

Statement – Cllr John Bull

REQUEST FOR £20,000 TO BE EARMARKED IN THE BUDGET FOR ALLOWING FREE INTERNET USE IN LIBRARIES

Cabinet will remember that last year Council agreed to a motion proposed by the Labour Group recommending a pilot scheme for allowing free use of the Internet in public libraries to those at present offered concessionary rates, such as students and those on benefit. Now that the Government has committed itself to ensuring that broadband is available to every community in the country it is important that access is made available to those who cannot afford private connection on-line through free use via the public library system. Although at present in BANES Libraries certain websites are free to all users others are charged for as is the sending of emails; however the Labour Group believe that in order to prevent a digital divide opening up free access must be made available to disadvantaged people. Although there is at present a mechanism whereby users can ask for additions to the use of free websites this is cumbersome and involves a time delay ; it is a matter of concern to us that various price comparison websites for energy are not at present on the list and that in a time when more and more jobs are applied for on-line it may be expensive for applicants to access employers' websites. Given that 'headroom' of £300,000 has been allowed in the proposed budget we call on the Cabinet to ensure that the £20,000 is allocated which we believe is professionally estimated to be sufficient to pay for extending this service.