

PROVISION OF MOBILE TELEPHONES

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1. Purpose

1.1 To present information about the current provision of mobile telephones to Members.

2. Summary

2.1 The Council provides a number of elected Members with mobile telephones, based on the recommendation of the Meeting of the Members' Services Panel on 10 September 1997 (Minute MS2/98 refers).

3. Recommendations

3.1 That due to current limited resource levels, no new mobile telephones be purchased by the Council for use by Members at present.

3.2 That the criteria for the allocation of mobile telephones be reviewed as part of the overall package of Members' Services adopted in association with the implementation of any new democratic structures.

4. **Background**

4.1 Minute MS2/98 of the Members' Services Panel provides:

“That each Group Leader and Group Secretary and the Chairs of Policy, Personnel, Education, Community Care, Children's and Housing Management Committees, be allocated mobile telephones and fax machines at an approximate cost of £10,240 per annum”.

“That all of the above recommendations be implemented only when resources are available.”

4.2 The following Members currently have mobile telephones provided by the Council:

- (a) Labour Group Leader;
- (b) Conservative Group Leader;
- (c) Chair of Personnel Committee; and
- (d) Deputy Leader - Media Relations (Councillor Coventry).

4.3 Under Minute MS2/98 the following Members are also entitled to be provided with mobile telephones by the Council, subject to resources being available:

- (a) Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group;
- (b) Group Secretaries of all three main parties; and
- (c) Chairs of Policy and Resources, Education, Community Care, Children's and Housing Committees.

This list is now out of date because of changes to the Committee structure, and the Chairs of the Neighbourhood Services and Children's and Youth Committee should be substituted for the Chairs of Community Care and Children's Committees.

4.4 Due to limited resources, none of the above have yet been provided with mobile telephones.

5. **Issues and Choices**

5.1 The criteria for issuing mobile telephones is based upon the need for Council staff and other Councillors to contact the Members holding the positions listed.

5.2 However, resources are not available to provide those Members who qualify under Minute MS2/98 with mobile telephones, if they want them.

5.3 Councillor Coventry currently has a telephone to which he is strictly not entitled, and a number of other Members who are entitled to telephones have not been supplied with them.

5.4 The main options available to the Council appear to be:

- (a) To leave things as they are and review the criteria once the package of Members' Services to support the new democratic structures is determined.
- (b) Supply additional mobile telephones, which would require the allocation of additional resources, either under the criteria set out in Minute MS2/98 or different criteria which would need to be determined.
- (c) To give all Members the alternative between having their telephone line rentals paid or the supply of a mobile up to the value of the line rental which would have no budgetary implications.
- (d) To give key Members (criteria to be determined) the use of a mobile telephone, while continuing to meet line rental costs and giving all other Members the choice as outlined in option (a). This will most likely require additional resources, depending on the definition of key Members.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Environmental

The extension of the mobile telephone network can cause concern because of the need for additional booster stations and the presence of additional radio waves.

6.2 Equalities

None.

6.3 Financial

The initial purchase cost of mobile telephones has reduced considerably over recent years and the costs involved in providing more mobile telephones would be negligible.

However, the average monthly rental is about £15 depending upon the option chosen, whilst the bill for calls cannot be estimated.

The total estimated annual cost of existing mobile telephones is £2,500.

Additional budget allocations would be necessary if the Council was to increase the number of mobile telephones without making any compensatory savings.

6.4 Legal

None.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

Bills for mobile telephone usage are received monthly, rather than quarterly, and involve a certain amount of staff time in checking and processing the invoices, together with monitoring usage and advising Members of the costs incurred.

Any increase in mobile telephone provision which required the Council to process the bills would have an impact on staff resources.

6.6 Health and Safety

There are currently a number of health and safety concerns about the use of mobile telephones, and the Council advises the use of 'hands-free' accessories at all times.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 Increased provision of mobile telephones will have both financial and staffing resource implications, although this may be offset by more efficient communications between officers and Members and between Members themselves.

Background Papers: None