

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Suggested Task and Finish Group on the Quality & Quantity of Council Reports.

1. Information.

1.1 Some members are expressing concern at the number of reports being prepared for committees and policy development groups. They are also concerned at the way the same report is duplicated amongst the committees and groups leading to some councillors, dependent on their committee/group membership, reading the same report as many as three to four times.

1.2 The quality of content, duplication and typos/errors within some reports are of concern particularly when they are available to the public.

1.3 Most reports have a recommendation as to action. Where the recommendation in the report is to note the report it is felt that this information could be disseminated in another way without taking committee time.

2. Intention.

2.1 To improve the quality of the Council reports by making them shorter, clearer, jargon-free and more focussed on key areas whilst ensuring significant information is provided to allow decisions to be made.

2.2 The resulting objective will seek to achieve:-

- a) Shorter, clearer and more informative reports;
- b) More emphasis on costs and the implications of a course of action – financial, social and political - and clear timetables for taking the policy or operation forward;
- c) Better informed readers;
- d) Less work for drafting officers;
- e) Better briefing and information outside the reports process.

3. Method.

3.1 Scrutiny Committee to set up a **Task & Finish Group** from members of Committee with some additional Councillors not on Scrutiny Committee. Potentially 5 members plus two Portfolio Holders. There would be a Lead Officer and a Support Officer [Scrutiny Officer?].

3.2 Potential witness would be approached as follows:-

- a) Council Members;
- b) Senior officers and their staff who prepare reports;
- c) Local press;
- d) Community groups;
- e) Parish Councils;

3.3 Suggested Key Questions could be taken from the following:-

- ☐ What do readers want from reports?
- ☐ What are officers' experiences of the report writing process?

- ☐ What can be learnt from other councils' reports?
- ☐ What should be removed?
- ☐ What is missing?
- ☐ What should the style be?
- ☐ How should officers be supported to write effective reports?
- ☐ How do reports fit into the current briefing process for members and the public?
- ☐ Does the existing reports process enable robust decision making?

3.4 Consideration of preparation and use of report 'templates' to reflect agreed policy/procedure.

4. Administrative Considerations.

4.1 The Scrutiny Officer to provide research and support. To provide information on:

- members' views on the quality and effectiveness of reports;
- officers' views on the process of producing reports;
- Example reports from MDDC;
- Example reports from other authorities;
- MDDC report writing template and guidance.

4.2 Collection of information, circulation and collection of questionnaires can be achieved by email, or where necessary, post.

4.3 Shorter reports would reduce the volume of paper produced significantly, thereby reducing the carbon footprint and costs.

4.4 Remote meetings could be used to save travel time and cost.

5. Timescale.

5.1 Most of the work can be carried out as indicated at 4.2 above thereby reducing the need for meetings. Two or three meeting should be sufficient to achieve a resultant report for action.

5.2 All questionnaires and other consultations or actions should have a clear timescale attached to them.

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10 August 2020