

# LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT

**Meeting of the Executive**  
13 December 2004

## Report from Director of Education, Arts & Libraries

For action

Wards affected:  
All

**Report Title: NORTH WEST LONDON ONLINE PROJECT –  
IMPLICATIONS FOR BRENT AFTER DECEMBER 2004**

Forward Plan Ref: EAL-04/05-0065

### 1.0 Summary

1.1 This report outlines the main implications of the termination of the North West Online Project after the end date of December 2004. This time limited joint project between Harrow and Brent delivers New Opportunities Funded ICT learning via 21 Brent community organisations. The report proposes a way forward to enable a number of Brent community organisations to continue to provide ICT learning and outlines the impact of the exit strategy of the project for Brent.

### 2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Note the implications of the termination of the North West London Online Project for the community organisations involved.
- 2.2 Note that officers in both Brent and Harrow are working with the North West London Online Management Board to offer organisations in both boroughs a range of options to sustain online learning for the majority.
- 2.3 Agree to contribute towards the probable redundancy costs of those North West London Online staff not placed with other positions subject to the Director of Education, Arts & Libraries and the Director of Finance being satisfied as to the exact cost to the Council and that they can be met from existing budgets.

### 3.0 Detail

3.1 North West London Online is a project designed to widen participation in and support learning via ICT in the community. It is a joint project between Brent and Harrow and NOF funded in the main, although other funding streams such as Learn Direct have also been accessed to support the project. It is a time-limited project which began in 2001 and is due to end in December 2004. The project supports 9 ICT training centres in Harrow and 21 centres in Brent. Harrow was the lead partner for the NOF funding and is technically the employer of the staff and owner of the equipment.

3.2 Harrow will continue the project in their borough at 6 centres, through their Adult Learning College with LSC funding after December 2004 and will be recruiting to these new posts shortly. We understand that the posts will be ring fenced to existing NWLOL staff.

3.3 Arrangements are being made for five of the existing NWLOL centres in Brent to continue as follows:

- Harlesden Library now has a private training provider running the ICT learning suite (as at Willesden Green and Kilburn Libraries)
- African & Caribbean Resource Centre and New Millennium Centre are both based in Social Services buildings with training provided by CNWL . The Director of Social Services will consider the possibility of them continuing with Social Services support.
- Ashley Gardens – training will continue with BACES.
- Kilburn centre will continue with CNWL.

3.4 In addition, there are now two options for the future of North West London Online in Brent:

3.4.1 **Option 1.** A not-for-profit staff cooperative has been registered by the North West London Online staff, employing up to 4.5 staff, to continue providing learning after December 2004 for eight of the twenty one community organisations across 8 different wards in Brent plus the centre at Bridge Park:

Brent Association for Disabled People  
Community Careers  
Pakistani Community Centre  
Brent Indian Association  
LEAP project  
Cricklewood Homeless  
Akshar (based at Swaminarayan Mandir)  
Church End/Roundwood Centre

- 3.4.2 **Option 2.** The Learning Hub (North West London Colleges Consortium PLC) has recently put forward a further offer to continue with all/the majority of organisations in Brent until January 2007 and has access to learndirect funding, providing technical and learning support to organisations whilst at the same time enabling the organisations to become self sustaining after 2007. It may be possible to incorporate some of the North West London Online proposal within this offer. The Learning Hub option would employ up to 3.5 FTE of the current NWLOL staff as project managers/administration staff as well as employing the majority of other NWLOL staff as tutors. North West London Colleges Consortium already work with the community organisations in Brent, providing technical and other support and would assess each organisation's needs separately for the best way forward.
- 3.5 Both options would rely on underspent New Opportunities funding at end December 2004 being utilised as well as UK Online funding which has been awarded to six of the community groups in Brent. Both NOF and UK Online have indicated that they would be happy to consider either option. In addition, the Learning Hub proposal has the added resources of the existing Colleges Consortium.
- 3.6 Brent's role would be to facilitate whichever of the two options that the North West London Online Management Board, after consultation with the community organisations, decide is the way forward. There would be no financial liability for Brent Council, with staff employed either by the cooperative or the Learning Hub and all costs borne by them.
- 3.7 Harrow would undertake to hand over all equipment to the consortium and to most other NWLOL served groups in the community. There are a small number of organisations which are currently in difficulties or not operating in both boroughs. Equipment from these could be used to increase capacity elsewhere. However, Harrow have indicated that they would have to reconsider this offer if Brent does not contribute to redundancy payments of staff.
- 3.8 In addition, it may be possible to provide support and guidance to those community organisations which may not be part of the offers above , for example signposting to other provisions already in existence in Brent through BACES, CNWL or libraries.
- 3.9 The above proposals would ensure that many learners in the community would have continuity of provision in their chosen location, where possible.
- 3.10 Brent and Harrow senior officers are working together with NWLOL management board to ensure that the best possible outcome for learners in both boroughs results from the proposed exit strategy.

