

## PART A

**Report to:** Annual Council  
**Date of meeting:** 11 June 2014  
**Report of:** Democratic Services Manager  
**Title:** Members' Communications Allowance

### 1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Independent Members' Remuneration Panel undertook a quadrennial review of the Members Remuneration scheme in November 2013.
- 1.2 As part of its recommendations, the Panel proposed that a review of Members' telephone and broadband allowances be carried out. The panel's final report stated that:
- "The panel felt that this was an area where a more formal policy should be established and it was suggested that in time this should be reviewed by Democratic Services."
- 1.3 With a view to achieving a fair and more consistent approach, officers carried out a thorough review of current payments for telephones and Broadband and propose replacing these payments with a standard communication allowance for all councillors.
- 1.4 Group Leaders and members of the Independent Remuneration Panel have been advised of the proposals and their comments are included in paragraph 3.7.1

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the current payments for telephone lines and Broadband be replaced with a standard communications allowance of £12 per month for all councillors and that the Members' Allowances Scheme be amended to take account of these changes.

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**Report approved by:** Head of Democracy and Governance

### **3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL**

#### **3.1 Current position**

3.1.1 Sixteen councillors currently receive telephone allowances ranging from £10.00 to £23.00. The Council pays for Broadband and/or telephone lines in five councillors' homes. Fourteen councillors do not currently receive anything although some have lines installed by the County Council as they are also County Councillors.

3.1.2 This inconsistent approach to members telephone/broadband lines has evolved and become more complex over the years with the introduction of email accounts and mobile phones resulting in councillors being offered different options for their IT connectivity.

#### **3.2 Proposal.**

3.2.1 In order to establish a consistent approach which is more straightforward to administer and clear to both councillors and the public should we receive any Freedom of Information Act requests on this topic, it is proposed to introduce a standard allowance for all councillors

3.2.2 The Council is currently paying £11.99 per month for the broadband lines we provide for councillors. It is, therefore, proposed to introduce a £12 monthly Communications Allowance for all councillors to replace all other telephone allowances, Broadband and telephone lines.

#### **3.3 Impact on current arrangements**

3.3.1 For Council installed broadband and telephone lines:

Councillors would have the option to either:

- a) Have the lines transferred into their names so they would start to pay the bills directly to the supplier
- b) Chose to cancel the Council provided lines and make their own arrangements

Either way they would receive the £12 monthly Communications Allowance.

3.3.2 For those currently receiving telephone/broadband allowance:

They would be paid the £12 monthly Communications Allowance

3.3.3 For those currently not currently receiving any allowance/lines:

They would be paid the £12 monthly Communications Allowance

#### **3.4 Elected Mayor**

3.4.1 The Elected Mayor and Majority Group Leader have mobile phones which are provided by the Council. Whilst the Elected Mayor works from the Town Hall office, the role also requires them to work from home at evenings and weekends when the

Town Hall is closed. The Elected Mayor would, therefore, also receive the Communications allowance.

### **3.5 Payment options**

- 3.5.1 Council is asked to consider whether the Communications Allowance should be paid as a separate allowance or added to the basic allowance. Whatever option is chosen, the same arrangement will be implemented for all councillors.

### **3.6 Councillors electing to forego allowances**

- 3.6.1 As with other allowances, councillors can elect to forego their allowance by writing to the Monitoring Officer or Managing Director.

### **3.7 Independent Members' Remuneration Panel (IMRP)**

- 3.7.1 As the introduction of a Communications Allowance would result in a change to the current Members' Allowances Scheme and the recommendation to carry out this review was part of the Panel's 2013 report, members of the IMRP have been informed and commented that the proposals are more straightforward and fairer to all. Group leaders have also been informed.

## **4.0 IMPLICATIONS**

### **4.1 Financial**

- 4.1.1 This new scheme would cost:  $37 \times 12 = \text{£}444$  per month ( $\text{£}5,328$  annually)

Current costs are:

Telephone allowances: 2012/13 =  $\text{£}3,134.42$

Telephone/broadband lines 2012/13 =  $\text{£}2,958.97$

Total costs for 2012/13 =  $\text{£}6,093.39$

The new scheme would therefore save  $\text{£}765$  based on 2012/13 figures. There may, however, be cancellation charges incurred if any existing lines are cancelled.

The Director of Finance comments that these proposals should generate a small saving to the Council.

### **4.2 Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**

- 4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the Independent Remuneration Panel has been consulted on the proposal as is required when a new allowance is to be introduced.

### **4.3 Equalities**

- 4.3.1 All councillors would be entitled to receive this allowance if introduced.

4.4 **Potential Risks**  
*None*

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Appendices

None

Background Papers

IMRP report 2013  
Members' Allowances Scheme

File Reference

None