



DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE – 13TH MARCH 2024

**SUBJECT: SUPPORTING THE WORK OF MEMBERS ELECTRONIC
ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND THE USE OF BROADBAND**

**REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND CORPORATE
SERVICES**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is for the Committee to consider whether a proposal for all elected Members to be remunerated for costs associated with the use of home broadband should be considered by Council.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The reports seeks the views of the Committee as to whether a contribution should be offered to members for the cost of home broadband to facilitate their council work.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The committee is asked to consider the options set out in paragraph 5.7 of the report and whether to make a recommendation to Council that members are offered the option of receiving a monthly allowance towards their home broadband provision.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 To ensure the Council's elected Members continue to be provided with the appropriate support and resources to effectively fulfil their duties.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 By way of background, particularly for those new members elected since May 2022, at its meeting on 28th September 2018 the Democratic Services Committee received a presentation in relation to IT Support for Councillors. The presentation included a questionnaire on IT support which was circulated to all members at that time.
- 5.2 Mobile device usage was discussed and Members took part in a Bring Your Own

Device (BYOD) trial which was very successful. Options were presented to members which included the use of a tablet and for members to go “paper free.” Broadband options were discussed and the use of a security key, rather than an additional home broadband line was referenced. It was also noted that a SIM card could also be installed in personal laptops allowing access to the Caerphilly network.

Members noted the provisions of the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) included a determination that Members should be provided with adequate access to IT support and the Committee’s opinion was sought on the provision at that time.

- 5.3 Members felt that the BYOD if rolled out to all Members would be invaluable and would eliminate the need for a second device. However some Members had expressed the preference to have Council matters on a separate device to their personal one. Members who had taken part in the BYOD trial expressed their willingness to speak to other Councillors on the merits of the facility.

The outcome of the Member IT questionnaire was presented to the subsequent Democratic Services Committee, on 26th November 2018 and it was agreed that proposals would be developed to allow the use of personal mobile phones to access council emails. In addition, the cost implications of providing mobile devices to encourage paperless committee papers would be considered.

- 5.4 However the landscape changed significantly in March 2020 due to the pandemic and as a result all members were provided with a Council laptop and ancillary items to allow them to continue to work effectively for their constituents and to attend Council meetings remotely. The specific issue of broadband usage was not addressed at that time and where members did not have a council router they utilised their own broadband provision at their own cost.

- 5.5 The issue has now been brought to the forefront as the current council router provision has become outdated and will be obsolete shortly. This has led to officers reviewing the broadband provision generally, concluding that due to the disparity in the provision being offered to members, it would be inequitable to continue to provide broadband to some members and not others. Almost all members use their own broadband network at their own cost.

- 5.6 Of the 69 Elected Members, 64 currently make use of their personal broadband connections without any contribution being paid by the Council. The 5 remaining Members currently access Caerphilly networks via a Council provided router and connection which is becoming obsolete.

- 5.7 In order to continue to meet members needs going forward the committee is asked to consider the following options:-

- (a) Members recommend to full Council that all Elected members make use of their personal broadband connections to access e-mails, papers and meetings, as is the case for 64 members currently.
- (b) Members recommend to full Council that all Elected members are offered a payment of £25 per month (before tax and national insurance deductions) as a contribution towards the cost of home broadband. Under HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) rules, the proposed allowance shall be subject to Tax and National Insurance deductions.

- 5.8 The amount of £25 has been assessed via a desk top review of average costs of broadband which ranges between £20 and £35 per month. The £25 takes into account the additional tax and NI which may need to be deducted. If this proposal is endorsed the payment can be made by the Payroll team at the same time as the salary payments.

5.9 **Conclusion**

The IRP recommend that councils through the Democratic Services Committee, must ensure that all its elected members are given as much support as is necessary to enable them to fulfil their duties effectively. All elected members should be provided with adequate telephone, email and internet facilities giving electronic access to appropriate information. Such support should be without cost to the individual member. Deductions must not be made from members' salaries by the respective authority as a contribution towards the cost of support which the authority has decided necessary for the effectiveness and or efficiency of members. As such the Committee is asked to consider the details contained in this report and make a recommendation.

6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

- 6.1 The proposed contribution to the cost of broadband is based on the average cost identified as part of a desktop exercise.

7. **SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 The proposal set out within the report is based on the principle of all elected Members being treated equally and consistently. As a result, no Equality Impact Assessment is deemed required for the purposes of this report.

8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There will be no cost to the Council if the option set out in 5.7a is approved.
- 8.2 The estimated financial implications if the contribution set out in 5.7b is approved will be £20,700 per year as well as some sundry costs in terms of processing payment.

9. **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There will be some personnel implications arising from the report in that the payments will incur administrative duties within the Payroll team to process the payments.

10. **CONSULTATIONS**

- 10.1 The report has been circulated to the consultees below and the responses have been included within the report.
- 10.2 Subject to the Democratic Services Committee determining a proposed way forward,

this will be reported to full Council for the consideration of all elected Members.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the Local Government Act 2000, Local Government Wales Measure 2011, Local Government (Democracy) (Wales) Act 2013.

Author: Lisa Lane, Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Consultees:

- Dave Street, Deputy Chief Executive
- Ed Edmunds, Corporate Director for Education and Corporate Services
- Mark S Williams, Corporate Director Economy and Environment
- Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer
- Stephen Harris, Head of Financial Services and S151 Officer
- Liz Lucas, Head of Customer and Digital Services
- Jonathan James, Digital Infrastructure Manager
- Jonathan Evans, Programme Manager
- Cllr Martyn James, Chair Democratic Services Committee
- Cllr Sean Morgan, Leader of Council
- Cllr Lindsay Whittle, Leader of Plaid Cymru Group
- Cllr Nigel Dix, Leader of the Independent Group