

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 10 January 2022

Portfolio:	Policy and Resources
Subject:	Member IT Review
Report of:	Director of Support Services
Corporate Priorities:	Dynamic, Prudent and Progressive council

Purpose:

To present the findings of the recent review of the provision and support of IT for Councillors and to then make proposals for a new approach that will meet the needs of members in a consistent, secure and cost-effective way.

Executive summary:

There is a mix of both hardware devices used by Councillors e.g. laptop, pc or tablet some of which are personally owned whilst others are provided by a Council.

In order to ensure a consistent, secure and value for money approach to IT provision and support for Members a review began in early 2021.

The review was influenced by the developments such as the rapid move to more virtual ways of working brought by COVID-19 and the approval of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan in June 2021, which committed to find ways to reduce our paper use.

The findings of the review are presented in this report alongside proposals that will help ensure that the ongoing provision of IT devices and support to Members is done in consistent and secure way which offers good value for money.

Recommendation/Recommended Option:

It is recommended that the Executive approves:

- (a) the committee process becoming paperless in early 2022/23 following a programme of training and support for all Members; and
- (b) up to 31 new laptop devices be purchased at a cost of up to £30,225.

Reason:

To ensure that Members have access to the IT devices and support that enable them to carry out their Council related work in a consistent, secure and cost-effective way.

Cost of proposals:

If all Members requested a new laptop with every accessory option the cost of the project would be £30,225, which can be met from current capital budgets. There would be a small saving in paper costs of between £600 - £650 a year.

Appendices: **A: Example images of style of laptop**

Background papers:

Reference papers:

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Executive Briefing Paper

Date:	10 January 2022
Subject:	Member IT Review
Briefing by:	Director of Support Services
Portfolio:	Policy and Resources

INTRODUCTION

1. This report presents the findings of the recent review of the provision and support of IT for Councillors and then makes proposals for a new approach that will meet the needs of Members whilst reducing our carbon footprint in a secure and cost-effective way.

Background

2. Up until 2017 Members were provided with Council owned devices e.g. laptops, tablets or phones for work linked to their roles as Councillors. This approach generated significant support calls to the ICT Helpdesk.
3. A decision was made to change the approach in 2017, with Members at the time being given the option of either receiving a laptop that would be their responsibility to maintain or to make use of their own personal devices for Council related work.
4. The majority of Councillors opted to use their own devices. This approach reduced the amount of support calls to the ICT Helpdesk during the last five years.
5. COVID-19 resulted in a rapid transition to working online and virtual meetings for both officers and Councillors. Members were given the option of loaning a laptop from the Council, with seven taking up the offer.
6. The Council's Climate Change Action Plan was approved at the 7 June 2021 Executive meeting and contains a project to understand how we can reduce unnecessary printing.
7. A report outlining a vision for a new way of working, with a focus on working in more flexible ways that make the most of the available technology was approved at the meeting of the Executive on 11 October 2021.
8. The 7 December Executive meeting approved that all future Officer/Member briefings and non-formal meetings would be delivered via Microsoft Teams where possible and practical to do so.

9. Taking into account these factors it is an appropriate time to review the provision of IT hardware, software and support to Councillors.

Review aims and methodology

10. The review aimed to identify a standardised approach to Member IT hardware and software provision that was secure, offered good value for money and recognised the differing requirements amongst Councillors. A standardised approach would also assist with training, support and maintenance. In addition, the review aimed to find ways to reduce the amount of paper needed for committee meetings.
11. The review involved a number of focus groups with Councillors that took place during January and February 2021. Following this, officers took part in a number of brainstorming sessions and discussions were held with the Executive Member for Health and Public Protection who is also the Councillor IT Champion.

