
Corporate & Scrutiny Management Policy & Scrutiny Committee

11 January 2016

Report of the Assistant Director, Governance & ICT

Scrutiny Review Support Budget

Summary

1. This report sets out the current position in relation to available Council funding for research for overview and scrutiny review work.
2. Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee has a constitutional right, under its delegated authority “to consider and recommend to the Executive a budget for scrutiny”. This report seeks to consult Members on any recommendations it may wish to make to the Executive prior to the budget setting process for 2016/17.

Background

3. For the 2010/11 financial year, this Committee decided not to recommend any change to its then existing base scrutiny support budget, which stood at £15k. The Budget Council meeting, however, in February 2011, agreed to cut that support budget, as part of a savings exercise.
4. The then Budget Council decision was taken against an understanding that there had, in reality, been little spend against the scrutiny support budget for the previous 3 to 4 years. This was with the notable exception of a consultation survey undertaken in relation to a scrutiny review into traffic congestion and its impact.
5. Subsequently, at Budget Council in February 2012 and upon the recommendation of the then Scrutiny Management Committee, Council agreed to reinstate a small support budget for scrutiny research work associated with reviews, in the sum of £5k.
6. Since that budget has been provided, Corporate & Scrutiny Management Policy & Scrutiny Committee has, in previous years, allocated £1k each

to the Standing Scrutiny Committees for use in supporting any research associated with scrutiny reviews.

Analysis

7. To date in the current financial year, there has been no spending against this budget. In the main, this is due to an influx of newer Members following the local elections in May 2015 and slight changes in the role of the Scrutiny Committees. All in all Scrutiny Members are still coming to terms with what they want to achieve specifically in their areas this year and no reviews agreed to date have required research support which it has been necessary to fund from this budget.
8. In 2014/15 the total spend against this budget was £2.5k in relation to:
 - 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
 - Accommodation expenses for Modgov training in Cardiff; and
 - 2 Members attending a Pupil Premium Conference.
9. Members should also be aware that historically, too, spend against this budget, when available, has been very little over the last few years, as follows:

2007/8 - £93

2008/9 - £620

2009/10 - £41 + £17k

2010/11 - £380

2012/13 - £1,500 (health work shop facilitation)

10. In 2009/10, a special carry forward to the budget was agreed by Council for the specific purpose of undertaking a public consultation survey in relation to an ongoing review at the time relating to traffic congestion.
11. Despite the comparatively low spend on external research support for scrutiny over the last few years; it does not appear, on the face of it, to have had a noticeable impact on Members undertaking scrutiny reviews. The Scrutiny Committees are proceeding with the following scrutiny reviews during the current year:

Corporate & Scrutiny Management Policy & Scrutiny Committee

Yearsley Pool Scrutiny Review – Abandoned July 2015

York Guildhall Scrutiny Report – September 2015

E-Democracy Scrutiny Review - ongoing

Standing Policy & Scrutiny Committees

Health and Adult Social Care

Public Health Grant Spending Review – ongoing

Bootham Park Hospital Review - ongoing

Community and Environment

Geese Management Review – ongoing

Alcohol Strategy Review (evolved from Hen and Stag parties Review) - ongoing

Learning & Culture

Tour de France Review – ongoing

York Museums Trust (YMT) Review to assist in the establishment of a new legal framework for the relationship between CYC and YMT – ongoing

Economic Development & Transport

A creative city uniquely utilising its distinctive heritage – ongoing

Unlocking brownfield sites for jobs and housing – ongoing

12. In addition, the Committees continue with a range of overview activities. In the case of Health and Community Safety, these Committees are also continuing with their statutory overview responsibilities in relation to health and crime and police affairs.
13. Given the explosion in the use of IT facilities and in the internet in recent years as essential research tools, it is noticeable that there has been less need to 'buy in' paid external research in relation to the chosen reviews over the last few years. Traffic congestion being a notable exception, although on that occasion, the specialist consultant used gave his time freely in support of that scrutiny work. Again, this year, consultant time is being given pro-bono in relation to supporting and advising on the Bootham Park Hospital review agreed by Health & Adult Social Care Policy & Scrutiny Committee.
14. The Chair of CSMPC is keen to ensure all Scrutiny Members have the appropriate skills and understanding to help them work with real purpose in scrutiny, delivering effective outcomes for policy and service improvement to our residents and visitors. Potentially, there is an opportunity to use this budget supporting those outcomes, provided Members of this Committee agree, in principle, and subject to proposals for training being delegated for approval to the Head of Civic & Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of this Committee.

Consultation

15. No consultation is 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 budget for scrutiny.

Options

16. (i) Having regard to the analysis section in this report, to note the position and recommend to Executive not to provide any budget specifically to support external research and consultancy work for scrutiny in 2016/17 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; and

- (iv) To allocate the use of the budget available in the current year for member training purposes, subject to detailed proposals being agreed by the Head of Civic & Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee.

Council Plan 2015-19

- 17. Whilst this report does not in itself materially affect how the work of scrutiny can support and develop the Council's overall priorities set out in the Council Plan 2015-2019, how scrutiny organises itself, selects and conducts its reviews could have a significant impact on how it contributes to the Council's development.

Implications

- 18. **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 of course is minimal in comparison to the potential benefits of receiving support, where required.
- 19. There are no Human Resources, Equalities, Legal, Information Technology, Crime & Disorder or other implications associated with this report. Constitutionally, this Committee has the right to recommend to Executive an appropriate budget to support scrutiny research.

Risk Management

- 20. 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 in the area concerned and any potential impact on improvements to Council performance. Based on previous years level of spend in this area, there is a risk that any budget allocation made in the future could largely remain unused.

Recommendations

- 21. Members are asked to consider whether they wish to:
 - (i) make a recommendation 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 2016/17; and

(ii) agree, in principle, to spending this year's allocation on appropriate training in scrutiny for Members and Officers, subject to a detailed programme being approved by the Head of Civic & Democratic Services, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee.

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

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Report Approved ☒ **Date** 22 December 2015

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

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Wards Affected:

All ☒

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes: None