

CONSTITUTION & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday 31 st January 2018
Report Subject	Provision of telephones to Members
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Corporate Management & Assets
Report Author	Democratic Services Manager
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) have included a determination in their last three Annual Reports that local authorities should provide phones for their members. When this determination was introduced in the 2016 Draft, the decision at Council (20th October 2015) was to oppose this determination on cost grounds.

In September 2017, during a periodic visit to Flintshire, the IRPW representatives pointed out to the Council's statutory officers that technically, Flintshire is not compliant with determination 6 because the Council does not provide telephones for Members.

We surveyed the 22 Welsh County and County Borough Councils on their phone provision. The results show that Flintshire is not alone in being non-compliant with the determination: only around a third of respondents make some sort of telephone provision for their members.

Members will be asked whether the officers should investigate providing phones to Members, whether that be through the payment of an additional allowance, the provision of a mobile phone or payment for their home landline.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That the Committee consider and comment on the report.
2	That the Committee consider whether the officers should investigate the provision of a phone allowance, landline payment or mobile phone to all Members.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	REVIEWING THE PROVISION OF MOBILE PHONES TO ELECTED MEMBERS
1.01	The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) have included a determination in their last three Annual Reports that local authorities should provide phones for their members. When this determination was introduced in the 2016 Draft, the decision at Council (20 th October 2015) was to oppose this determination on cost grounds.
1.02	Determination 6 reads as follows: <i>The Panel has determined that each authority, through its Democratic Services Committee, must ensure that all its members are given as much support as is necessary to enable them to fulfil their duties effectively. All elected members should be provided with adequate telephone, email and internet facilities giving electronic access to appropriate information.</i>
1.03	In September 2017, during a periodic visit to Flintshire, the IRPW representatives pointed out to the Council's statutory officers that technically, Flintshire is not compliant with determination 6. It was pointed out that Flintshire provides Members with I pads but had had opposed the provision of phones to each Member on cost grounds in 2015, following consideration of the IRPW's draft annual report at Council. Since then, financial constraints upon all local authorities had become considerably harder. The additional cost of phone provision, whether that be through the payment of an additional allowance, the provision of a mobile phone or payment for their home landline, at a time when the Council is fighting to preserve services would be hard to bear and directly challenge initiatives across the board to reduce costs.
1.04	To argue against determination 6 from a position of strength, a survey was conducted amongst the other 21 principal councils in Wales. This is attached as appendix A. It shows that Flintshire is not alone in non-compliance – only around a third of councils appear to make some form of provision.
1.05	It is appreciated that the IRPW have concerns that the means or lack thereof should not be a barrier to people wishing to stand for public office, hence their making determination 6.
1.06	It is known that Members already have their own home landlines and that the majority have their own mobile phone packages. Many would not want to carry two phones, if a mobile was provided by the Council. Members may feel that the payment of an additional allowance at a time of financial constraint would be both inappropriate and potentially damaging. Members would, of course, be free to refuse any offer of a phone.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The provision of phones or an additional allowance to elected Members is likely to have significant cost implications and attract adverse publicity no matter how competitively this initiative could be costed.
3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	This report is being published as part of consultation with Members.
4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	If Flintshire, as with many other local authorities, does not provide mobile phones to all its elected members then it is technically non-compliant with IRPW determination 6.
4.02	If Flintshire was to provide an additional allowance, fund landlines or mobile phones to Members then there will be an increased cost and the risk of adverse publicity and a weakening of the Council's robust arguments for cost reductions as a response to financial constraint.
5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Telephone Payments to Elected Members across Welsh Local Authorities.
6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	Annual Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales 2018 Contact Officer: Robert Robins, Democratic Services Manager Telephone: 01352 702320 E-mail: robert.robins@flintshire.gov.uk
7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	IRPW – Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales is the independent body established by the Welsh Government to determine the level of Local Authority payments to Members. Determinations - the decisions which the IRPW makes.