

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING) -
COMMENTS**

1. THE FUTURE OF MEMBERS IT

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) has received a presentation outlining proposed changes to the current IT provision for elected Members. As part of the presentation, the Panel has been advised of the current issues surrounding Members IT, together with details of the proposal to withdraw Council-funded IT equipment and promote alternative ways of working.

The Panel has expressed support in principle for the proposals; however Members have made the following comments which they wish the Cabinet to consider.

- ❖ The iPad is the recommended device because it is more secure; however Members will still be able to use their own Android-based tablets. Reasonable levels of support will be provided. The application for accessing and annotating committee papers (Modern.gov) works on Android and Apple Devices and is also available on Windows 8.
- ❖ The Panel has questioned whether the proposal would enable the Authority to achieve savings in the region of £50k. Officers have undertaken to recheck the calculations.
- ❖ The Panel has discussed the assistance the Council might provide to enable Members to acquire a device. The option of paying through Members allowances over their term of office is being considered. The Panel has discussed how this scheme will work, particularly if it commences part way through a term of office. Those Members wishing to purchase a device that has a higher specification than that required by the Council's systems will need to 'top up' any loan which is provided. It will not be possible to offer an interest free loan as this would constitute a 'benefit in kind'. Options that are similar to a 'Salary Sacrifice' have been investigated. Only limited discounts can be achieved if the Council is to purchase devices. Members will need to make their own decisions based upon their own tax position.
- ❖ With regard to the practical arrangements associated with using tablets in place of printed Agendas and reports, Members have commented on the need to stress test the WIFI facility within the Civic Suite. They have also queried whether there will be sufficient memory to access large agendas (i.e. Development Management Panel) and whether downloading large

documents at home might cause them to exceed their personal data limits, which would result in additional costs to them. The IMD Service Manager will undertake further testing of file sizes.

- ❖ Members have expressed concerns with regard to the increased costs (i.e. paper and toner) which they might incur when printing documents at home. There will be flexibility so, for example, printed copies of large Development Management Agenda could still be produced.
- ❖ Members will have to provide their own e-mail addresses for Council business. Security and encryption arrangements for sending confidential emails and documents to Members' private email addresses will be introduced. Further investigation will be undertaken to enable Members to receive confidential committee papers and reports through the Modern.Gov committee management system.
- ❖ The Panel has emphasised the need for further consideration to be given to the details of the new arrangements, specifically the mechanisms for accessing Council information (i.e. the address book) from Members' own equipment. Members have also questioned whether the transition period is realistic and have emphasised the need to ensure that appropriate training and support is in place for Members before the proposed change in arrangements is implemented. Some Members are of the view that MS-Office should be provided by the Council.
- ❖ The Panel has discussed whether the proposal will deter potential candidates from standing for election. Given that the basic allowance payable is currently in the region of £4k, it is not unreasonable to expect a Member to purchase their own equipment at a cost of approximately £400 over the term of their office. However it has been suggested that candidates should be made aware of this requirement.