

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Task and Finish Group Report

THE QUALITY OF COUNCIL REPORTS

SMT response

Recommendation	SMT response
Recommendation 1: The Council should review its report template and consider adopting the features of the alternative report template in Annex 1.	<p>The report template is kept under ongoing review to ensure it remains fit for purpose. SMT does not favour the format of the alternative report, as it is felt it would not work for anything other than very straightforward reports and is likely to lead to a greater number of queries at Committee meetings and may result in decisions being deferred until the information required by decision makers is provided in writing. It is noted that the example used could have been written using the Council's information note template.</p> <p>SMT does recognise that the focus of sections 9 to 14 of the current report template should be to identify the relevant issues and so the template and guidance will be reviewed to streamline where possible. Identifying if a matter is an Executive or Council or Local Choice Function could be included within the legal implications as it is linked to how responsibilities are set out within the Council's Constitution.</p>
Recommendation 2: Reports should clearly state their purpose.	Agreed. A reminder will be sent to all report writers to set this out in the Summary section of the report.
Recommendation 3: Reports should include timelines showing financial and timetable changes for projects.	Agreed, where it is relevant. This idea will be included in the report writing guidance notes and included in the note sent to report writers.
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.	<p>SMT agrees with the principle of recommendation 4 and assume it also refers to briefing or information notes, but notes the importance of the regular monitoring reports that Cabinet receives on strategic planning and recognises for instance that external audit require evidence that Cabinet regularly and transparently monitor financial matters.</p> <p>Heads of Service and report writers will be reminded of this principle, which also requires the support of all Councillors and Committees.</p>

<p>Recommendation 5: The Council should introduce a document management system to enable proper tracking, management and storage of documents.</p>	<p>The Council already has the Eagenda system, which could include this functionality to a limited extent. IT has on its work plan for this summer to implement Sharepoint which will allow, amongst other things, multiple and shared amendments to the same document, stored in a central area with full version control maintained. This will achieve all the aims of this recommendation.</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: There is a need for training to encourage both plainer English and for officers to better understand the purpose of reports.</p>	<p>Agreed. This will be included in the note sent to report writers and Learning and Development will be asked to look at training options in conjunction with the communications team who have responsibility for corporate style.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7: The Council should trial the introduction of paperless reports with a view to introducing paperless reports for all 49 councillors.</p>	<p>Democratic Services has been trialling paperless reports with four different Councillors for over a year, using tablets to view reports. SMT supports the recommendation, subject to an acceptable business case and confidence in the technological solution. Consideration may need to be given to how information is presented if it is being viewed on screen as opposed to on paper. It is noted that there may be training required for some Councillors if this is implemented and that for a limited time a transitional arrangement of both paperless and paper reports may be required. SMT anticipates that with time this approach will become the norm for authorities.</p>