

## **Eastbourne Area Committee**

**Wednesday 26 June 2002**

### **The Peoples Network at Eastbourne Central Library - Information Note**

#### **1. Context**

1.1 East Sussex Libraries Information and Arts (LIA) are installing more than 200 new computers in libraries to provide free high speed Internet access to the public. This is part of the People's Network (PN), a national government scheme designed to close the 'digital divide' between those who have access to IT and those who do not.

1.2 LIA secured a grant of £740,000 from the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) to upgrade our network and to provide the PN. We have to complete all installations by December 2002, which is the deadline set by NOF for drawing down funds. All schools, libraries and county offices will eventually be connected.

1.3 Further information on the PN can be found at <http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk>

#### **2. Eastbourne Library Pilot Project**

2.1 Eastbourne Central was the first library to offer free broadband Internet access to the public. Nine computers were installed (including one Equal Access PC for people with special needs) as a pilot for the People's Network, which opened to the public on 28<sup>th</sup> November 2001. The pilot network was very popular from the outset with an average of 50 visitors a day using the PCs for up to an hour at a time.

2.2 The pilot project enabled us to test software, train staff and develop policies and procedures.

#### **3. Pilot Project and Beyond**

3.1 On the 16<sup>th</sup> May this year the pilot finished and the PN was up and running with 29 PCs. In addition to providing Internet and e-mail access, the Microsoft Office suite is available on all computers, providing word processing, spreadsheet and database facilities. Scanners and colour printing facilities are also available.

3.2 Demand has grown dramatically and up to 150 visitors each day use the PCs for sessions of between 15 minutes and an hour. Users range from visiting students to senior citizens who are using the facilities to prepare CV's, complete coursework, carry out family history research, "surf the net" and send and receive email. The PCs are also used by the Careers Service, who run weekly training courses in the library.

3.3 The next phase of the PN will be the installation of 6 PCs in the children's library, which will be available from Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> June. These machines will be designated for

children's use and provide filtered Internet access.

3.4 The PN is an excellent new facility using state-of-the-art computer technology to make the Internet accessible to everyone in the local community. If councillors would like to book a session, staff would be more than happy to demonstrate it to them.

**Mick Bacon**

**Group Manager – Eastbourne**