## **4.0 Financial Implications**

4.1 The North West London Online Project is funded through New Opportunities Fund for the life of the project and has also attracted LSC European Social Funds as well as generating income through Learn Direct and Information, Advice and Guidance partnership. The London Borough of Harrow is the lead partner for NWLOL project and directly employs the 21 staff on its payroll with NOF, ESF and LearnDirect providing the income to offset staffing and other costs.

4.2 At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2004, there is a projected underspend of £117,000 (at current estimates) on this funding. This underspend cannot, under the terms of the funding, be used to offset any redundancy costs for staff. Current estimates received from Harrow, based on redundancy costs for 17 FTE staff, are as follows:

- Staff under 50 - £39000.
- Staff over 50 - £30,000 pa for 5 years.

These figures indicate the maximum financial costs to both boroughs. Harrow is requesting that Brent contributes 50% of any redundancy costs incurred, in the spirit of the original partnership agreement. However, officers in both boroughs are actively seeking solutions to reduce these figures (4.3). Any remaining costs to Brent will be met from existing budgets within Education, Arts & Libraries.

4.3 Harrow have now recruited 5 FTE staff into new positions in Harrow. The options outlined above (3.4) could take on between 3.5 and 4.5 FTE posts. In addition, 1.5 FTE members of staff have now left and under option 2 (section 3.4.2 above), further staff from NWLOL (possibly all remaining staff) could be employed as tutors. Therefore redundancy costs could be more than halved from the figures above, particularly with option 2.

4.4 Brent (through BACES) is also actively engaged in identifying possible job opportunities for remaining staff alongside other partners such as College of North West London.

4.5 It is proposed to apply to New Opportunities Fund (NOF) to transfer any underspend as at 31<sup>st</sup> December to fund either of the two options for Brent community organisations currently involved and NOF have already indicated their agreement to this. Harrow will provide written agreement that the majority of this underspend should go to Brent (in the region of £100,000) to fund the new arrangements.

## **5.0 Legal Implications**

5.1 The Council cannot ring fence posts for current staff employed in North West London Online but can assist in identifying opportunities for future employment.

5.2 The Director of Education, Arts & Libraries and the Director of Finance will need to be satisfied that the Council is given full details of the potential redundancy claims and will need to be satisfied that reasonable steps are taken to redeploy the staff are taken by Harrow in accordance with their commitment to do so.

5.3 The Council will not be paying redundancy costs for North West London online Project staff not in new posts at end of December since they are not Brent Council employees but it is open to the Council to contribute to the redundancy costs incurred by Harrow given the nature of the partnership between the two boroughs and because of a desire to ensure the services continue to be provided.

## **6.0 Diversity Implications**

6.1 The twenty-one community organisations cover a wide variety of ethnic and other groups within Brent such as the homeless, under fives, disabled people, etc. It is important that Brent Council continues to offer advice and guidance to those organisations to support ICT learning in the community.

## **7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)**

7.1 There are no staffing implications for Brent in this report.

## **Background Papers**

1. New Opportunities Funding Application 2001
2. Business Proposal North West London Online Ltd 2004
3. Project Plan North West London Colleges Consortium November 2004

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