



## CONSTITUTION & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	Wednesday, 14 October 2020
<b>Report Subject</b>	Member IT Support
<b>Report Author</b>	Chief Officer (Governance)
<b>Type of Report</b>	Operational

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The ongoing pandemic resulted in our having to cancel Member meetings from March to May. Resumption of democratic governance was only possible by remote attendance, using Webex software, which has been operating since June. This has been very successful, with positive Member feedback.

We recognise that our current IT provision for Members (based on providing iPads) is now inadequate for the circumstances. In addition, we are incurring increasing costs of printing and postage. This has also resulted in an increase to the Council's carbon foot print.

To alleviate these concerns, and enable Members who are currently without their own IT equipment, we have investigated the provision of lap tops.

Webex needs a strong broadband connection to function well and bandwidth in all parts of the county is insufficient for the task. This report therefore also details the creation of a 'broadband allowance' which could be claimed by Members, should they so wish.

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	
1	That the Committee approves the provision of a council laptop to each Member who requires one.
2	That the Committee approves the introduction of broadband allowance of up to £30 per month to each Member of the Council who requires it.
3	That the Committee recognises that any Member is free not to accept either offer of a laptop or Broadband allowance.

## **REPORT DETAILS**

<b>1.00</b>	<b>EXPLAINING THE PROVISION OF MEMBER IT SUPPORT</b>
1.01	During the initial stage of emergency, we ceased physical Member meetings. However, the use of IT solutions, most notably Webex software, enabled us to resume Member meetings by remote attendance from mid-June. All Members are now supplied with a Council iPad.
1.02	It quickly became apparent that it was difficult for Members to contribute effectively to meetings on their iPads without a separate copy of the agenda. The printing and postage of paper copies is a practice which had ceased some time ago, with a resultant cost saving. However, resumption of this was recognised as a necessary expedient to enable the democratic process to resume.
1.03	During August, we carried out a review of Member's own IT: around 25 have their own equipment which enables them to use Webex at the same time as reading the agenda on another device. That means that 45 member would need another device to enable them to contribute effectively to Remote Attendance Webex meetings.
1.04	We had previously decided that remote attendance meetings would continue for the rest of the calendar year. This decision has been brought into sharper focus by the announcement of a local health protection area covering Flintshire, alongside 3 other counties, from 1 <sup>st</sup> October.
1.05	The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales Determinations 9 and 10 on Member support, include councils making provision for their members to have 'adequate telephone, email and internet facilities giving electronic access to appropriate information' being made, without cost to the individual Member.

1.06	We are seeking to provide a council lap top to each member who requests it. These costs would be offset against the mounting costs of printing and postage for agendas. Members would be able to refuse such provision.
1.07	We also recognise that Flintshire has not previously observed the requirements of the IT and telephone provisions. (In July 2015, the former Democratic Services Committee, the predecessor to this Committee decided that Members were then satisfied that they were not provided with phones or a greater level of support. We are now five years on, and operating in much changed circumstances. For this reason, it is reasonable for the committee to consider offering Members a 'broadband allowance' of up to £30 per month. Individual Members would then be able to decline the offer if they were satisfied with their current provision.
1.08	We acknowledge that we have a small number of Members who, despite having the maximum broadband provision in their area, still do not get sufficient bandwidth. This has caused connectivity problems and resultant frustration for those Members. In such circumstances, 'a MiFi' device would be provided. This would have a cost of around £30 per month, but this could then be offset against a Member's £30 broadband allowance.

<b>2.00</b>	<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>
2.01	The provision of up to 45 laptops would cost up to £600 each, depending on specification - a maximum cost of £27,000. The provision of broadband allowance of up to £30 per month to each Member of the Council would be up to £25,200 p.a. Both of these figures are based on maximum acceptance.

<b>3.00</b>	<b>CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT</b>
3.01	Group leaders have been consulted on this report.

<b>4.00</b>	<b>RISK MANAGEMENT</b>
4.01	There are inherent risks in not offering to provide Members of the Council with appropriate equipment and allowances as it means non-compliance with successive Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales determinations.

<b>5.00</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>
5.01	None

<b>6.00</b>	<b>LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS</b>
6.01	<p>None.</p> <p><b>Contact Officer:</b> Robert Robins, Head of Democratic Services  <b>Telephone:</b> 01352 702320  <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:robert.robins@flintshire.gov.uk">robert.robins@flintshire.gov.uk</a></p>

<b>7.00</b>	<b>GLOSSARY OF TERMS</b>
6.01	<p><b>Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW)</b> - body established by the Welsh Government to determine the level of Local Authority payments to Members.</p> <p><b>Determinations</b> - the decisions which the IRPW makes</p> <p><b>Mi Fi device:</b> MiFi devices are small, wireless devices that let multiple users and mobile devices share a mobile broadband internet connection. MiFis work by creating a localised signal, similar to the wireless routers used by home broadband providers.</p>