Carbon Clever Committees
Report by Depute Chief Executive

| SUMMARY |
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| This report advises Members of the work that has been undertaken to date to reduce the reliance on paper reports at Committees, the outcome of the assessments and the potential future direction of this initiative.

The proposal to move towards Carbon Clever Committees presents an opportunity to modernise how the Council's committees operate, reducing reliance on printed documents and providing access to electronic agendas and reports, which will enable Members and officers to work in a more flexible way and will improve efficiency and reduce costs. |

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Following discussion at Highland Council in October 2013, the then Assistant Chief Executive was asked 'to consult with Members and bring forward a report setting out the logistics, benefits and savings associated with the option of paperless Committee meetings'. In December Members agreed that an additional commitment be included in the Council Programme 'Working Together for the Highlands', namely that 'We will reduce the volume of printed material produced by the Council building on a current initiative for paperless Council meeting options and developing further options for Members, customers and employees to conduct Council business on-line'.

1.2 The proposal to move to a more modern way of working reflects the approach that has already been adopted successfully by a number of other Scottish local authorities including City of Edinburgh Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, whilst others such as Scottish Borders Council are currently finalising proposals.

1.3 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the work that has been undertaken to date, the outcome of the assessments and the potential future direction of the project.

2. CURRENT POSITION

2.1 In 2012/13 the Council printed and distributed over 1,029,000 pages of papers to support meetings of the Council, its Committees, Joint Boards, arms' length companies and associated bodies. The cost of printing and distributing these papers was approximately £28,000, being made up primarily of printing costs of £23,500, materials of £400 and postage costs of £4000.

2.2   In the last year the overall number of meetings has reduced with changes in the Committee timetable and the loss of the Police and Fire Joint Boards. However the Council has also introduced four new Area Committees and recently established a Customer Services Board. It is anticipated that formal agendas and papers will be issued for over 200 meetings per year.

2.3   Table 1 below shows indicatively how savings could be achieved if there was a gradual reduction in print requirements. If an incremental approach to new ways of working is not introduced then it can be assumed that print requirements and costs will not reduce significantly from the current 1,023,000 pages at a cost of £28,000 per annum.

Committee Paper Production & Postage Costs Forecast
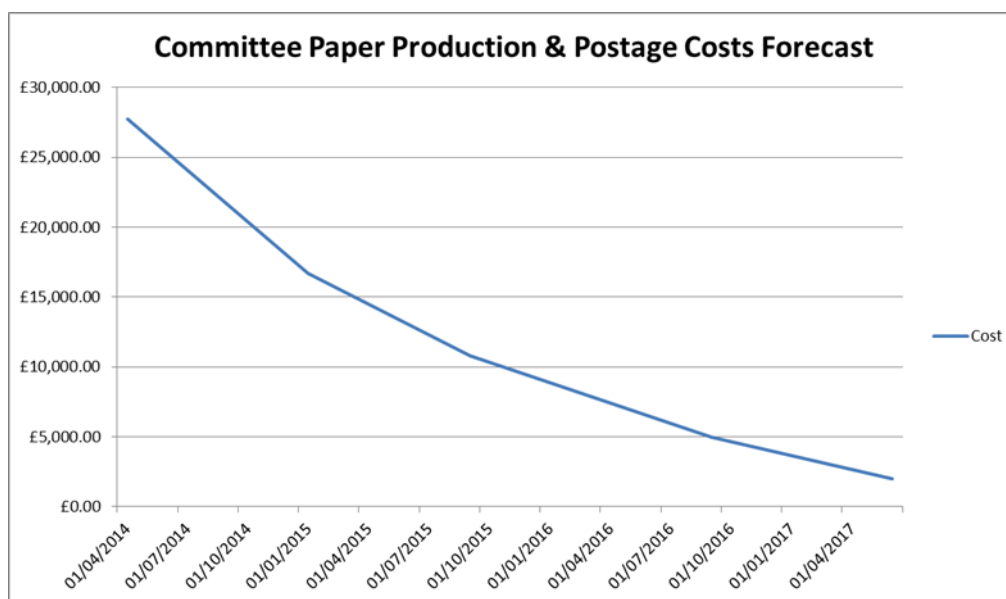
3.   PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION

3.1   It is recognised and accepted that moving to electronic receipt of committee papers represents a significant change in the Council's existing practice. Accordingly it is not proposed that the Council seek to move all Members immediately but rather that an incremental approach is adopted in the run up to the next Council election in 2017, with the intention that the reports for all meetings conducted from June 2017 are distributed electronically .