Results of the Review

12. The following outlines the main findings of the review:
13. *Members use a range of devices for their Council work:* As would be expected, there was a mix of both hardware devices used e.g. laptop, pc or tablet and their source e.g. personally owned or provided by a Council.
14. *Members successfully adapted to more virtual ways of working during the pandemic:* e.g. virtual committee meetings and their IT skills were developed as a result. However, there is still a range of skill levels, from more advanced users through to those that have a lower level of IT knowledge. As would be expected, the level of support provided by the ICT Helpdesk rapidly increased during this time.
15. In addition, Members were given the option of loaning a laptop from the Council, with seven taking up the offer.
16. *The current approach to committees is paper and carbon intensive:* Between 110,000 – 130,000 double sided A4 sheets of paper are printed to support the Committee process each year. A mixture of virgin and recycled paper is used and it is estimated that its production creates between 1.3 and 1.5 tonnes of greenhouse gases equivalent to carbon dioxide (TCO_{2e}).
17. *An increasing number of Councils are moving to paperless committees:* As Councils seek to reduce their carbon footprint an increasing number are moving to paperless committees. Within Hampshire, the County Council, Eastleigh and Basingstoke and Deane Councils have all gone paperless for the majority of their committee process. More are likely to follow as Councils to reduce the carbon emissions associated with the use of paper.
18. *The majority of Councillors supported a move to paperless committees if properly trained:* When discussions took place in early 2021 the majority of Members were supportive of the potential move to accessing online agendas and reports via a device given sufficient training. However, a minority were not supportive of the proposals.
19. *Positive feedback was received about Hampshire County Council's (HCC) approach to IT provision:* County Councillors were very complimentary about the hybrid

laptop/tablets they were provided with that require only a single log-in to access all of the software systems and files needed for their county role. This was introduced in conjunction with the transition to paperless committees.

20. Instead of paper reports and agendas, HCC make use of the ModGov app. This is an online tool loaded onto Councillors' devices that allows them to easily save, read, highlight, make comments and write notes directly onto reports.

Proposed Approach

21. It is clear that members have worked hard to develop their IT skills, particularly during the pandemic and are now well experienced in the use of devices such as laptops for meetings. When considered alongside the CCAP commitment to find ways to reduce printing and the positive feedback received regarding the approach to device provision used by HCC, it is clear that an alternative approach is feasible.
22. With this in mind, it is proposed that all Councillors be offered a Council owned laptop with the following features:
 - A large tablet style touchscreen
 - Good quality webcam, microphone and speakers
 - Automatic access to Wi-Fi in the Civic Offices or when members are working at home
 - Quick access to the Council network via a single sign in procedure
 - Full access to Microsoft Teams with all features including background pictures
 - The ModGov app installed allowing reading, saving and annotating reports
 - A carry case to protect the device and aid transporting it
 - An optional wireless mouse
 - An optional large second monitor screen to help with virtual meetings
 - An optional standalone webcam to help with virtual meetings
23. To help ensure a standardised and secure approach, Members would be actively encouraged to use the corporately provided device. Appendix A contains an image of what the device is likely to look like. As mentioned previously, the feedback received from County Councillors regarding this type of provision was positive.
24. All members would still be able to use their phones or tablets to read and respond to emails or calendar requests. To ensure data security, any Member using their own Windows laptop would have to use the web-based version of Teams. The features are almost identical to the full version, although the web version does not currently offer blurred or changed backgrounds.
25. This approach means that all printing for the committee process will stop. However, officers will have discretion to allow ad hoc printing in exceptional circumstances such as providing a reasonable adjustment to overcome sight disabilities.

Transition

26. It is anticipated that the committee meetings will be paperless from May 2022 . Ahead of this, Councillors would be asked which approach and device options they prefer. Equipment would then be procured and training on using the devices and ModGov would be provided. Accessibility options such as larger fonts can also be set up for Members at this time.
27. Ongoing support would be provided by the ICT Helpdesk. It is recognised that this could have an impact on the number of calls going into the Helpdesk and this will be monitored.

Financial considerations

28. The new laptops cost around £800 each with the optional extras such as additional monitor, webcam and carry case increasing the potential cost to £975. Members will be asked for their individual device preferences. It is anticipated that not all will want all the optional extras. However, if they did it would cost up to £30,225, which can be met from current capital budgets. There would be a small saving in paper costs of between £600 - £650 a year.

Conclusion

29. A review of the provision of IT devices and support to Members has been conducted with proposals presented for Councillors to be given a Council owned laptop/tablet hybrid and a choice of additional items.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Roy Brown (Ext 4489)