

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>INTERIM REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL (MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES) TO STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
<b>Purpose of Report</b>	This report sets out the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel's (IRP) review of the Members' ICT allowance within the Members' Scheme of Allowances.
<b>Decision(s)</b>	<p><b>Council RESOLVES to consider the Interim report of the IRP and determine whether to accept the recommendations as follows:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the ICT allowance be set at a maximum of £702 per member, for those members opting not to receive a Council-managed device, with effect from May, 2021;</li> <li>b. the allowance be based on the indicative values at para 13 relating to the purchase of a device and ancillary equipment;</li> <li>c. those members who opt to receive a Council – managed device instead of the ICT allowance, be entitled to claim for approved ancillary equipment, up to the maximum of £177;</li> <li>d. The Strategic Director of Resources be delegated authority to agree variations in the allocation of the allowance at his discretion to meet any special requirements of councillors; and</li> <li>e. the Panel keeps this matter under review, as part of each fundamental review of the Members' Allowances Scheme.</li> </ol>
<b>Consultation and Feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All Members were consulted on the adequacy of the current Members' ICT allowance.</li> <li>• Members of the ICT Working Group have consulted closely Group Leaders and with their Political Group Members.</li> <li>• The Members ICT Working Group has consulted with the Independent Remuneration Panel.</li> </ul>
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<b>Options</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Accept all the recommendations in the report</li> <li>2. Accept some but not all recommendations or amend them as appropriate</li> <li>3. Not to accept the recommendations in the report</li> </ol>

<b>Background Papers</b>	None			
<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix A – Interim Report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (Members’ Allowances) to Stroud District Council.			
<b>Implications (further details at the end of the report)</b>	Financial	Legal	Equality	Environmental
	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No

**1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The Independent Remuneration Panel conducts its work in accordance with the legislation governing the role of the Panel as set out by the Local Government Act 2000, subsequent legislation and statutory guidance produced in 2006. The purpose of the Panel is to make recommendations to the Council about allowances to be made to elected members and the legislation states that Local Authorities must have regard to this advice.
- 1.2 The Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) convened at the beginning of 2020 to undertake a full review of the Members’ Allowances Scheme but unfortunately this has been delayed to later this year as a result of the pandemic.
- 1.3 The pandemic itself has impacted on the work of elected members with virtual meetings rather than physical ones taking place and engagement with Town and Parish councils and community groups similarly recast, with consequent effect on Members’ workload. Although travel time has been saved, online meetings and email engagement have significantly increased.
- 1.4 Whilst such effects in regard to virtual committee meetings may be time-limited, some of these new ways of working are undoubtedly here to stay and the IRP was asked to review the Members’ ICT allowance of the Members’ Scheme of Allowances.

**2. WORK OF THE MEMBERS ICT WORKING GROUP**

- 2.1 In October 2020, a Members ICT Working Group was established to review Members present and future ICT requirements. Members of the Working Group are; Cllrs Baxendale, Cornell, Pearson, Ross and Tucker (Chair).
- 2.2 The Working Group published a survey asking all Members for their views on the ICT allowance, equipment and system access. 43 Members responded to the survey and the results demonstrated that:
  - 2.2.1 Of those that commented on the adequacy of the current allowance, 54% said the allowance was moderately or seriously inadequate.
  - 2.2.2 31% said their primary device was not adequate for their role and 81% of Members are using a second device for easier access to emails or to view committee papers whilst participating in a Zoom/Teams meeting.
  - 2.2.3 When asked whether Members would prefer to retain the ICT allowance or be provided with an SDC managed device, 56% said they would prefer to retain the allowance scheme.

- 2.3** To give Members better access to the Council's Network, the Working Group and Officers undertook the task of migrating all Members to Microsoft Office 365 and Teams to replace the need to access the Network via Citrix. All Members have now been successfully migrated.
- 2.4** As a result of views given in response to the survey, the Working Group set to identify a solution to Members different ICT needs and the necessity to have access to adequate ICT equipment in order to fulfil their role. The Working Group resolved that Members should be given an option to request an SDC managed device or alternatively receive an ICT allowance to purchase a laptop or tablet.
- 2.5** Using the findings of the Working Group, the IRP is recommending an increase in the ICT allowance in order for Members to purchase and claim for specific items of equipment they may need, as follows:

**2.6**

Item		Maximum amount members can claim per item:	Condition for claim
1	Laptop or tablet	£500	A device purchased with the allowance can be used for personal use but the hardware will not be supported by the Council's ICT team.
2	Anti-virus protection	£25	
3	Printer	£50	Members who have claimed for this allowance will not be provided with committee reports in paper format unless the printer is not working. <i>Note: Members Basic Allowance provides for costs towards paper and ink cartridges.</i>
4	Monitor	£90	
5	HDMI cable for monitor	£7	
6	Keyboard	£20	
7	Mouse	£10	
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£702</b>	

- 2.7** Members who choose not to claim for Items 1 and 2 and instead opt to receive an SDC managed device would still be entitled to claim for the ancillary Items 3-7.
- 2.8** The Council's ICT department will publish a recommended list of devices (laptop or tablet) which best support the Council's software, to help inform members choice regarding the purchase of suitable devices. Technical support will also be provided to those Members who choose an SDC managed device.
- 2.9** In making their recommendations to the IRP, the Working Group were mindful of the current financial climate, but noted that the current Member's ICT Allowance was set at £390 in 2010. Since then, inflation has had a significant effect on purchasing power and the specification of Member's IT equipment requirements have increased, particularly during the current pandemic. It is anticipated that most Members would not need or wish to spend the whole of the proposed allowance, and that the allowance would not be considered as a target. However, it is important that all Members are able to purchase adequate ICT equipment that meet the demands of their role and the digital age.

- 2.10** The Working Group further considered that an increase to the ICT allowance might also contribute to attracting a greater diversity of experience, age and background of elected members and hence assist in making public office more accessible to individuals who might otherwise feel excluded.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

- 3.1** The Independent Remuneration Panel's Report at Appendix A sets out their recommendations and rationale in full. The Council is therefore being invited by the Panel to consider adopting the changes recommended in their interim report.

### **4. IMPLICATIONS**

#### **4.1 Financial Implications**

There are no significant financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

The recommended Members allowance for ICT is higher than the current allowance, with the total cost in the region of £36k, £16k higher than at present. This additional cost will only be incurred once every four years.

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#### **4.2 Legal Implications**

The Council must consider, but is not bound by, the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel when deciding the level of allowances to be paid to councillors. However, it is considered good practice to follow the recommendations.

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#### **4.3 Equality Implications**

Public sector equality duties have been considered by the IRP as part of their deliberations.

#### **4.4 Environmental Implications**

There are no significant implications within this category.