

**Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny
Management Committee**

7 November 2022

Report of the Director of Governance

Scrutiny Review Support Budget 2023/24

Summary

1. This report sets out the current position in relation to available Council funding for research in support of scrutiny review work.
2. Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee (CCSMC) has a constitutional right, under its delegated authority, to consider and recommend to the Executive a budget for scrutiny research. This report seeks to consult Members on any recommendations it may wish to make to the Executive prior to the budget setting process for 2023/24.

Background

3. Since February 2011, Scrutiny has been allocated a research support budget for reviews in the sum of £5k per annum. In previous years, that budget has either been shared out across each Scrutiny Committee or retained for use by CCSMC as appropriate.
4. In making its recommendations on this budget to Budget Council for the last few financial years, this Committee has debated at some length the merits of potentially asking Council to increase this support budget to enable more outward facing scrutiny to take place. In light of the low spend reported below consistently against this budget, the Council has continued to allocate an annual sum of £5k.
5. The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on scrutiny activity and resources available to support any activity has affected spend and what work has been possible to undertake.

Analysis

6. In this current financial year to date 2022/23, there has been no spend against this budget which, at this stage, again demonstrates a continuing trend and one which is unlikely to change for the remainder of the

financial year given the comparatively small, dedicated resource available to support scrutiny. Members will recall that new working arrangements, to continue some scrutiny activity, were introduced during the pandemic, namely the introduction of informal Scrutiny Forums meeting remotely, with a reduced number of mainline public Committee meetings. In March 2022, Council approved revised Scrutiny Procedural Rules, broadly confirming a pattern of scrutiny meetings and arrangements to reflect the resource available to support to it. Even prior to the pandemic, this Committee had received reports for several years outlining a declining spend on external scrutiny research activity.

7. Historically, there has been no spend against this budget since 2016/17, when this Committee allocated the available budget to cover required training costs for newly-appointed Scrutiny Chairs, to reflect new working arrangements which accompanied the amended scrutiny structure at that time. This training also doubled up as refresher training in scrutiny skills and feedback from those Members attending at the time was extremely positive. Total costs for this training amounted to £1,426.40.
8. Irrespective of recent changes to scrutiny arrangements, to demonstrate the historical pattern of low spend against this budget for a number of years, the position is as follows:
 - 2010/11 - £380
 - 2011/12 - £0
 - 2012/13 - £1,500 (health workshop facilitation)
 - 2013/14 - £0
 - 2014/15 - £2,500. Following a decision by this Committee in January 2015, the available budget was again used for scrutiny training purposes i.e.:
 - 3 cross party Members (and 2 officers) travelling to and attending the Annual Centre for Public Scrutiny Studies Conference and Awards;
 - £1k contribution to Leeds City Council to cover the cost of running the regional Joint Health & Overview Scrutiny Committee; and
 - Some travel expenses for a Councillor attending an event in London to gather information for an ongoing scrutiny review; and
 - 2 Members attending a Pupil Premium Conference

2015/16 - £350 in relation to support costs for the Tour De France Scrutiny Review.

9. Given the use of IT facilities and the internet in recent years as essential research tools, it is noticeable that there has been no need to 'buy in' paid external research in relation to the chosen reviews which have taken place. Significantly, any external research support engaged for scrutiny in the last decade has been at no cost to the Authority, as a result of the willingness on the part of external 'specialists' to engage freely with the Council. Such examples would be the Bootham Park Hospital review completed by the former Health & Adult Social Care Policy & Scrutiny Committee in September 2016 and academic support provided by the University of York and The Joseph Rowntree Foundation on various reviews.

Member Training

10. As reported in paragraphs 7 and 8 above, this particular research budget has sometimes been used for specific training on scrutiny, when there has been little or no spend in relation to specific research work.
11. There is, however, a specific budget set aside for Member Training. Annually, this amounts to £5k and is often supplemented specifically for an induction year of newly elected Members.
12. Prior to the start of the pandemic, Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs had planned to discuss the potential for specific scrutiny training for scrutiny members, looking at the possibility of utilising funds from this budget for the specific purpose. However, this Committee has acknowledged that any training for Scrutiny Members would now be best addressed as part of the full induction round following the forthcoming local elections in May 2023.

Consultation

13. No consultation was required on this report at this stage, given that it provides this Committee with their constitutional opportunity to consider making a recommendation to Executive for a research support budget for scrutiny.

Options

14. Having regard to the analysis section in this report, Members can
 - (i) to note the position and recommend to Executive not to provide any budget specifically to support external research and consultancy work for scrutiny in 2023/24 onwards; or

- (ii) to recommend Executive retains the current budgetary support for external research and consultancy work, explaining why; or
- (iii) to recommend Executive increases the current budgetary support for external scrutiny research/consultancy, explaining why and suggesting an appropriate figure.

Council Plan 2019-23

- 15. Whilst this report does not in itself materially affect how the work of scrutiny can support and develop the Council's overall priorities to set out in the new Council Plan 2019-23, how scrutiny organises itself and undertakes its activities could have a significant impact on how it contributes to the Council's development.

Implications

- 16. **Financial** – There would, of course, continue to be some financial impact should this Committee recommend continuing with a scrutiny research support budget, if the Executive supported that proposal. If funding continues at a comparatively low level as currently provided, then that impact would be minimal in comparison to the potential benefits of receiving any support, if required. However, in times of financial constraint upon all Councils following the pandemic, Members would be prudent to consider the recommendation of any funding most carefully for 2023/24, given the lack of spend over many consecutive years.
- 17. There are no Human Resources, Equalities, Legal, Information Technology, Crime & Disorder or other implications associated with the recommendations in this report. Constitutionally, this Committee has the right to recommend to Executive an appropriate budget to support scrutiny research.

Risk Management

- 18. Clearly, this Committee needs to address what it believes the current and future needs of scrutiny may be, taking into account the historical levels of spend and any potential impact on improvements to Council performance/services.

Conclusions

- 19. It is clear that there has been very little call on this budget spend since 2009/10 and that it has become a continuing trend for the budget not to be

required to be spent on external research or consultancy. Rather in recent years this Committee and other Scrutiny Committees have looked to diversify and seek to use the funds in alternative ways.

20. The reasons for this are diverse as referenced in this report. In part it is also due to the topics chosen in recent times and to a decreasing number of those running up to a local election year.
21. It is difficult to envisage scrutiny needing to call upon this particular budget in the coming year given the information contained in this report.

Recommendations

22. Members are asked to consider what recommendation to make to the Executive in relation to a scrutiny support budget for use on external consultation/market research, for consideration as part of the Council's budget setting process for 2023/24

Reason: To address the Committee's constitutional right to comment to Executive on setting the above scrutiny budget.

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Specialist Implications Officer(s)

None

All

Wards Affected:

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes: None