

# TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

## CABINET

9 October 2013

### Report of the Chief Executive

#### Part 1- Public

#### Executive Non Key Decisions

#### **1 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**To receive and endorse the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of two recent reviews concerning Media and Communications and Council Agendas.**

#### **1.1 Background**

1.1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2013 to receive the reports and recommendations from two informal review groups concerning Media and Communications with a focus on the future of the Council newspaper Here and Now, and the printing of Council agenda papers and the potential to make use of IT instead of printed material. Both reviews were driven by the need to assess the value for money issues involved with a view to identifying appropriate financial savings that might help meet the targets set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

#### **1.2 Review of Media and Communications**

1.2.1 Following consideration of the review group's findings, chaired by Cllr Liz Simpson, the following recommendations were endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Due to the high costs of production and distribution of Here and Now, the limitations of the long lead in time, and the diversion of the staff resources in the Media team, and the need for the Council to identify cost savings to meet the targets set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy, Here and Now be discontinued from April 2014.
2. An exit strategy for Here and Now be prepared and reported to the appropriate Advisory Board setting out proposals for dealing with future Council publicity, press and media relations based on the following strands:
  - the need to free up the Council's media resources to establish closer and proactive relationships with local media and to enable them to

provide increased support to Members and service managers across the Council on all media issues

- to explore opportunities to direct resources towards the use of new technology including online/social media, and to undertake more targeted marketing to residents and others to get the right messages out to residents in the most appropriate format
  - That appropriate training on the use of online/social media be organised for Members and staff
3. Consideration be given to additional engagement with local media, for example, to organise a future visit to the Kent Messenger radio studio to learn more about the technology used and any opportunities for the Council to further enhance our ability to communicate with residents

### **1.3 Review of Council Agendas, Printing and the Increased Use of IT**

1.3.1 The review group, chaired by Cllr Trevor Robins, made a number of recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> September 2013. Following further consideration of the issues raised by the review, the following recommendations were agreed:

1. In the light of the potential financial savings to be made, it is recommended that the change from printed Council papers should be supported in principle subject to the resolution of any legal issues and to the following:
  - That, on an exceptional basis only, printed agendas continue to be supplied to those Members who require them
  - More significant documents that sometimes accompany agenda papers (e.g. annual statements of accounts, local plan publications etc) continue to be made available in hard copy
  - A time limited transitional period be established during which printed agendas continue to be made available, to allow Members to become familiar with the use of new technology
  - The training for Members on the use of the new technology be made available via practical sessions involving small groups
  - Management Team explore any additional savings to be made via the available new technology
2. The Management Team should establish an officer review group to assess the potential impact of such a change on the remit and role of the Reprographics Section, including the possibility that the section could undertake further commercial printing work, printing for local community

groups, and/or shared services with other councils, in order to generate additional income. This would need to include a review of printing charges for external work.

3. A Capital Plan evaluation be undertaken regarding the purchase of tablets as a fast track item and the results of this evaluation be reported to the Cabinet alongside these recommendations.

- 1.3.2 A number of legal and constitutional issues were raised at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to the potential requirements to continue to provide paper copies of Council agenda papers. These matters are dealt with below and do not, in the view of the Director of Central Services, cause any change to the above agreed recommendations. It was noted that for Council meetings involving outside parties, including the Tonbridge Forum and the Parish Partnership Panel and any meetings involving co-opted members, hard copy agendas would continue to be required.

## **1.4 Legal Implications**

- 1.4.1 It is a statutory requirement for a summons to a meeting of the full Council (but not other Committees or Boards) to be left at, or sent by post to the usual place of residence of all Councillors (Local Government Act 1972). There is no corresponding requirement in respect of agendas and reports, although these are currently sent by post with the summons.
- 1.4.2 Given the above requirements, it will be necessary for summonses to meetings of the full Council to continue to be sent by post.
- 1.4.3 The proposals will necessitate some consequential changes to the Constitution to reflect the cessation of paper copy delivery of agendas and reports to Members.

## **1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

- 1.5.1 As set out in each review.

## **1.6 Risk Assessment**

- 1.6.1 As dealt with by each review.

## **1.7 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 1.7.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

## **1.8 Recommendations**

- 1.8.1 That the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as set out in paragraphs 1.2.1 and 1.3.1 of this report **BE ENDORSED**.

Background papers:

contact: Mark Raymond

Nil

Julie Beilby  
Chief Executive

<b>Screening for equality impacts:</b>		
<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Explanation of impacts</b>
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	Assessed as part of each individual review
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	N/A	
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

*In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.*