

REPORT

SUBJECT:	COUNCILLOR MOBILE PHONES
MEETING:	DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE
DATE:	24th September 2018
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	N/A

1. PURPOSE:

To consider the most suitable telephony solution to be offered to councillors during this term of office.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That members of the committee agree to the most suitable solution for this term of office.

3. REASONS:

To respond effectively to the concerns of the committee and enable members to carry out their duties effectively.

4. KEY ISSUES:

BACKGROUND:

Upon being elected in May 2017 all County Councillors were provided with a Microsoft Surface Pro 4 to meet the relevant ICT tasks associated with the role of Councillor. This included the sending and receipt of emails, ability to utilise the modern.gov app to access papers for meetings in line with the authorities commitment to be paperless, access all information contained on the Councils Intranet (the Hub) and to meet their telephony needs via the built in Cisco VPN phone which allows calls to be made over the internet. This is in contrast to the previous term of Council who received a laptop, as well as an ipad to do all of the above, requiring two separate devices with restricted access, support and functionality due to security requirements to meet the same demands.

Members of the Democratic Services Committee have previously requested a review of the members telephony provisions with a belief that all Councillors should be provided with a mobile phone to keep in touch with constituents and officers when away from the device.

The current telephony arrangements through the Cisco VPN phone require members to be connected to the network and have a wifi connection in order for the phone to work. Whilst it restricts the use of a phone when 'on-site' it allows members access to the internal telephone directory to access officers telephones numbers directly and is a direct route between councillors and officers. Each councillor has been allocated an internal telephone number and voicemail facilities that they can use as their telephone between themselves and constituents to alleviate concerns on publishing personal telephone numbers to the public. Take up and use of the telephones has been relatively low with interest being dependent on how councillors prefer to carry out their role and how much of a concern having their own contact details in the public domain is to them and how they wish to interact with residents. Each licence to use the Cisco VPN phone costs £45 per councillors per year (£1,935 per annum).

CONTRACT:

The authority's mobile phone contract is through EE and the monthly cost of a contract is dependent on the term of the contract as well as the data limit required. Costs per contract are available below:

Term of Contract (Months)	Data Limit	Monthly Cost	Cost per year per Councillor	Total Annual Contract Cost	Non Smart Phone Handset (£59)	Smartphone Handset (£115)	Initial Annual Non Smartphone	Initial Annual Smartphone
36	2GB	£10	£120	£5,160	£2,537	£4,945	£7,697	£10,105
36	4GB	£12	£144	£6,192	£2,537	£4,945	£8,729	£11,137
36	8GB	£20	£240	£10,320	£2,537	£4,945	£12,857	£15,265
36	16GB	£30	£360	£15,480	£2,537	£4,945	£18,017	£20,425
24	2GB	£12	£144	£6,192	£2,537	£4,945	£8,729	£11,137
24	4GB	£14	£168	£7,224	£2,537	£4,945	£9,761	£12,169
24	8GB	£22	£264	£11,352	£2,537	£4,945	£13,889	£16,297
24	16GB	£32	£384	£16,512	£2,537	£4,945	£19,049	£21,457

Given the demand for ICT and the likelihood most members will utilise the telephone to also keep up to date with their emails through O365, use the My Monmouthshire App as well as social media platforms, it is unlikely that anything less than 4GB would be suitable given the size of some information that would be downloaded, particularly attachments to emails. Contractual penalties are in place for overuse of the data limit which would significantly increase the overall cost of the facility above the monthly fee. Capping use of the data limit is not available in the contracts that the authority has in place with its supplier. Additionally, if the committee recommends the use of mobile phones for all councillors it is recommended that the longer term of 36 months is used given how early in the term of office we currently are however, members would need to consider issues such as performance, battery life and storage capacity of devices over a longer term contract. All contracts are unlimited to calls and standard text messages.

For comparison, a private contract through a mobile phone supplier for the same model phone and data package is currently £28 per month with no upfront cost for

the handset over a 24 month period with £100 cashback. Comparative costs over the same period are £595 for the Council procured contract or £575 for a personal contract but the council contract would be for an additional 12 months with the handset needing to last for the additional period.

Alternatively, a sim only contract which could be used in an existing handset that councillors may have, is currently available with a much larger data package and unlimited calls at a cost of £20 per month for 12 months or a like for like package available at £15 per month.

HANDBSET & SUPPORT:

Each handset for the phone is additional on top of the monthly contract. A basic mobile (non-smartphone) is £59 plus the monthly contract. A smart phone, currently a Sony L1 model (<https://www.sonymobile.com/gb/products/phones/xperia-l1/#gref>) would be an additional £115 plus the monthly fee. This would be an additional £2,537 or £4,945 depending on the model that Councillors want, likely to be the smartphone for use of apps and social media platforms. Members should note that the smartphone model is not one that officers are familiar with so supporting councillors with issues and setting up applications cannot be guaranteed.

