Bath & North East Somerset Council		
MEETING:		
MEETING DATE:	**13 March 2013**	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE: **E 2510**
TITLE:	**Library Service: Charging schedule for Peoples Network computers**	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: **Appendix 1: Options for a new PN charging schedule** **Appendix 2: Statistics**		

1   THE ISSUE

1.1 People's Network (PN) charging was introduced in 2007 with the aim of enabling the provision of the PN service to be partially self-financing. Income targets have not been achieved in the last few years and the target has therefore been reduced each year, requiring equivalent savings to be achieved in other parts of the Library Service. Since charges were introduced there has been a reduction in computer usage which is a concern as libraries have a key role enabling and assisting people to get on-line, particularly in respect of Central Government's 'digital by default' agenda.

1.2 Within the 3 year Library Strategy, agreed by Cabinet in April 2012, there is an intention to increase library hours in the smaller libraries by using volunteers. The current charging structure creates an issue as volunteers will not be trained to use the Library Management System to log users on and take money.

1.3 This report therefore lists options available for 2013/14 to facilitate greater up take of this service.

2   RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet agrees that

2.1 The preferred option: no. 2 is implemented – to commence April 2013

3   FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The operating costs of the People's Network service are budgeted to cost £86K in the current year, excluding income. The budget provides for c. 23% of this cost to be met from charges, totalling £19.5K. This income target is unlikely to be achieved in the current year, and on current forecasts the shortfall could total c. £5K

3.2 A financial model developed to assess the impact of providing all users with ½ hour free access demonstrates that c. 5% of the sessions booked would go over ½ hour and therefore generate a charge. This would reduce annual income to c. £1.5K per annum and require further savings to be required by the Library Service to meet the shortfall against current budgeted levels of £19K per annum.

3.3 The budget proposals for 2013/14 and subsequent financial years currently require the Library Service to achieve savings of c. £500K per annum by 2014/15. Any decision to reduce income will add to the saving required in 2013/14 and future years and will increase the risk associated with achieving this level of reduction in the net operating cost of the service.

4   CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

- *Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone*
  The Library service supports many people to access ICT for the first time, developing confidence and skills. Students of all ages are supported through formal and informal learning. Libraries help to reduce isolation and provide stimulation through reading and activities for all ages
- *Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live*
  Libraries are open to all and free, they provide a focal and safe point within a community where people can access affordable and relevant resources for learning, reading and enjoyment.
- *Building a stronger economy*
  By providing access to opportunities for participation in local activities and volunteering, supporting job seekers and SME

5   THE REPORT

5.1 Currently there is a scale of charges for members of the public to use the library computers: People with concessionary status have full computer access for up to one hour per day free of charge, and then £1.80 per hour, the charge for library members is £3 per hour and £3.60 for non library members. The income target included in the 2012-13 budget is £19.5K

5.2 Reducing this target would bring many benefits including improved access to the service, improved usage levels, reduced complexity for staff, users and providers of service support, thereby improving efficiency, plus enabling smaller libraries to be open additional hours with volunteer support :
a) No need for provision of free websites if everyone is entitled to free access and can therefore access council information etc. free of charge through standard portal. The free websites area has become increasingly difficult to manage and maintain as websites become more and more interactive with large number of links to other sites, options for user feedback etc.
b) The PC desktop can be simplified – easier to log on, no need to direct people to free websites as well as booked session

c) Process for booking sessions either by staff or self service will be simplified – saving time for all

d) During volunteer led sessions, library users will be able to use the computers.

d) There will be no conflict between offering free WiFi and charging for use of PC's

e) Use will increase, library visitor numbers will increase

f) The Society of Chief Librarians 'Digital Promise for Public Libraries 2012' "Expects every Public Library Service should provide: Free access to the Internet for every customer (for a minimum period of time)"

g) This will be good publicity for the library service and improve the community offer, it fulfils the council's corporate priorities and the Library Strategy 2012-15 objectives

h) It is an opportune time, as the Council pilots Universal Credits and Central Government promotes the 'digital by default' agenda. The Library Service is ideally placed to help people apply for benefits and other services online.

5.3 Options

Charging does not have to be removed altogether. To facilitate access, especially at busy sites such as Bath Central Library, charging could be applied after a certain length of free time. Appendix 1 lists possible options.

The preferred option is 2 – providing ½ hour free of charge per day, additional time to incur charges
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6 RISK MANAGEMENT

6.1 The report author and Lead Cabinet member have fully reviewed the risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

7 EQUALITIES

An EqIA has been completed. No adverse or other significant issues were found.

8 RATIONALE

8.1 Library statistics show that usage of the PN computers are low within Bath and North East Somerset Libraries (see Appendix 2) i.e. in June 2011, at Bath Library, the computers were used for 30.28% of their available time, these percentages were even lower at Keynsham where usage was 15.30% and Saltford 3.15%. New opportunities such as the availability of accessing Internet via WiFi have been introduced into a number of libraries during the year and can be perceived as a conflict between people using their own laptops and people paying to use the library computers. Free access will encourage people to take advantage of all the at the library service has to offer

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 Options are listed in Appendix 1

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 *Cabinet members; Trades Unions; Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel; Staff; Other B&NES Services; Service Users; Local Residents; Community Interest Groups; Youth Council; Stakeholders/Partners; Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer*

10.2 Consultation has been carried out with service users via PLUS (Public Library User's Survey) collection of comments and complaints regarding the service, and staff.

11 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

11.1 *Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Sustainability; Young People; Human Rights; Corporate; Impact on Staff; Other Legal Considerations*

12 ADVICE SOUGHT

12.1 The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

Contact person	*June Brassington, Library Services Manager,* **01225 396424**
Sponsoring Cabinet Member	*Councillor David Dixon*
Background papers	*The Society Of Chief Librarians 'Digital Promise for Public Libraries 2012'* *Martha Lane Fox: 'Direct Gov 2010 & beyond: revolution not evolution'*
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