

## APPENDIX A

## APPENDIX A

**Standing Order 30 questions submitted by Councillor Gillman**

At the Strategy & Resources meeting on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2022, the proposed IT capital programme was presented. While the total sum of money to be spent was given, no details were provided as to what the money was being used for and an action was placed (Action 2 in the minutes) to provide committee members with full details. I was disappointed that this data was not presented on 1<sup>st</sup> February as elected members were being asked to support the proposals 'blind' and were not in a position to make an informed and evidence-based decision.

The details were provided on 7<sup>th</sup> February and, given the financial position of the council, I was horrified to see some of what is proposed. On the basis that the machines are 3 years old, it is proposed to replace 243 laptop computers at an estimated cost of £148K, 10 desktop computers at an estimated cost of 4.5K, 22 tablets, with a life of 2 years, at an estimated cost of £11.2K. Also on the basis they are 2 years old, 100 smartphones at an estimated cost of £13.2K.

In addition to the capital costs there also needs to be added the cost of staff time setting up the new equipment and decommissioning the old equipment which has not be included.

The spending of council tax payers' money should always be done with great care to ensure any spend is wise and justified. In times of great financial pressure, like those the council is currently facing, these criteria must be applied even more vigorously. Policies must be looked at to ensure they remain appropriate and it is not acceptable to mechanically apply a policy without considering if the policy remains appropriate to the present conditions. Residents do not, as a matter of policy, replace their mobile phones every 2 years or a laptop computer every 3 years, just because it has reached a certain age and I suspect council staff in their private lives act the same. If the device is still working they will keep using it, especially when budgets are tight. The council needs to act likewise.

Does the Chair agree that, until a full business case is submitted to this committee for formal approval by Councillors, these purchases should be put on hold and that new items are only purchased to replace those broken or damaged?

Does the Chair also agree that, in future years, a full breakdown of the items to be purchased under the capital programmes should be provided to this committee when the budget is submitted?

Response from Councillor Bourne:

Councillor Bourne began by reading the following extract from information supplied by Officers in respect of Councillor Gillman's question:

*"Prior to the capital bid in 2020, there was no lifespan cycle management. Therefore we built in a rolling programme of replacement client and infrastructure hardware which includes laptops, servers, switches, firewalls etc.*

*Most industry experts estimate a laptop's lifespan to be three to five years. We have already opted to replace at every five years.*

*Laptops may survive longer than that, but its utility will be limited as the components become less capable of running advanced applications*

*We hold a very small stock of new laptops, and we always recycle from leavers to new starters. However, it is proving challenging and very time consuming trying to repair when invariably some other component then breaks. From a resource point of view it is preferable to issue new laptops on a rolling basis, as a bespoke project, over a period of a couple of months, rather than the challenge of repairing, rebuilding or issuing new in the current unplanned ad hoc manner.*

*Replacing items that are broken or damaged only, will not protect us against security vulnerabilities and associated risks. However, we can prepare a business case for S&R on 30<sup>th</sup> June if this is the committee's preference.*

*In regards to the second question, a full detailed list was shared with Cllrs at the original capital budget meeting, in November 2019. A number of detailed questions were asked regarding the cyclical nature of the replacements for each element of hardware (by Cllr Langton). When the next capital bid is submitted for the future replacement programme, a full breakdown of items to be purchased will be included."*

Councillor Bourne then addressed Councillor Gillman's two questions (repeated below) as follows:

Does the Chair agree that, until a full business case is submitted to this committee for formal approval by Councillors, these purchases should be put on hold and that new items are only purchased to replace those broken or damaged?

*"Yes I do. I think we should be doing exactly that and I will be addressing this with Mark Hak-Sanders when he takes up post as Chief Finance Officer in two weeks' time."*

Does the Chair also agree that, in future years, a full breakdown of the items to be purchased under the capital programmes should be provided to this committee when the budget is submitted?

*"Yes I do, and I'm sure the Chief Finance Officer will do that in future. This has been an exceptional year with so many other problems to overcome and perhaps some of these details didn't get the attention they deserved. I remember asking several questions about the items in the IT capital budget back in November 2019, and I wasn't particularly happy. We were assured then that each item would come back to Members when they were ready to be spent. From memory, there were nine separate programs that added up to just under £1million. I will be bringing that up with the Chief Finance Officer and Chief Executive and will ensure that none of the items are considered to be accepted until they come back to Committee for approval."*