Recommendation

It is recommended that Policy and Performance Scrutiny Panel considers the data relating to late reports currently going to committees and the corrective action being taken to address this.

Summary

Councillors have requested that research be undertaken in respect of the volume of late committee reports. This report sets out the findings and corrective action being taken to minimise late reports across the Council.

Statutory Powers

Local Government Act 1972

Strategic Implications

1. This report has no direct correlation to the achievement of Corporate Plan objectives. However, the timely submission of good quality reports is an important aspect of good governance that underpins achievement of all strategic outcomes.

Introduction

2. Following on from a request for late reports data to be regularly reported to Policy and Performance Scrutiny Panel, a request was made for follow-up analysis to be presented to this committee mid-way through the financial year. The first late reports analysis came to this committee in January of this year and covered the period January to December 2017.

3. The Council’s democratic system (Modern.gov) records the amount of late reports by amount and percentage (%). It also records the report author and the date the late report was published. However, the system does not have the capability to record a reason for the report being late. Appendix A outlines the results for this period (January 1 – July 31, 2018).
4. Agendas for committees are published eight days in advance. This is a statutory requirement and ensures there is enough notice to hold a committee meeting and information disseminated can be read and understood in advance.

5. All draft reports are circulated to key staff and Councillors for comments in advance of publication. The usual circulation list includes the following:

- The Chief Executive (only for reports to Cabinet, Council, and Resources Scrutiny Panel)
- The Management Team member who overviews the section
- Any Management Team member who is likely to have an interest in the content of the report (for example, if it relates to a unit/service they overview or to a topic on which they lead, or it is a cross-cutting issue of general significance)
- Any manager likely to have an interest in the report, either because it relates to their section or to a topic on which they lead
- Local Area Managers
- Finance
- Monitoring Officer
- the Strategic Planning Manager for the Corporate Plan Objectives (Cabinet and Council reports only)
- the relevant Legal Officer
- the relevant Committee Officer
- the Leader of the Council
- Any other appropriate councillors (such as the Cabinet Member or Committee Chair).

6. The report circulation checklist (outlined above) can also be found at the start of the report writing template. This template advises that the ‘Report Circulation Guide’ on the Council’s intranet lists all report deadline dates.

7. Reports are sent to committees in a number of ways:

(a) Reports can be listed on a specific committee’s work programme (or be a key decision on the Forward Plan in the case of Cabinet) and referenced on the relevant agenda. On occasions, reports which are late (due to last minute information being obtained), will be marked ‘to follow’ and circulated after the main agenda pack has been issued as a ‘supplementary agenda’;

(b) Reports on topics that are requested by Members/Committees, as in the case of this particular report.

(c) Reports that are deemed ‘urgent’ and are sent to committee for consideration late on, having never previously appeared on a work programme or Forward Plan. In this instance if a report is required to go before a committee for consideration after the committee agenda has been published, then it will be tabled at the committee.
Findings and corrective action

8. Of the 118 reports that went to committees between January 1 and July 31 2018, 8.5% (10 in total) were published after the eight day deadline. The previous reporting period, considered by this committee, showed 15% of the 183 reports that went to committee between January and December 2017, (27 in total) were late.

9. The analysis shows the committees with the highest number of late reports include Audit and Resources and Chandler’s Ford and Hiltingbury Local Area Committees with two late reports each between January and July of this year (see Appendix A).

10. One of the reasons for late reports over the last two years are the number of new or newly appointed staff working within the Council following our transformation programme. To address this, additional training has been put in place to advise and guide inexperienced report authors.

11. To ensure that late reports are minimised as far as possible, late reports are being rejected by Management Team where there is no valid justification. A range of other measures have also been put in place to minimise late reports as outlined below:

- Since the last report on this issue in January the report writing process has been improved through the use of the modern.gov democratic system. Reports are generated and written within the system to ensure greater levels of transparency and sign off. This ensures:
  
  (i) Better understanding of those reports coming to individual committees with report authors given firm deadlines and email reminders when their report is due for circulation and sign off

  (ii) Clearer audit trail tracking who has/hasn’t signed of reports

  (iii) Improved version control

  (iv) Record of who has made changes/comments on reports

  (v) Ability for administrators to be able to ‘share their work’ with others enabling a report to be retrieved and circulated for sign off in the event that a report author is ill/absent from work

- To support the use of this system and new approach, mandatory report protocol training was delivered to senior staff and other report authors in November/December 2017 and early 2018. There are plans to repeat this training in the 2018/19 financial year to ensure staff are continuing to use the mod.gov system to write and submit their reports.

- A review of the Council’s governance processes is in the work programme of the new Democratic Senior Specialist and will assess:
Who writes and clears reports?

Content/style of reports?

Roles of committees as per the Constitution

Financial Implications

Agendas and report packs are no longer being printed to ensure a more environmentally friendly and cost effective approach. Councillors are equipped with IPads and make use of the Mod.gov application on their tablet devices to be able to track, access and comment on reports going to committees.

Risk Assessment

Risk is incurred by not giving due (public) notice of key decisions or contentious issues which could result in complaints or investigations against the Council.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The Equality Act is not relevant to the decision in this report as the decision does not relate to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, or fostering good relations between different people. An Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out.

Conclusion

Committee are asked to consider the findings of this report and note the steps being put in place to improve the timings of reports.

GAETANA WISEMAN
PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE MANAGER

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Appendices Attached: 1

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - SECTION 100D

The following is a list of documents which disclose facts or matters on which this report or an important part of it is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. This list does not include any published works or documents which would disclose exempt or confidential information.

Background Papers - none.