3.2   There will be two options available to those Members who wish to support the proposal and allow the savings to be achieved. The first option is for Members to elect to use a single tablet device supplied by the Council and return their current devices. This single, portable device will be used for receipt of papers and attendance at meetings along with all Council business, including access to emails and the Internet. Use of a single device will allow the annual ICT support costs to remain unchanged. The net cost involved in such provision, i.e. provision of a tablet device with docking station and integrated keyboard, is quoted at £668 per device resulting in an annual saving of £350 per person. The devices returned by Members will be recycled and will be available to be reallocated within the Council.

3.3   The second option proposed is that Members, should they wish, will be encouraged and supported to make use of their own personal devices for receipt of committee papers. This approach has already been adopted successfully by one Member to date. However Members would still not be able to access their highland.gov.uk email account from their personal devices.

3.4   The proposal and savings forecast assume that those Members who have indicated a wish to receive papers electronically will not have the opportunity to request and receive reports in paper form. Members would have the facility to access the reports online and store them on their devices. The devices supplied to Members would be equipped to allow work to be undertaken off-line and remotely and to allow annotation and comments to be added to the electronic reports.

3.5   At present, it is being assumed that Committee Chairs would continue to receive paper copies for their committees, and it is also proposed that confidential papers will continue to be printed and issued on pink paper for information security reasons.

4. BENEFITS

4.1   Ultimately a move to electronic receipt of committee papers would be a significant step in modernising the working of the Council and has the potential to generate efficiency savings. However there are additional benefits that such a move could capture. A benefits mapping session conducted in February identified a number of advantages:

Efficiency and costs
- Reduce paper, printing, postage costs
- Reduce paper storage and reduce recycling/shredding costs
- Streamline process to produce and distribute papers

Officers and Members
- Increase Member/staff satisfaction
- Reduce weight of devices
- Increase quantity/quality of information, e.g. images and hyperlinks to previous reports and webcasts
- Eliminate restrictions on use of colour within reports

New ways of working
- Increase accessibility and versatility of reports
- Ability to work more flexibly and to work from home and remote locations
- Potential to support voting system (in the longer term)

Other
- Increase positive image of the Council as a forward looking authority
- Reduce carbon footprint/support of Carbon Clever initiative
- Create multimedia/interaction opportunities
- Increase security in the distribution of reports

5.   DEPENDENCIES

5.1   A primary issue will be the identification of an appropriate tablet device that will offer all of the functionality currently enjoyed, as well as the facility to access committee reports whilst being portable. An initial trial of devices with a number of Members and officers is being undertaken. Feedback and data from this pilot will inform future decisions on devices and potential further trials. The Council has now commissioned further work on its infrastructure to secure future accreditation to the Public Sector Network and this will enable the secure use of iPads and android devices on the Council network. It is therefore intended to trial these devices before a decision is finally made on which tablet devices to offer.

5.2   The Council has previously approved a capital commitment to undertake refurbishment of the microphone and voting system within the Headquarters Council Chamber. The Chamber does not currently have the facility to allow Members to keep devices charged and it is recognised that meetings may, on occasion, extend beyond the anticipated battery life of devices. It is proposed therefore that, the opportunity presented by refurbishment is taken to undertake any works that might be necessary to support the future use of tablet devices.

6.   FUTURE PROGRESS

6.1   Once an appropriate device has been identified, a number of actions such as training, technical support and contingency planning in case of system failure will be undertaken to support the move to carbon clever meetings.

7.   IMPLICATIONS

7.1   Financial
         The proposals anticipate an expenditure of up to £53,000 over two years to allow for the purchase of tablets, keyboards and docking stations. It is proposed that the costs are met from the capital budget already agreed by Council for ICT Refresh.

7.2   Carbon Clever
         The proposal has the potential to make a significant contribution to the Council's climate change and Carbon Clever commitments with a reduction in printing and use of paper.

7.3   Legal
         Standing Orders currently allow for the electronic distribution of agendas and accompanying reports and will not require to be adjusted. Legislation allows the Council to move to the electronic production of agendas.

7.4   There are no Gaelic or equalities implications to be highlighted.

8.	**RECOMMENDATION**

Members are asked to:

i.	NOTE the progress that has been made to date in supporting a move to Carbon Clever meetings;
ii.	APPROVE the initiative to enable officers to progress the work needed to deliver Carbon Clever Committees; and
iii.	APPROVE the use of the capital budget, allocated to ICT Refresh, as detailed in 7.1

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Date: 8 May 2014

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Background Papers: