Agenda item no.	
Subject	Internet Café
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Report to	Burwash Parish Council
Meeting date	12 March 2019

1. Summary

1.1 Parish Councillors held a meeting with volunteers on 27 February 2019 to hear their ambitions and views on the Internet Café and their thoughts on a Community Hub. The Internet Café is a valued community service and the volunteers are hard-working and dedicated to helping people – particularly older people – navigate their way round the web and increasingly hi-tech gadgetry.

For the most part, volunteers are open to the concept of sharing the space with other community groups – with strong provisos on the need to properly secure the PCs, laptops and other equipment.

1.2 This paper makes recommendations for Council to consider on future volunteer liaison, as well as the management of the Internet Café and the parish room resource.

2. Background

2.1 There are currently eight regular volunteers, and around 18 people a week use the Internet Café, which is open for three three-hour sessions each week. The volunteers report that 60% of the people who use the Internet Café bring their own devices and that a high percentage of users are regulars. Most users are in their 70s and 80s and the volunteers report that the Internet Café can be realistically viewed as an emergency support for people who have problems with BT, energy suppliers and the like.

2.2 The Internet Café is promoted via regular articles in the parish magazines and special events are advertised on posters. An A-frame advises passers-by when the Internet Café is open.

3. Purpose

3.1 The volunteers play an advisory role. Working one-to-one, they help people navigate the Internet and work their way through *red tape*.

3.2 Popular uses include:
- Ancestry, family tree work
- Scam and fraud awareness
- Advice on photos
- iPad/iPhone basics
- Word Processing on a tablet
- Bookings – online appointments for the surgery and buying Panto tickets.
- Help with switching energy suppliers, visa applications and setting up accounts.

3.3 The Internet Café is not currently charging users for services. Volunteers discussed whether this could lead to a change in the operating model for the Internet Café. Once again, all emphasised the need to keep users safe online. That the laptops are not linked to the *Dynasoft* programme, yet were safe and secure was mentioned.

4. Ambitions

4.1 Volunteers felt it important to do more to promote the Internet Café to bring in new people. They would like to offer more workshops on things such as social media and protecting yourself online. Reaching out to give advice for sole traders or people working from home was discussed as was the potential for offering more services, particularly for young people. The volunteers also touched on factors such as the need for DBS checks or limitations on volunteer time or recruitment.

4.2 The volunteers have some practical ambitions for the facilities. They'd like people to have access to clean toilets, and ask also for an efficient fridge. The roof needs to be insulated and they'd like a more efficient layout for vehicles using the car park.

4.3 Volunteers spoke of the need for health and safety checks and routine tests for the portable appliances used in the Internet Café. This highlights the need for improved liaison with the Parish Council as the Clerk reports that health and safety checks have been undertaken. Professional advice re the PAT requirements for equipment has previously been shared with the Internet Café – the advice is that, given the usage rates, further testing is not required until summer 2019.

5. Community Hub
5.1 One volunteer said: "Sometimes people just pop in for the pink recycling bags, and they stop for more. This is already a hub. The Internet Café has morphed over time. It's not the inner London model for an Internet café - it's more a local service, and visitors use it for all sorts of things."

5.2 They spoke of the need to liaise with existing room providers in the Parish – such as the Village Hall and Burwash Common Pavilion. "We should not be standing on other people's toes." Volunteers said we should also consult local people to determine what the community actually needs and wants. Their own "blue skies" list of potential options for consideration included something to combat the isolation felt by older people; a place for local people to have coffee; a library and a place with facilities for young people.

5.3 The potential for sharing the Parish Room with other groups and for re-configuring the space was recognised, but with strong caveats about the need to keep the equipment secure.

6. To resolve
The Parish Council should regularise working relationships with the Internet Café volunteers and agree management arrangements for the Parish Room and BPC assets.

Burwash Parish Council **resolves** to:

Invite Volunteers to select two of their number to join two Parish Councillors on an Internet Café liaison group. The first tasks of this group will be to:

a) Explore and make recommendations to Council on the current financial arrangements for the Internet Café – including the donation/charging framework and purchasing – in line with parish council financial regulations and requirements.
b) Work with the Clerk to ensure implementation of health and safety recommendations.
c) In the interim, make arrangements for the donation tin to be locked away after each session, and ensure that the Clerk has copies of all Internet Café cupboard keys, and a full list of key and door code holders.
d) In the interim, booking enquiries for the Internet Café (Parish Room) are to be referred to the Parish Clerk.