



# COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	<b>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>CABINET - 6<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2020</b>
Report Number	<b>AGENDA ITEM (13)</b>
Subject	<b>MEMBERS' ICT ALLOWANCE</b>
Wards affected	Not applicable
Accountable members	Councillor Joe Harris Leader of the Council Councillor Mike Evely Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance Tel: 01285 623000 Emails: <a href="mailto:joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk">joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:mike.evely@cotswold.gov.uk">mike.evely@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Nigel Adams Head of Paid Service 01285 623202 <a href="mailto:nigel.adams@cotswold.gov.uk">nigel.adams@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To consider a more flexible approach to the payment of the Members' ICT allowance.
Annexes	None
Recommendation/s	<b>(a) That Members be offered the choice of either (i) continuing to receive their ICT allowance on a monthly basis or (ii) drawing down the remainder of the allowance due to the end of the current Council term (May 2023), either in part or in whole, at any stage during the remainder of such term;</b> <b>(b) That, if a Member chooses the draw-down option, then they be required to repay any overpayment made in the event of them ceasing to be a Member for whatever reason before the end of the term (on a proportionate basis).</b>
Corporate priorities	None directly
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council Chief Finance Officer

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** Since October 2008, the Council has provided an allowance to Members for ICT rather than provide equipment/support direct. This allowance sought to cover the cost (over four years) of the purchase of a PC or laptop and printer together with Broadband connectivity and all relevant support direct from the hardware/software providers/suppliers.
- 1.2** The current allowance is £300 per annum, and a pro rata sum is paid to each Member automatically each month, along with the Basic Allowance. The ICT allowance is subject to tax and NI deductions (in the same way as the Basic Allowance).
- 1.3** The annual amount has not changed since the initial introduction of the allowance (during a period when other allowance levels also remained largely unchanged).
- 1.4** The allowance was retained as part of the allowances review undertaken by the Independent Remuneration Panel in 2018, as presented to the new Council in May 2019. At that time, the Panel noted that there was a difference of opinion amongst Members over a financial payment (which then enabled Member choice in ICT procurement) and direct provision by the Council; but no significant majority in support of a changed approach.
- 1.5.** Informal discussions with Members and lead ICT officers has led to the view that, if direct provision is to be contemplated, then this would be best reviewed in advance of the next District Council elections in May 2023, timed such that equipment etc. would then be available immediately upon election for all Members of the then new Council.
- 1.6.** With this approach, the Panel will be asked to review the level of the ICT allowance as part of its annual light-touch exercise, as it had previously expressed the view that, should a payment continue to be made, the current sum was inadequate.

## **2. ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO ALLOWANCE PAYMENT**

- 2.1.** A number of Members have expressed disappointment that the current approach of monthly payments effectively means that they have to finance any purchase themselves; and have enquired if an alternative approach could be offered whereby access to a larger sum of funds would be possible (ideally equivalent to the sum to which they would be entitled during the four-year term).
- 2.2.** It is acknowledged that such an alternative approach would reduce the burden on Members in acquiring equipment that enables the effective performance of their roles.

## **3. OPTIONS**

- 3.1.** It is recommended that Members be offered the choice of either (i) continuing to receive their ICT allowance on a monthly basis or (ii) drawing down the remainder of the allowance due to the end of the current Council term (May 2023), either in part or in whole, at any stage during the remainder of such term.
- 3.2.** However, if a Member chooses the draw-down option, it is recommended that they be required to repay any overpayment made in the event of them ceasing to be a Member for whatever reason before the end of the term (on a proportionate basis).

- 3.3. The allowance could also be offered in annual lump sums, or in two-year sums. However, the administrative burden increases with the larger number of options made available. In addition, anything other than the ability of a full draw-down is unlikely to address the concerns that have been raised.
- 3.4. The other alternative would be to move to direct provision of equipment by the Council mid-term - although this is not recommended at this stage.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1. The alternative draw-down option does not give rise to any additional financial implications - it is purely a matter of timing of funding provision. However, the Chief Finance Officer is content that the Medium Term Financial Strategy can accommodate any required flexibility caused by Members choosing the draw-down option.
- 4.2. If the Panel recommends an increased level of ICT allowance, this will need to be considered by the Council and, if approved, appropriate budgetary provision made.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

The payment of an ICT allowance, and the options identified, are legally permissible.

#### **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

The introduction of a claw-back arrangement seeks to minimise any risk in recovering any over-payment made through the draw-down option in the event of a Member ceasing to be a Member for whatever reason before the end of the term.

#### **7. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

If approved, the payment options will be available to all Members.

#### **8. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

No specific implications.

#### **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 9.1. The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:
  - Report to Council - 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019 - Review of Members' Allowances.
- 9.2. These documents are available on the Council's Website.

(END)