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**Scrutiny Management Committee**

**18 December 2006**

Report of the Head of Civic, Democratic & Legal Services

**SCRUTINY REVIEW SUPPORT BUDGET**

**Summary**

1. This report summarises the position to date on expenditure against the budget available specifically for supporting scrutiny reviews in 2006/7. It also seeks Members views on the available budget for 2007/8, with a view to making a recommendation to the Executive as part of the budgeting setting process.

**Background**

2. This Committee has the constitutional right to consider and recommend to the Executive a suitable scrutiny budget, to be used for the effective support of any agreed reviews during a year.
3. For the 2006/7 financial year, scrutiny was allocated a budget of £6,000 to support its reviews. This budget was originally £9,500 in financial year 2004/5 and was reduced to the figure of £6,000 in financial year 2005/6.

**Budget Monitoring**

4. As at December 2006, expenditure against this budget is £559. In September 2006, Members may recall allocating a sum of £250 of expenditure per Scrutiny Committee or Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee to support administrative and consultative processes associated with their reviews from this budget, on the basis that requests for more funds could be made to Scrutiny Management Committee.
5. No formal application has yet been made to SMC for additional funds. However, a number of additional expenditure commitments are in the pipeline as follows:

**Education - School Transport Review**

Travel to Cheshire for 4 members - £90  
Expenses for visitors - £90  
Consultation with parents/governors - £50  
Additional member visit - £90

## **Health Scrutiny Committee**

Public conference on health changes - room, equipment,catering etc - £350  
Speakers expenses - £50  
Annual Health Check - training activities and travel - £100

## **Tang Hall Ad Hoc**

Consultation meeting with community groups - £75  
Public Meeting - £75  
Publicity and survey - £500

## **Total extra expenditure amounting to £1,470**

6. Expenditure so far this financial year has been minimal but over recent months due to new reviews have not progressed by SMC, pending the completion of outstanding backlog from 2005/6 and the implementation of new working procedures. A greater call on the budget is anticipated between now and the end of the financial year.

## **Consultation**

7. The Head of Financial Services has been consulted on the preparation of the report to ensure it complies with the constitutional and statutory requirements for feeding into the budget process for 2007/8.

## **Options**

8. The information on budget expenditure in 2006/7 to date is merely for noting. However, Members have the constitutional right to consider what recommendation they wish to make to the Executive in relation to the allocation of budget for supporting scrutiny reviews in 2007/8. The Executive will receive that recommendation at its meeting on 16 January 2007, consider it and set an appropriate figure for this budget accordingly.

## **Analysis**

9. Members should consider what scrutiny support budget they wish to recommend to the Executive, taking into account the following issues:
  - a. Current level of expenditure;
  - b. What the budget is used for now and what it could be used for in 2007/8;
  - c. The current budget climate in general

## **What is or Could the Budget be Used for?**

10. Currently, and over the past 2 financial years, this budget has been used to cover expenditure on the following range of consultative events and information gathering exercises:
  - a. Community meetings
  - b. Drop in centre events
  - c. Site visits to other local authorities or places of interest related to the scrutiny
  - d. Publicity associated with any of the above
  - e. Conferences and training events
11. In the next financial year, it is anticipated that the budget will be used in much the same way. However, it is hoped that the new procedures in place now will sharpen the focus of reviews and enable more short to medium reviews to be completed. As a part of the reviews commissioned in 2007, Members may wish to take up more opportunities to inform their reviews through a wider range of consultative events and learning exercises.
12. The Government's new White Paper on Strong and Prosperous Communities (report elsewhere on this agenda) envisages extending scrutiny powers to services external to the Council. As a result, a wider range of consultative events and processes may be required. Funding may be required for more partnership activities and events, should the White Paper become legislation.

## **Corporate Priorities**

13. This report in terms of budget monitoring and making recommendations on a suitable level of budget for supporting scrutiny reviews, helps contribute to the Council's overall organisational effectiveness.

## **Other Related Issues**

14. Members will be aware that the Chief Executive's restructure originally proposed an additional Scrutiny Officer at SO1/2 level, following abolition of the Scrutiny Manager post. Subsequently, in an effort to find further savings, the Executive agreed to both reduce the pay range of this post to Scale 4 / 5 as a Scrutiny Assistant and to defer appointment to it, pending more information on the impact of the White Paper referred to above and elsewhere on this agenda.

## **Implications**

### **15.. Financial**

At the end of the current financial year, a slight underspend on this budget might be reported due to the lull in reviews in the current year, for the reasons previously reported.

Constitutionally, SMC is delegated to recommend to the Executive an appropriate support budget for scrutiny reviews.

### **Human Resources**

No implications.

### **Equalities**

No implications.

### **Legal**

No implications.

### **Crime and Disorder Information Technology (IT)**

No implications.

### **Property**

No implications.

### **Risk Management**

16. There are no known risks associated with this report other than a possibility that scrutiny might be allocated a budget by the Executive and Council it feels is wholly inadequate for supporting its reviews, if SMC fails to make a recommendation to the Executive.

## **Recommendations**

17. Members are asked to note the report, the current budget position and to recommend a budget to the Executive for supporting scrutiny reviews.

*Reason: To enable a robust scrutiny review support budget to be set for the 2007/8 financial year.*

## **Contact Details**

**Author:**

**Chief Officer Responsible for the report:**

**Dawn Steel**  
Democratic Services Manager  
01904-551030

**Suzan Hemingway**  
Head of Civic Democratic & Legal Services

Report Approved

Date 7.12.06

**Specialist Implications Officer(s)**

*Patrick Looker*  
*Principal Accountant*

**Wards Affected:** *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:**

None.

**Annexes**

None.