

Report to Employment Panel

Agenda
Item:

A.2(a)

Meeting Date: 12 November 2013
Portfolio: Finance, Governance and Resources
Key Decision: No
Within Policy and Budget Framework: No
Public / Private: Public

Title: COMPUTERS FOR STAFF
Report of: Organisational Development Manager
Report Number: CE 12/13

Purpose / Summary:

The City Council has introduced a scheme for Members to buy tablets as part of an initiative to reduce paper use for committees and other Council meetings. As part of this, the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Resources asked members of the Employee Benefits Working Group to develop a scheme for staff to buy computers for work or home use.

The Computers for Staff scheme would enable staff to buy a PC, laptop or tablet and pay for it through monthly salary deductions. Therefore the scheme would operate at nil cost for the Council.

Recommendations:

The Employment Panel is asked to:

1. Approve the Computers for Staff scheme, in principle, subject to a consultation process being undertaken with staff and approval for incurring expenditure being requested of and approved by the Executive.
2. Consider whether this scheme is deemed to be a term and condition of employment or a discretionary benefit.

Tracking

Executive:	
Overview and Scrutiny:	
Council:	

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 In September 2012 Members of Resources O&S Panel requested that a Task Group be set up to look at opportunities to save paper within the democratic process. The Task Group made several recommendations, including one to undertake a pilot of using tablet technology in Committee meetings.

1.1.2 The Saving Paper Task Group Update Report (OS 09/13) suggested that Members could purchase a suitable device via deductions from their allowance if they wanted to have their own tablet. The Report also said that consideration would need to be given to how this could be rolled out to officers.

1.1.3 The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Resources asked members of the Employee Benefits Working Group to develop a scheme for staff to buy computers for work or home use. Officers who attend committees and other Council meetings could use tablets at these meetings, but the Portfolio Holder also recognised that many other staff could benefit from a scheme which enabled them to buy a computer and pay for it through salary deductions. Many of the staff who could take part in such a scheme would not be involved in committees or Council meetings and some of these would not use computers as part of their job e.g. operational staff. For staff who do not use computers at work, a scheme to enable them to buy a computer in an affordable way could help to improve their IT skills which may increase the range of employment opportunities available to them.

1.1.4 There are a wide range of benefits organisations can offer to their employees which support employee engagement. Effective pay and reward strategies, together with initiatives including flexible working, recognition of achievement and learning and development opportunities contribute to successful recruitment and retention. The City Council has already introduced Holiday Purchase and Cycle to Work schemes, and a Computers for Staff scheme would add to the range of employee benefits offered to staff.

1.2 Principles

1.2.1 The City Council's Computers for Staff scheme would initially be a one off opportunity for staff to buy a computer. However, if there was sufficient interest it could become an annual scheme for staff.

1.2.2 A small range of PCs, laptops and tablets from a variety of manufacturers and at different price points will be selected for staff to choose from (see 1.7.1 for examples). Computer peripherals e.g. printers will not be included in the scheme.

1.2.3 The cost of the device will be taken in equal monthly instalments from the employee's salary. This is not a salary sacrifice scheme so costs are taken from net (after tax and National Insurance Contributions are deducted) rather than gross salary. Payment will be over 12 months.

1.2.4 The City Council reserves the right to refuse an employee's application to purchase a computer if it will take their salary below the National Minimum Wage. Occasionally there may be other reasons why applications are refused e.g. staff on final written warnings. If approval is not given the reason will be explained in writing to the employee. All requests will be considered and approved (or not) by the Director of Resources.

1.2.5 Employees who leave the City Council before fully repaying for a computer they have purchased will be required to complete payment either through a deduction to final pay, or if this would cause hardship, a payment programme can be negotiated.

1.3 Procedure

1.3.1 Employees who want to buy a computer will do so by submitting the Computers for Staff Form to the Service Support Team. Once the application has been received, the Service Support Team will check that the repayments would not take the employee's salary below the National Minimum Wage. If approved, the Service Support Team will calculate the likely deductions in salary and confirm these in writing to the employee.

1.3.2 Should the application be declined the reasons for this will be outlined in writing by the Director of Resources.

1.4 Adjustments To Pay

1.4.1 Where an employee requests to buy a computer, this will result in a reduction to their monthly salary for 12 months. The new monthly salary will be calculated and notified to the employee, by the Service Support Team, as soon as possible following approval of their application.

