



27th November, 2007

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT A COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF RANDWICK WILL BE HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, TOWN HALL, 90 AVOCA STREET, RANDWICK, ON TUESDAY, 4TH DECEMBER, 2007 AT 5:30 P.M.

Committee Members: The Mayor, B. Notley-Smith, Belleli, Hughes, Matson, Nash, Procopiadis (Deputy Chairperson), Woodsmith (Chairperson)

Quorum: Four (4) members.

NOTE: AT THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING HELD ON 28TH SEPTEMBER, 2004, THE COUNCIL RESOLVED THAT THE COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE BE CONSTITUTED AS A COMMITTEE WITH FULL DELEGATION TO DETERMINE MATTERS ON THE AGENDA.

1 Apologies/Granting of leave of absences

2 Confirmation of the Minutes

CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 13TH NOVEMBER, 2007.

3 Declaration of Pecuniary & Non-Pecuniary Interests

4 Addressing of Committee by Members of the Public

5 Urgent Business

6 Library

6.1 DIRECTOR, CITY SERVICES' REPORT 86/2007 - RANDWICK CITY LIBRARY SERVICE - FILTERING SOFTWARE. 2

7 Confidential Items (Closed Session)

8 Notices of Rescission Motions

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GENERAL MANAGER

Director, City Services' Report 86/2007



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| SUBJECT: | RANDWICK CITY LIBRARY SERVICE - FILTERING SOFTWARE |
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| DATE: | 7 November, 2007 | FILE NO: | F2004/ |
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REPORT BY: DIRECTOR, CITY SERVICES

INTRODUCTION:

Randwick City Library Service provides public access to the Internet through a number of computers for use by children only and others for youth and adults.

Council at its Works Committee Meeting held on 9 October 2007, discussed the Library's Internet Access and Personal Computer Access Policy. It was resolved on the Motion of Councillor Andrews and Mayor, Councillor Notley-Smith that:

(a) *the following Library policies be adopted:*

1. *Library Services Membership Policy*
2. *Library Services Lending Policy*
3. *Library Opening Hours Policy*
4. *Library Fees and Charges Policy*
5. *Library Internet and Personal Computer Access Policy*
6. *Library Community Bus Policy*
7. *Servicing Children and Young Persons in Randwick City Library Policy*
8. *Library Volunteers Policy*
9. *Library Work Experience Placement Policy*
10. *Library Book Clubs Policy*
11. *Document Delivery Policy*
12. *Hire of Facilities Policy; and*

(b) *a report be brought back to council detailing various internet filtering systems that could be utilised in Council libraries.*

Filtering software is commonly regarded as the solution to the problem of children inadvertently accessing unacceptable material, as it selectively controls what content Internet users can view and what activities they can participate in, using a variety of automatic technologies and set parameters ⁽¹⁾.

However, censoring software or filtering is seen by the Library Council of NSW⁽²⁾ and public libraries as inadequate to the task of protecting children from viewing unacceptable material as it cannot filter images, may let through unacceptable material and can often screen out useful information. Like other public libraries, Randwick City Library Service has taken steps to provide a safe and secure environment for children viewing the Internet in the library, rather than relying on filters.

ISSUES:

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) take a strong stand against the usage of Internet filters or restricting information access, except as required by law. While it supports the 'Protecting Australian Families Online' (PAFO) initiative for home use, it does not recommend the use of filtering technology for public libraries and has instead worked with organisations such as NetAlert in developing educational and information materials for libraries and Internet users.

According to the publication put out by the Federal Government: *Netalert: Protecting Australian Families Online*⁽³⁾ "installing an internet content filter reduces the risk of your family coming into contact with something upsetting or dangerous online but – like a seat belt in a car – it does not offer total protection.

Internet content filters offer a range of different functions to help block, screen or monitor unwanted material. Unfortunately, there is no single action of internet content filter that does everything and it's not possible to have two or more internet content filters installed on your computer at the same time." (p.18)

Internet filters can work by blocking sites by having a black or exclusion list containing websites or webpages considered inappropriate. If used at home, you can set different categories to suit different age groups, but this cannot be done in a public library context. Other internet content filters use more advanced techniques including key word and phrase searches, but again, this does not guarantee that inoffensive material will be screened out.

NetAlert recommends managing the risks and keeping library patrons, particularly young patrons, safe online by:

- Education
- Encouragement and support
- Making the computer safe; and
- Supervision

It recommends using all four ways together for the best results. It recommends placing NetAlert's safety brochures in accessible areas for the public and making the CD offering free home filtering available to all who want it.

A recent survey of Australian libraries⁽¹⁾ indicated that while 39% of libraries do use commercial filters (generally delivered through server level, Council-wide networked Internet terminals), most were not satisfied with their performance. Like Randwick City Library Service, 95% have clear Internet policies and user behaviour policies; they provide supervision by staff, parental involvement and parental consent to approve Internet access rights, as well as giving information and training. Most respondents rejected Internet filtering as a form of censorship and limit on intellectual freedom; its unreliability and inaccuracy and stated that they had experienced few or no complaints about offensive material.

The following points are common to public libraries in terms of filtering software:

- Supervision and placing public computers in public view was a preferable form of monitoring of usage
- Children under the age of 12 years are required to have parental supervision in the library and this includes Internet supervision
- Educating the public in safe and responsible Internet use was preferred to installing surveillance software

- Parents are already required to provide consent in order for children under the age of 18 years to use public Internet terminals
- Filtering can be subjective, what is inappropriate to some may not be to others
- Filtering limits access to 'legitimate' information

The Library Council of NSW Guidelines ⁽²⁾ state that "Library clients must be sensitive to the values and beliefs of others when displaying potentially controversial information or images on computer screens located in public areas. Where a client is found to be using Library computers to access pornographic, offensive or objectionable material, or for any unlawful purpose, the Library reserves the right to direct the client to leave the library, to direct that the client not re-enter the Library for a specified period and to report unlawful conduct to relevant authorities."

