

TITLE OF REPORT: TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF COUNCIL REPORTS

REPORT OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report of the Task and Finish Group on the Quality of the Council's Reports is attached for Cabinet's consideration.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to consider and respond to the Task and Finish Group's report and its recommendations at Appendix A.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To enable Cabinet to consider the report of the Task and Finish Group.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Task and Finish Group considered the evidence before them before reaching their final conclusions and recommendations.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 The Task and Finish Group conducted surveys of councillors in NHDC and parish and town councils; and invited the local press to contribute to the review. They also sought the views of officers who write, contribute to and coordinate committee reports.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND / ISSUES

- 7.1 The report of the Task and Finish Group is attached at **Appendix A**. SMT's comments are at **Appendix B**. The recommendations are in section 1 of the report and are reproduced in paragraph 7.3 below.

- 7.2 The background papers seen by the review can be found on the Council's website at: <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-and-democracy/overview-and-scrutiny-committee>

7.3 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Council should review its report template and consider adopting the features of the alternative report template in Annex 1.

Recommendation 2: Reports should clearly state their purpose.

Recommendation 3: Reports should include timelines showing financial and timetable changes for projects.

Recommendation 4: The Council should be mindful of the burden of producing reports and consider doing so only when decisions are required. Reports should not be used to brief members unless there is a compelling reason for it.

Recommendation 5: The Council should introduce a document management system to enable proper tracking, management and storage of documents.

Recommendation 6: There is a need for training to encourage both plainer English and for officers to better understand the purpose of reports.

Recommendation 7: The Council should trial the introduction of paperless reports with a view to introducing paperless reports for all 49 councillors.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The terms of reference of Overview and Scrutiny Committee include at paragraph 6.2.7(u) of the Council's Constitution "To appoint time limited task and finish Topic Groups to undertake detailed scrutiny work [and] report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to make recommendations to the Cabinet".

8.2 As set out in the Task and Finish Group report there are some statutory requirements that the Council must be aware of in its decisions. Examples include best value, equalities and social value, or the duty to consult. There is no prescribed way of demonstrating such consideration and therefore each Council has some flexibility in its approach to reports. The Council also has to comply with the publication requirements of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 and The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

9. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

9.1 It could be possible for the Council to save up to £52,000 by going paperless (£46,000 in printing and £6,000 in postage costs). Some of these costs are fixed costs (like printing equipment) and not all of these savings might be realised. The Council would need to ensure that as much of the £46,000 as possible was saved within the print room: otherwise the effect of ceasing printing would be a general increase in printing recharges for other Council services.

9.2 Some of these savings would need to be spent on supplying tablets to councillors at £300 per member. Assuming a tablet has a life span of 3 years, each tablet would cost the Council £100 a year. Some members would wish to use their own equipment supported by Good Technology which would be cheaper for the Council. It is not known how many councillors would need tablets, but supplying 40 councillors would cost about £4,000 a year.

9.3 There would be further costs if the Council chose to provide members with a data card for their tablet to enable full mobile working, although this is not necessary for Council business. Members could use the free Wi-Fi in the

Council Offices and their own Wi-Fi at home. If the Council did provide data cards, these cost £12.50 a month which is £150 a year per tablet. This would be £6,000 for 40 members, bumping the total cost of IT support to £10,000 a year overall.

10. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 A significant reduction in print room output could have manpower implications which would need to be quantified if this recommendation was accepted.

11. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Equality Act 2010 came into force on the 1 October 2010, a major piece of legislation. The Act also created a new Public Sector Equality Duty, which came into force on the 5 April 2011. There is a general duty, described below, that public bodies must meet, and this is underpinned by more specific duties which are designed to help meet them.

- 11.2 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of its functions: give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity; and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 11.3 There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

12. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 There are no social value implications directly arising from this report.

13. APPENDICES

- 13.1 Appendix A – Task and Finish Group Report on the Quality of Council Reports.

- 13.2 Appendix B – SMT’s comments on the Report.

14. CONTACT OFFICERS

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15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 15.1 Task and Finish Group on the Quality of Council Reports: Background Papers.