1.4.2 Employees should note that by completing and submitting the application form that, if approved, this form also constitutes their consent to any applicable salary adjustment.

1.4.3 The calculation will be arrived at by:

- Dividing the cost of the computer by 12

1.5 Supply of Computers

1.5.1 The supply of computers for the staff scheme will work differently to the one for Members. For the Members scheme the Digital and Information Services (DIS) staff bought the tablets through one of their regular providers on a framework agreement. As the main aim of the Member scheme was to reduce paper use at committee meetings, the DIS staff will provide IT support for the tablets for the first year.

1.5.2 The number of staff who may take up the Computers for Staff scheme makes using DIS for technical support unfeasible so an alternative solution has been sought. For the Computers for Staff scheme a company is needed who can provide the computers and technical support. The Computers for Staff scheme has been judged as being a Category

B procurement project so quotations for the computers will be sought from three companies.

1.5.3 If the scheme is a success and there is sufficient demand from staff to run the scheme on a more regular basis other procurement methods may need to be considered in the future.

1.6 Paying for the Computers

1.6.1 As the Council will pay for the computers up front, there will be an initial outlay of cash which will be recovered over a 12 month period from employees. Approval will be sought from the Executive to incur this initial expenditure albeit the scheme will operate at a nil cost to the authority.

1.6.2 It is anticipated that the cost for the initial scheme will be £20,000 - £30,000, based on employee feedback and the maximum value allowable for a computer.

1.6.3 When participation numbers are known and the order subsequently placed, sundry debtor invoices will be raised to cover the cost of the computers to all those participants. This creates income which is then netted off against the cost of the purchase invoice for the computers. Payments for the debtor invoices will be done as salary deductions over a set time period.

1.7 Examples of Computers

1.7.1 Tablets, laptops and PCs will be available through the Computers for Staff scheme. Examples of the types of computers include:

- Apple iPad with Retina display 16GB
- Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1" 16 GB
- Acer Aspire E1-571 15.6" Laptop
- Apple MacBook Air MD711B/A 11.6" Laptop
- Acer iMedia S 2870 Desktop 21.5"
- Apple iMac MD095B/A 27"
- Packard Bell iMedia S2870 Desktop 20"

2. CONSULTATION

2.1 A paper on the Computers for Staff scheme was taken to SMT in October 2013. If Employment Panel approves the scheme consultation will take place with staff and unions.

3. CONCLUSION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 A Computers for Staff scheme would add to the range of employee benefits offered to staff which can help to support employee engagement. For staff who do not use computers at work, a scheme to enable them to buy a computer in an affordable way could help to improve their IT skills which may increase the range of employment opportunities available to them. The Employment Panel is asked to approve the Computers for Staff scheme, in principle, subject to a consultation process being undertaken with staff and approval for incurring expenditure being requested of and approved by the Executive; and to consider whether this scheme is deemed to be a term and condition of employment or a discretionary benefit.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO THE CARLISLE PLAN PRIORITIES

4.1 The Computers for Staff scheme supports the priority to develop a skilled and prosperous workforce, fit for the future.

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Appendices None
attached to report:

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers:

- OS 09/13

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS/RISKS:

Chief Executive's -

Community Engagement –

Economic Development –

Governance – The proposed scheme will either be classed as forming part of staffs' terms and conditions of employment or be a discretionary benefit with the right reserved by the Council to withdraw the scheme. If the latter is the chosen option then this should be explicitly stated in documentation. The Computers for Staff Scheme will need to be underpinned by an agreement between the Council and the employee to cover, for example, repayment of funding should the employee leave the employment of the Council during the relevant period.

Local Environment –

Resources -

HR - As this is a further enhancement of the workforce benefits package and is not currently part of the terms and conditions of employment the proposal may be introduced without the need for consultation. It would be recommended that this scheme remain discretionary and reviewed yearly.

Finance – The proposed scheme will operate at nil cost to the Council, with any expenditure being recovered from employees over a 12 month period. Subject to approval by the Employment Panel, the Executive will need to give approval to incur the initial expenditure associated with the scheme. The chosen procurement methodology will need to comply with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.