



MEETING PAPER

Subject: Microsoft Licences

Meeting: Extraordinary Finance and Governance Committee

Date: 18/06/2024

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~/NON CONFIDENTIAL

Background/Introduction

As part of the transfer to a new IT provider, the Town Council became cloud-based using the Microsoft 365 packages. The licences for councillors are the **Business Basic licence (£4.90 per month per user, £98 per month in total for councillors, £1,176 per year)** which gives councillors access to the web versions of popular Microsoft apps such as Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Outlook and Teams whilst also offering 1TB of cloud storage on OneDrive.

This package was recommended for councillors by CloudyIT (our IT providers) who offer this package to the many different councils they supply as it gives a cost-effective, and flexible access to all of the necessary apps for councillors to conduct council business.

After a period of getting used to this new way of working, the transfer on the whole has been a success and offers both councillors and officers a flexible and integrated approach to carrying out the council's business. At present, the Town Council is not yet utilising the benefits of this new system to its fullest as everyone adapts to the new systems. As Microsoft continues to develop its products (and with the integration of AI), new features will make this way of working easier in the near future.

As we continue this transition into the new system, the Town Council is regularly reviewing its IT provision (there is a standing item on the Events and Communications Sub-Committee agenda to review and receive updates on the IT provision).

As part of this, some councillors have asked for a change in their licences to allow access to documents via the desktop apps (the traditional method of opening up Word etc.). This would help with councillors accessing documents that are downloaded from websites (a workaround involving the changing of a couple of settings has been circulated to councillors to rectify this issue with support/training available to help with this).

Officers have researched two options for this which would need to be agreed by CloudyIT.

1. Upgrade all Councillor accounts to the **Business Standard account**.

Cost: £10.30 per month per user, £206 per month for all councillors, £2472 per year.

It would need to be checked whether this option is available.

2. Upgrade all Councillor accounts to the **Business Premium account**.

Cost: £18.10 per month per user, £362 per month for all councillors, £4,344 per year.

The intermediate package that Microsoft offers (between the Basic and Standard) would not be suitable for Council use as it removes the online versions and access to Teams.

Depending upon what would help Councillors, a further solution would be to purchase the **Decisions App**. This is a meeting software application that works with Microsoft 365 to create agenda packages which can automatically update. The benefits of this would be:

- Councillors would be sent the link to one agenda document which has links to all the supporting papers within it
- The agenda document could be updated as new supporting materials are added without the need to reissue the link
- This could mean that the members area is no longer required as confidential items can still be linked to the agenda but with set access permissions. This would be far more secure than the current offering.
- Every document would open up within Microsoft 365 online and can be set to read-only, no download/print depending upon the nature of the document
- This would be a cheaper upgrade than the price different of moving to the Business Premium (costing **£7.90 per month per user**) although additional licences would also be required for some office staff. It is also possible that purchasing just a couple of licences would be required, rather than upgrading every councillor, as the software packages everything together as a pdf/word document for people to access (i.e. you don't need the decisions app to access its benefits).

Recommendations

Depending upon what the desired outcome of any change is, there are different recommendations from Officers

1. **Councillors would like to explore the Decisions App option**

If an ease of accessing all documents relating to meetings is the agreed outcome (with linked agendas and supporting documents) it is recommended that Officers explore this option, its related costs and usability with Officers (especially those who set up agendas) reporting back on the feasibility of this option.

2. **Councillors are happy with the current provision and want to keep the status quo**

If this is the agreed outcome, additional training and support can be offered. It is worth noting that there are online tutorials available to Councillors through the Cloudy e-Hub via Teams which offers bitesize videos on using Microsoft 365 products. Additional in-house training can also be arranged through the Communications Officer, and external training can also be offered by our IT Providers.

3. **Councillors would like to access Microsoft products through the desktop apps**

If this is the agreed outcome, it is recommended that quotes are sought from CloudyIT to upgrade all councillor licences to the **Business Standard Licence**. It is worth noting that this upgrade would take time and require our IT providers to gain access remotely to all councillor devices (which would involve an organised call-in of all councillor devices. Each device would take a couple of hours to upgrade so labour costs would also need to be factored in.