There is no insurance included with the contract for the handset so any breakages or loss would result in members needing to purchase their own handsets as replacements, particularly given the length of the contracts that are being entered into. At the end of the Term of Office or telephone contract, whichever occurs first, members must return the handset to the authority.

COVERAGE:

Coverage is always a major factor in Monmouthshire given how limited it can be in certain areas. Members can access the coverage provided by EE on the following link and should check to see how much coverage they have within their ward and whether it would be of benefit to them: <https://ee.co.uk/why-ee/mobile-coverage>. There are a significant number of areas within Monmouthshire that would receive limited, if any, connection. Those villages have been identified in Appendix A for information. In checking other suppliers however (O2, Vodafone & 3), members would experience similar connectivity issues in certain areas to that of the EE contract. For some councillors, they may not utilise an authority procured mobile, purely because there is limited connectivity in their area through EE rather than another provider and how should these members be supported?

OTHER INFORMATION:

In providing mobile phones, members would need to ensure that the equipment is being used for the purposes its being provided which is to carry out your duties as a County Councillor. The equipment should not be used for personal use and should not be used in any other capacity, for example in your role as a town councillor, as funding from the relevant body should be provided to cover their responsibilities. Any handsets given out to Councillors must be returned to the authority at the end of the term or contract whichever occurs first.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL:

Do nothing

Retain the VPN licences for the Cisco VPN phone and hold training sessions to encourage councillors to utilise the phone. Councillors to remain using their own personal devices for all purposes at their own costs.

Positives

- VPN calls are free other than annual licence fee
- Access to full council telephone directory with quick and direct access to officers

Negatives

- Wifi connection needed in order to access the network to be able to use the telephone so can't be used 'offsite'

Provide members with a procured contracted device

Councillors to be provided with a telephone and contract through the Council's procurement programme in line with the costs highlighted above. Actual budget implications depend on the preferred package.

Positives

- All members would have a dedicated telephone number and device to be used purely for Council business
- Device can be used 'offsite' provided that a network signal is available
- Same device for all members so whilst it may take time for officers to become familiar with device, long term support may be easier

Negatives

- Additional budget pressures
- A single network provider for all councillors regardless of location and signal quality
- Unfamiliar devices for members to use as well as receive support
- Limited to use for just County Council business
- Not always the cheapest option compared to private contracts

Reimburse an element of members personal mobile phone contracts

As some councillors are already tied in to personal contracts, it could be an option to reimburse an element of their own telephone contract which would cover the elements used for County Council business.

Positives

- Clear and balanced support provided to all members regardless of circumstances
- Allows members to continue using their own devices that they are familiar with
- Likely that members will receive better network coverage through

Negatives

- Unable to quantify portion of contract that should be reimbursed to members for County Council business
- Members personal contracts will all be different overall costs dependent on package and device

their own personal contracts for the areas they reside

Reimburse costs for a sim only package

Personal sim only contracts are available which allow for a separate number to be used in a device already owned. Data packages are similar to that of usual contract but without the costs of the device built in so are generally cheaper than a full contract.

Positives

- Councillors have a single dedicated number that can be used for Council business
- Package is similar to that of a usual contract but usually cheaper
- Councillors can choose which supplier gives them the best coverage in their area
- Can use a device that the user is familiar with
- Contracts are usually 12 months so councillors are not tied in to lengthy contracts.

Negatives

- Own device needed to use the sim
- Certain sim cards only fit certain phones
- Support could be limited due to the number of different devices members use

6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

Whilst there is some scope within the existing members budget to cover the costs of mobile phones some of the spare resource is dependent on the structure of the Council. For example, there are currently 8 Cabinet members which could be increased to 10 at the discretion of the Leader requiring additional budget of £25,400. Similarly there is an additional salary payable within the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales report which is not utilised due to the appointment of the independent chair of Audit which could ultimately lead to a pressure of £8,700 if circumstances were to change. These would be on top of pressures already in place including an uplift in the members basic salary (£8,600) and a corporate strategy of 10% reduction in mileage budgets across the authority (£2,620).

Whilst the current situation would allow for the pressures to be met within its existing budget, changes in circumstances over the three year term of the contracts may, by factors outside the control over the budget holder, lead to an overspend.

7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS:

None

8. SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING IMPLICATIONS

Members who utilise accessing emails and information through phone need to be responsible in keeping the data they access secure and confidential and report any loss of equipment or potential data breaches as soon as possible.

9. CONSULTEES:

Democratic Services Committee
Digital Team

10. AUTHOR:

John Pearson, Local Democracy Manager
Email: johnpearson@monmouthshire.gov.uk
Telephone: 01633 644978