

## **AGENDA ITEM 25, Enc xx) FINANCIAL APPROVAL FOR PROVISION OF TABLETS FOR COUNCILLORS**

### **1. Background**

Currently, some Councillors access Council emails and shared data using personal devices (laptops, phones, tablets). While convenient, this practice presents potential GDPR compliance risks and data security concerns. Providing dedicated Council tablets would enable Councillors to maintain complete separation between personal and Council business data.

It should be noted that whilst providing Council-owned devices represents good practice from a GDPR perspective, it is not a legal requirement. Councillors can maintain appropriate data protection standards through adherence to the Code of Conduct and established data handling protocols, even when using personal devices. The Councillors' Code of Conduct includes obligations regarding the handling of confidential information and respect for data protection principles, which support GDPR compliance when combined with the Council's data protection policies.

### **2. Proposal**

To purchase tablets for Councillors who wish to conduct all Council business on dedicated Council devices, ensuring 100% compliance with data protection requirements. The tablets would operate using Wi-Fi connectivity, relying on the Council's Wi-Fi network at Council premises and Councillors' personal broadband connections at home, rather than purchasing separate data plans.

### **3. Cost**

#### ***Widescope (Current IT Provider) Option:***

Galaxy Tab A9 (8.7", Wi-Fi)  
64 GB  
Setup including  
Google account linked to Councillor Email address.  
Updates  
Google Drive  
Emails setup and signature added.  
£179.00 + VAT each

#### ***Estimated Requirement***

Maximum eleven tablets (factoring in that dual role Councillors with existing NCC devices and Councillors not actively using email systems are unlikely to require Council devices). **£1,969**

### **4. Recommendation**

Based on the initial information detailed in this report, it is recommended that the Council purchases tablets from Widescope for those Councillors who will actively use them. This approach provides the best value for money by ensuring devices are pre-configured and ready to use, while avoiding unnecessary expenditure on devices that would remain unused.

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### **5. Advantages (Pros)**

#### ***Data Protection & GDPR Compliance***

- Complete separation of personal and Council data
- Enhanced security for sensitive Council information (though not legally mandated)
- Reduced risk of data breaches through personal device compromise
- Clear audit trail for Council data access
- Represents best practice, building upon existing Code of Conduct protections

#### ***Professional Standards***

- Demonstrates commitment to best practice governance
- Provides consistent platform for all Councillors
- Reduces technical support issues arising from varied personal devices
- Professional appearance if used at meetings

#### ***Accessibility & Equality***

- Ensures all Councillors have equal access to digital Council resources
- Removes financial barrier for Councillors
- Standardised interface

#### ***Technical Benefits***

- Centralised device management and security updates through existing IT support (Widescope)
- Consistent software versions and compatibility
- Remote management capabilities for IT support
- Pre-configured access to Council systems (if purchased through Widescope)
- Seamless integration with existing IT infrastructure and support arrangements

### **6. Disadvantages (Cons)**

#### ***Financial Costs***

- Initial capital expenditure for tablet purchase
- Software licensing and security subscriptions (if required)
- Replacement and maintenance costs over time
- No ongoing data plan costs (devices would use Wi-Fi only)

#### ***Practical Challenges***

- Additional device for Councillors to carry and manage

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- Learning curve for Councillors unfamiliar with tablet technology
- Potential for device loss, theft, or damage
- Battery management and charging requirements
- Wi-Fi dependency may limit usage when away from Council premises or home
- No mobile data connectivity without additional cost

### ***Implementation Issues***

- Time required for setup and configuration
- Training needs for Councillors
- IT support resource implications
- Potential resistance from Councillors comfortable with current arrangements

## **7. Operational Considerations**

- Not all Councillors may want or need a Council device
- May create two-tier system between device users and non-users
- Backup arrangements needed when devices malfunction
- Data migration complexities from existing personal device usage
- Dual role Councillors already have NCC-provided devices, raising questions about value for money
- Potential for purchased devices to remain unused by those with existing suitable equipment
- Some Councillors are comfortable with their current devices and systems
- Some Councillors do not actively use Council email systems and therefore have no practical need for additional digital access
- Important that Councillors are honest about their likely usage to avoid unnecessary expenditure and poor use of public funds

## **8. Recommendation**

The proposal offers significant benefits for data protection compliance and professional governance standards. However, implementation should be carefully planned with proper costings, and recognition that adoption may be voluntary rather than mandatory for all Councillors.

## **9. Additional Considerations**

**Dual Role Councillors** Several Councillors serve dual roles as both Town Councillors and County Councillors for Northumberland County Council (NCC). These Councillors are already provided with devices by NCC for their County Council duties. The Council must carefully

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consider whether purchasing additional tablets for dual role Councillors represents good value for public money, particularly given that these devices are unlikely to be utilised when suitable alternatives are already available.

This consideration should inform the assessment of actual device requirements and may significantly reduce the overall cost and scope of the proposal.

### **10. Next Steps**

- ✓ Finalise cost comparison between Widescope and direct purchase options
- ✓ Conduct honest assessment of which Councillors would actively utilise Council devices, excluding:
  - Dual role Councillors with existing NCC devices
  - Councillors comfortable with current personal device arrangements
  - Councillors who do not actively use Council email systems