

# Mobile Phone Policy & Guidance

## Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to give guidance on how the Authority will support its elected members in terms of the costs associated with telephony and data usage for mobile phones incurred as part of carrying out your role as councillor. The policy sets out general principles and aims to:

- Promote the use of mobile phone facilities in a cost effective manner whilst ensuring that councillors have choice regarding the most suitable facility for them.
- Ensure that members have access to telephony to be used in their role as Councillor without incurring personal expense.
- Safeguard councillors against the potential for personal abuse by not using personal contact information.
- Ensure that all users understand how mobile phones should and should not be used.
- Ensure members can access Council ICT on mobile devices without increasing risk to the systems.

## Who does this guidance apply to?

This guidance applies to all elected members who have chosen to apply for the re-imbusement of the sim only option to cover the costs associated with carrying out your duties as a councillor.

## Background

At the meeting of Democratic Services Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2018, members received a report in relation to the costs of procuring contracted mobile phones and the associated issues with having a single supplier of mobile contracts in a rural area such as Monmouthshire. The report highlighted, amongst other issues, the relatively high procurement costs compared to personal mobile contracts, connectivity throughout Monmouthshire and the familiarity of handsets and ability for councillors to utilise the technology effectively.

Members highlighted the need for the Authority to provide telephony support to Members to ensure they do not incur personal expense in carrying out their role as councillor as well as the need to safeguard their personal details whilst being able to carry out their duties as a councillor. The Council currently supply all members with a surface pro that has a built in telephone and provides calls free of charge over the internet and has access to the full council telephone directory to quickly access officer details. However, this does not meet the members needs when 'offsite' away from their device or without internet connection.

The report at that meeting presented various options to proceed with telephony support and the committee agreed to explore further the option of personal sim only packages which would be reimbursed by the Authority and the potential to supply second hand handsets. All handsets returned as part of the authority procured mobile contracts are sent for recycling and not fit for purpose upon being returned at the end of the contract and therefore no handsets are available to supply to Councillors.

The Democratic Service Committee agreed at its meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018 that the reimbursement of sim only packages was the most suitable and cost effective solution to resolving telephony issues that elected members face.

### What can Councillors receive with a sim only package?

A sim only package is where you purchase a fixed amount of minutes and data for a set monthly fee. Most network providers offer a sim only package with unlimited minutes and texts and various levels of data usage for the month with the cost varying depending on the amount of data that you need. The data will be used anytime you want to access the internet, access emails, send pictures etc when you do not have an internet connection. Where you have an internet connection then your data usage would not be used. For example, where you have connected your device to your internet at home, Council Offices or anywhere else that has wifi connectivity, you will not use your data allowance at those locations.

By allowing councillors to procure their own sim only package, members are able to select the supplier who provides the best coverage within the area in which they reside and access any potential benefits they may have with existing mobile phone suppliers.

### What do Councillors have to supply as part of the package?

The sim only packages requires Councillors to provide their own mobile device to be used in conjunction with the sim card. Concerns raised by Councillors was the need to have a separate telephone line for council business to that of a personal mobile or landline. A sim only package will allow Councillors to have a dedicated telephone number to be used purely for Council business and wouldn't not impact on their personal life in anyway. It will mean however that Councillors will need to carry two telephones if they choose this option, their personal mobile and their Council mobile, as well as their surface pro when attending committees. At the time of this policy, there is no supplier within the National Procurement Framework that offers second hand/refurbished handsets that the Council can purchase on behalf of members. Members will need to source a handset either from expired personal contracts or from a dedicated supplier of handsets. The flexibility this approach offers members allows them to purchase a device that has suitable functionality for the personal needs of the Councillor.

### What can I use the sim only package for?

The sim only package offers the same functionality as any personal mobile contract and Councillors would be able to use the package for all telephone calls, text messages and internet needs. For example;

- This approach allows Councillors to use the sim for work associated with County and Community/Town Council work
- Members can access Office 365 and the Outlook app on their device, provided the device has suitable functionality, to access Council related emails and the data as part of the package can be used to access these without internet connection
- Using My Monmouthshire 'on-site' to log queries and issues with the Council directly can be used as it currently is
- Personal calls can be used on the device as the package allows for unlimited minutes so there is no additional cost to the Council depending on whether the call is council or personal.
- Apps such as facebook, twitter and whats app are all accessible through this package provided your mobile device has the functionality.

### What restrictions are in place with this package?

In being reimbursed for this package, councillors are being provided with funding for its main use associated with Council business. When using any facilities on the device, councillors must always act in line with the Members Code of Conduct and could still be liable to breaches of that code depending

on how the device is used. You must not use the device in any way which is inconsistent with carrying out your role or might conflict with the Council's interests.

You must not use the mobile phone to access, use or distribute any material, or to participate in any activity which is, or might reasonably be regarded as, distasteful, offensive or indecent or harmful to other users. The following list, though not exhaustive, is an example of the sort of material or activities that will be regarded as unacceptable;

- Bullying or harassment
- Personal insults, attacks or abuse
- Racist or sexist activity
- Upload, download or otherwise transmit commercial software or other material, in violation of its copyright
- Share confidential information that you are privy to in your role as councillor with those not permitted to access it.

If you identify any misuse of the mobile package then you must report it to the Head of Democratic Services immediately.

#### Additional costs incurred as part of the package

With the sim only package, sometimes there may be additional charges for the sending of picture messages, including emojis, GIFs and Meme's, and supplying additional data for the calendar month. These costs would not be reimbursed to Councillors as they should not be needed as part of your role. Devices that enable you to take pictures would allow you to email pictures where required and this can be transmitted via an internet connection without incurring additional costs and data usage.

#### What support can Councillors get?

Democratic Services are available to help members further understand how the process works, what packages are available and how to access it as well as help with understanding which package and device is the most suitable for you.

#### Reimbursement of costs

The council will reimburse the costs for the sim package in the monthly payroll along with the payment for members' allowances.

At the time of this policy being agreed, an unlimited calls and text package with 4gb of data is available through 3 for £11 per month. [http://www.three.co.uk/Store/SIM/Plans\\_for\\_phones](http://www.three.co.uk/Store/SIM/Plans_for_phones). For 2019-20, councillors will be reimbursed up to £11 per month depending on the package they choose and proof of the contract being set up forwarded to Democratic Services.

Councillors can claim the actual amount to be reimbursed by adding it to their expenses claims through My View and selecting 'Reimbursement with VAT Receipts' under miscellaneous expenditure and entering the amount you need to claim.