

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1. MEETING:	Members' Training and Development Panel
2. DATE:	16th February 2012
3. TITLE:	Improving the standard of report writing within Rotherham Borough Council
4. DIRECTORATES:	All Directorates All Wards

5. SUMMARY

This report outlines a proposal to raise awareness amongst managers across the council about the need to improve their report writing skills, particularly with regard to the provision of information in support of elected members. It complements existing operational guidance eg Plain English Guide.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members:

- a) agree the draft Report Writer's Guidance attached to this report.
- b) agree that the guidance be circulated across the Council as a manager briefing to highlight the need for the standard of report writing to be improved – particularly with regard to the use of plain English
- c) agree to take a report in six months' time on the perceived impact of the guidance on reports received by elected members

7. PROPOSALS AND DETAIL

Communicating and engaging with others is a key competency for all managers within Rotherham Borough Council, and report writing is an important element of this. Reports are used within the council to support the work of officers; externally to communicate the position or view of the authority to partner or other organisations/groups; to inform and assist elected members in carrying out their duties, and to support the system of governance through Full Council, Cabinet, Delegated Powers, Overview and Scrutiny Select Commission and other elected member meetings.

Reports can be used to summarise lengthy issues; translate complex or technical information into a language and format that is easily understood by the target audience and put forward recommendations to facilitate the decision-making process. In addition, the style and content of reports (including spelling, grammar and punctuation) can impact positively or negatively on the reputation of the Council.

However, it has been identified on a number of occasions that the standard of report writing – particularly in the context of providing information for elected members – needs to be improved. The report attached at Appendix 1 provides managers with guidance on how they can personally improve their skills and references other operational documents which are also available to provide support, eg Plain English Guide. It is recommended that these documents are also reviewed and refreshed with immediate effect.

It is proposed that the report at Appendix 1 is disseminated across the Council as a Manager Briefing and is available for reference on the Authority's intranet. To determine the impact of the guidance, it is recommended that the views of elected members are sought in advance of the panel meeting in six months' time and any further actions required identified at that time.

8. FINANCE

There are no costs associated with the dissemination or implementation of the guidance document.

9. RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES

It is the responsibility of individual managers to use the guidance attached, and in turn their line manager to performance manage against the key communications competency. It may be necessary in future to identify further mechanisms for improving performance, such as training sessions.

10. POLICY AND PERFORMANCE AGENDA IMPLICATIONS

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS AND CONSULTATION

RMBC Plain English Guide

RMBC Guidance for Reports to Members

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