen on giving our tablets a second chance and gifting them to those who may be able to benefit from them rather going to a landfilled site. We are currently exploring how we can gift these tablets to library and council users who are unable to access online council and other services due to the digital divide. This will also help towards the Live Your Best Life Ambitions, particularly Opportunities to be fit, well and independent and Connected to friends and family.

The use of the Peoples Network also contributes to the Council Corporate Strategy in the following areas:

- Priority 2 Improved Life Chances – provide safe, warm and trusted library spaces to improve health and wellbeing. Increase aspirations in young people.
- Priority 3 Connected Communities – enhance broadband and mobile connectivity within our libraries.
- Priority 4 Thriving Villages & Towns - support of small business in their communities

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.

A modern and efficient Peoples Network enables the library service to supporting council services, the growth of local businesses and collaborative working with our internal and external partners. This in turn helps to bridge the digital divide being experienced by many of our customers and will help prevent further digital poverty. The recently approved library service strategy 23-27 states that all systems should be refreshed in 5 yearly intervals to enable the service to remain up to date and secure.

The Peoples 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.

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.

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.

In addition, customers can use the Peoples Network to access our e-books, e-audiobooks, e-magazine and e-newspaper platforms as well as other subscriptions services provided by for free by the library service.

Potential internal resourcing requirements

- **DTI Architect** required to understand interdependencies with Unified Network, Hardware Refresh, Unified Printing and Customer Strategy (list not exhaustive)
- **DTI Business Analyst** required for value proposition, requirements, processes and operating model
- **DTI Project Manager** required due to complexities and scope spanning multiple sites and business processes
- **NLIS Project Lead/Subject Matter Expert** – to support DTI Project Manager
- **NLIS Project Support Team** for implementation across 34 libraries

Estimated Total Project Delivery Costs

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.

Item	Cost
140x Public PCs replacement (this will include PC screen, PC base unit, keyboard and mouse)	£90,000
140x PC booking licenses	£7,000
140x Microsoft Office and server licenses	£30,000
140x Trend software licenses	£15,000

Replacement back end servers (currently 8x physical servers and 9 virtual servers)	£25,000
35x Large accessibility keyboards for all libraries	£1,500
35x Large accessibility for all libraries	£1,500
Print solution integration (integration with public MFDs)	£5,000
Project Management costs	£10,000
Legal Costs	£3,000
53x Tablets (Samsung Galaxy tablets)	£22,525
Hublet docking station license including device management	£14,925
Installation (7.5 days to visit 15 locations)	£7,125
Project Contingency	£17,425

Timescales

With the ongoing performance issues we are keen to start to scope out the required work with DTI and finalise costings and ensure all required resource is in place. Looking at timeframes we would like implementation of our new solution in two parts. The first part involving our tablets which we are looking to implement from May 2024 if funding is in place as these will be delivered by a 3rd party supplier and would not require any additional DTI involvement. We anticipate the PC refresh may not start until the summer of 2024 as this will involve several technical meetings to ensure all requirements are fully addressed and that we future proof the solution of this part of the project.

Impact / Risks

The refresh will provide an opportunity to address the issues that customers have been experiencing due to out of support hardware and software. This will also future proof the service against system changes in the future. Over the last several months we have experienced an increasing number of countywide issues which not only impact on the service we provide but also the reputation of the council. There is also a financial impact as we are unable to generate income from services such as printing. Issues we have experienced have been;

Impact on staff and customers

- Websites not being compatible with the version of Microsoft Edge we are currently using.
- Council desktop shortcuts opening in Internet Explorer which cause customer frustration when experiencing difficulties paying their council tax. This also affects our CML's providing library services to our council customers.
- Microsoft Office applications not being available as part of our charged for service.
- Time it takes the public PCs to be ready for the customer to use can vary from 2mins up to 20mins and sometimes even longer while the PC builds the user profile due to the age of the PC.
- Accessing council shortcuts causing Windows security messages to pop up asking customers to authenticate themselves using an admin login which they do not have access too.
- Access to the public printer disappearing without warning.

Affecting physical servers as part of the current solution;

- Unsupported operating system.

- Our Third Party Hardware Support is only valid until Nov 24.
- Blade server housed in an old chassis

Affecting virtual servers as part of the current solution;

- Seven of our current virtual servers operate on Microsoft Windows Server 2012 which is using an unsupported operating system.
- For our Trend server, Trend retired this product April 2024 and there will be no further supported updates.

With more systems and websites updating regularly, the existing PCs and backend servers that deliver this vital service are becoming defunct. This causes disruption to digital access for our customers preventing them from self-serving. If we do not replace these PCs we will not be able to provide access to the public and we risk the council suffering reputational damage. This in turn prevents the library service from delivering the Library Strategy, the Council Priorities and the Live Your Best Life Ambitions. Our PC solution also enables customers to use our printing facilities which is a vital income stream. The reduction in income ultimately increases the cost of delivering the library service for the council.