Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	The provision of IT equipment to Members
Date:	Friday, 22 April, 2011
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager (ext. 6314)
Contact Officer:	Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer (ext. 6316)

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Policy and Resources (Members) Sub-Committee, at its meeting on 14 March, 2005, agreed that Members, elected to the new Council in May of that year, be provided with personal computer equipment up to a maximum cost of £2,000 per Member per Council term. This equipment would be provided to each Member on the basis that the Council owns the equipment and it is loaned to those who request it. Members would have the option of borrowing either a desk-top computer or a lap-top, together with appropriate peripheral devices, such as, printers, scanners, cameras and iPACs.
1.2	It was agreed also that Members would have the option at the end of the Council term or when resigning a Council seat to purchase the computer equipment which had been loaned to them. The cost to the Member would be based on the age and quality of the computer equipment.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Since the commencement of the last Council term in 2005, technology has advanced immensely resulting in high quality IT equipment available at a significantly reduced cost than was previously the case. This has had a direct impact on the amount and type of equipment which can be provided to Members for the Council term. It is clear that an opportunity now exists for the Committee to consider the IT provision to Members and any associated savings which may be realised. These savings must be made in a manner which does not restrict the ability to offer an enhanced IT package to Members which will allow them to harness the many new technologies which can assist them in undertaking their roles and responsibilities effectively.
2.2	A further development which has had an impact on the provision of IT equipment is the very high turnover of Councillors, with 21 Members co-opted since the last election in 2005. Although it is unlikely that the Council would see such a high turnover in the foreseeable future it is arguable that any decision in

	relation to the IT provision to Members should take into account that future Council terms will most like see a higher turnover than that which would have been experienced pre May 2005. Members are therefore asked to consider the implications of how the current policy permits all 51 re-elected or newly elected Members to avail of the £2,000 IT provision at the start of the Council term. This means that it is possible for a Member who has been co-opted 2 months before the end of a Council term and provided with the relevant IT Equipment to be given the option of receiving new equipment should they be re-elected to the new Council.
2.3	To ensure that the best use is being made of the IT provision, Members are asked to consider that the equipment be provided on a four year rolling programme with all devices being supported by a suitable warranty for this period. This would mean, for example, that those Members who received their equipment in January 2010 would be offered the option to receive new equipment, from a standard package (outlined below), in January 2014 at the earliest. This would ensure that Members would be able to make use of the equipment for its whole useful life and would provide value for money in respect of the equipment purchased.
2.4	Following a recent information, communication and technology study it was identified that the Council's IT estate is too diverse with a wide range of personal computers, laptops, operating systems and other peripherals. The diversity of the estate contributes directly to the amount of resources required to support it and therefore to the cost effectiveness of the Council's IT provision. As part of ISB's improvement plan, the estate will be standardised with appropriate high quality and functionally capable IT equipment and associated software.
2.5	It is accepted that, although standardising the estate will result in efficiencies, this must not have a detrimental effect on how Members can utilise their equipment in undertaking their roles and responsibilities effectively. The estate must also ensure that further technological advancements can be harnessed and utilised by Members and Council staff. Therefore, ISB have proposed the following package, at a cost of £1,200 per Member, which will be offered to all Councillors who are returned to the Council following the Local Government Elections in May: • Desktop • Monitor *or* • Laptop • Laptop docking station • Laptop case • Laptop lock *and* • All-in-one printer, scanner and fax machine • 500GB External hard drive • Communications Device (Blackberry, iPhone, Android, etc) o (as per the decision of the Policy and Resources (Members) Sub-Committee, on 19th September, 2005 this does not include line rental)

2.6	Should all Members continue to be provided with the non-standardised IT equipment, in accordance with the current policy, the total cost would equate to approximately £25,000 per year. However, the total cost of the revised package would equate to approximately £13,000 per year, resulting in a saving of approximately £48,000 over the Council term.
2.7	It must be made clear that although significant savings can be made through the standardisation of the package being offered these savings will not result in a reduced IT support for Members. Members are assured that the proposed package will not only allow for their roles and responsibilities as a locally elected representative to be carried out effectively but that it will also permit Members to harness new, evolving and increasingly important methods of communication.
2.8	Furthermore, the proposed package not only acknowledges the benefits of the equipment which is currently provided to Members but also considers best practice research, as outlined in appendix 1. As a result of this research and when considering how the Council's methods of communication have evolved and improved, it is recommended that the package includes a communications device.
2.9	The communications device will not only permit Members to communicate verbally, by text and by email but it will also prove to be an effective tool in utilising social media, a communication technique which is changing the way messages are relayed to many of the city's key stakeholders through interactive dialogue.
2.10	In line with the decision of the Policy and Resources (Members) Sub-Committee, on 14 March, 2005, Members are recommended to continue with the policy whereby they are given the option to purchase the IT equipment which had been loaned to them and that the cost would be based on the age and quality of the computer equipment.

3	**Resource Implications**
3.1	The total cost to the Council to provide the above IT package would be approximately £15,000 per year which would result in an annual saving of £10,000 per year.
3.2	As a result of the standardisation of the IT estate further efficiencies would be realised as a result of a decrease in the amount of resources required to support the diverse estate which exists presently.

4	**Equality Implications**
4.1	N/A

5	**Recommendations**
5.1	It is recommended that the Committee agrees to:
5.2	• the standardisation of the IT equipment provided to Members which would result in the provision of the above package from the start of the new Council term on a rolling four year programme, and

| 5.2 | • reaffirm the decision of the Policy and Resources (Members) Sub-Committee of 14 March, 2005 whereby Members are given the option to purchase the loaned equipment at a cost which would be based on its age and quality. |

6	Decision Tracking

Officers responsible:

Gareth Quinn, Senior Democratic Services Officer

May 2011

7	Key to Abbreviations

ISB – Information Services Belfast

8	Documents Attached

Appendix 1 – Best Practice

Best practice research on IT provision to other high performing Councils

Edinburgh City Council

Desktop or laptop
Mobile or Blackberry - **only** to those Members who have a special responsibility
Printers in party rooms

Glasgow City Council

Desk top or laptop
Blackberry for all Members
Printer

Manchester City Council

Desk top or laptop
Printer
Blackberry for all Members

Liverpool City Council

Laptop only
3G Network Card
Printer
Blackberry - **only** for Members who have a special responsibility

Dublin City Council

Laptop
Docking Station
Printer
Blackberry