RELATIONSHIP TO CITY PLAN:

Outcome 5: Excellence in recreation and lifestyle opportunities
Direction: Library programmes, resources and facilities provide innovative and inspirational opportunities for education and leisure
Key Actions: Our libraries will continue to be central to community involvement and interaction.

FINANCIAL IMPACT STATEMENT:

There is no financial impact for this matter.

CONCLUSION:

While Filtering software is available in different forms and does work to a limited extent, it is more suitable for a home environment where it can be set to a required level and can be used together with parental monitoring. In a public library environment, where the public use computers to search for information, filtering software can often block useful sites and prevent access to information. It cannot be set to deal with different levels of screening and cannot block out unacceptable images. Public libraries prefer to monitor usage by making screens in full view of staff and promote education and parental supervision of their children's internet usage as a means of protecting them from unacceptable material.

RECOMMENDATION:

That Randwick City Library Service continues to protect its users from unacceptable Internet sites using its current, successful internet strategies rather than relying on filtering software which cannot guarantee protection from unacceptable sites.

References:

1. ALIA: Internet Filtering in Public Libraries 2007 Survey Report May 2007.
2. Library Council of NSW: Access to Information in New South Wales Public Libraries Guideline, April 2006.
3. NetAlert: Protecting Australian Families Online, Dept of Communications, Information and Technology and the Arts, Commonwealth of Australia, 2007
4. ALIA Statement on Free Access to Information (<http://www.alia.org.au/policies/content.regulation.html>)
5. ALIA Statement on Online Content Regulation (<http://www.alia.org.au/policies/content.regulations.html>)

ATTACHMENT/S:

- Attachment 1: Statement on Free Access to Information
- Attachment 2: ALIA Statement on Online Content Regulation

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JORDE FRANGOPLES
DIRECTOR, CITY SERVICES

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BARBARA TODES
MANAGER, LIBRARY AND
COMMUNITY SERVICES

ATTACHMENT 1

STATEMENT ON FREE ACCESS TO INFORMATION

ALIA objects addressed

To promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interests of all Australians and a thriving culture and democracy.

Principle

Freedom can be protected in a democratic society only if its citizens have unrestricted access to information and ideas.

Statement

There are several different levels at which the free flow of ideas can be impeded. At the societal level, legislative bodies of all kinds are expected to consider the legal and regulatory frameworks they put in place to support the free flow of information and ideas about the interests and concerns of citizens. At the institutional level, library and information services are expected to encourage the free flow of information and ideas within the scope of their roles and responsibilities. At the individual level, citizens are expected to make informed decisions in exercising their rights and responsibilities.

The Australian Library and Information Association believe that library and information services have particular responsibilities in supporting and sustaining the free flow of information and ideas including:

1. asserting the equal and equitable rights of citizens to information regardless of age, race, gender, religion, disability, cultural identity, language, socioeconomic status, lifestyle choice, political allegiance or social viewpoint;
2. adopting an inclusive approach in developing and implementing policies regarding access to information and ideas that are relevant to the library and information service concerned, irrespective of the controversial nature of the information or ideas;
3. ensuring that their clients have access to information from a variety of sources and agencies to meet their needs and that a citizen's information needs are met independently of location and an ability to pay;
4. catering for interest in contemporary issues without promoting or suppressing particular beliefs and ideas;
5. protecting the confidential relationships that exist between the library and information service and its clients;
6. resisting attempts by individuals or groups within their communities to restrict access to information and ideas while at the same time recognising that powers of censorship are legally vested in state and federal governments;
7. observing laws and regulations governing access to information and ideas but working towards the amendment of those laws and regulations which inhibit

library and information services in meeting the obligations and responsibilities outlined in this Statement.

Related documents

- a) Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>
- b) Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ccpr.htm
- c) International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom
<http://www.ifla.org/faife/policy/iflastat/iflastat.htm>

ATTACHMENT 2

ALIA Statement on Online Content Regulation

ALIA objects addressed

To promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy and democracy.

Principle

Freedom can be protected in a democratic society only if its citizens have unrestricted access to information and ideas.

Statement

Libraries and information services facilitate and promote public access to the widest variety of information, reflecting the plurality and diversity of society. The selection and availability of library materials and services, including online content and services, is governed by professional considerations and not by political, moral and religious views.

Libraries and information services support the right of all users to unhindered access to information of their choice regardless of format. Access to electronic information resources should not be restricted except as required by law and this basic right should not be eroded in the development of regulatory measures for online information.

Users are assisted with the necessary skills and a suitable environment in which to use their chosen information sources and services freely and confidently. Each user's right to privacy and confidentiality is protected with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted.

In addition to the many valuable resources available on the internet, some are incorrect, misleading and may be offensive. Libraries and information services proactively promote and facilitate responsible access to quality networked information for all their users, including children and young people. They enable library users to learn to use the internet and electronic information efficiently and effectively.

Related documents

- a) ALIA Statement on Free Access to Information
<http://alia.org.au/policies/free.access.html>
- b) International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom
<http://www.ifla.org/V/press/pr990326.html>
- c) International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Internet Manifesto: <http://www.ifla.org/III/misc/im-e.html>
- d) Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>