
Scrutiny Management Committee

28 January 2008

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 2007/8. It also seeks Members views on the available budget for 2008/9, with a view to making a recommendation to the Council as part of the budget setting process.

Background

2. This Committee has the constitutional right to consider and recommend to Council a suitable scrutiny budget, to be used for the effective support of any agreed reviews during a year.
3. For the 2007/8 financial year, scrutiny was allocated a budget of £6,000 to support its reviews. This budget was originally £9,500 in the financial year 2004/5 and was reduced to the figure of £6,000 in the financial year 2005/6.

Budget Monitoring

4. As at January 2008, expenditure against this budget is £364. In September 2006, a sum of £250 of expenditure was allocated per Scrutiny Committee or Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee to support administrative and consultative processes associated with their reviews from this budget. This was agreed on the basis that requests for more funds could be made to Scrutiny Management Committee (SMC).
5. A request to SMC for additional funds from the Traffic Congestion Ad-hoc Scrutiny Committee has been included in their interim report to be considered at this meeting. The Education Scrutiny Committee is also planning to request additional funds in order to complete their review of School Governors, in the approximate amount of £550 (full details will be contained within their interim report to SMC in February 2008).
6. Expenditure so far this financial year has been minimal but a greater call on the budget is anticipated between now and the end of the financial year due to the above requests and a number of additional expenditure commitments in the pipeline as follows:

Health Scrutiny Committee

7. Public & Patients Consultation Event - room, equipment, catering etc - £300

Scrutiny Training for Members

8. Training provided in June 2007, awaiting invoice - £1,057

Consultation

9. 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 2008/9.

Options

10. The information on budget expenditure in 2007/8 to date is merely for noting. However, Members have the constitutional right to consider what recommendation they wish to make to Council in relation to the allocation of budget for supporting scrutiny reviews in 2008/9. Council will receive that recommendation at its budget meeting on 21 February 2008, consider it and set an appropriate figure for this budget accordingly.

Analysis

11. 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 2008/9;
 - c. The current budget climate in general

What is or Could the Budget be Used for?

12. 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
13. 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 2008, Members may

wish to take up more opportunities to inform their reviews through a wider range of consultative events and learning exercises.

14. The local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 envisages extending scrutiny powers to services external to the Council. As a result, funding for a wider range of consultative events and processes may be required.

Corporate Direction & Priorities

15. This report in terms of budget monitoring and making recommendations on a suitable level of budget for supporting scrutiny reviews, helps contribute to an effective and successful scrutiny process. This in turn supports the Council in moving forward in line with the direction statements set out in the recently refreshed Corporate Strategy.

Other Related Issues

16. 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 local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 referred to above.

Implications

15. **Financial** - Constitutionally, SMC is delegated to recommend to Council an appropriate support budget for scrutiny reviews.
16. There are no Human Resources, Equalities, Legal, ITT, Crime & Disorder or other implications associated with this report

Risk Management

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

Recommendations

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

Reason: To enable a robust scrutiny review support budget to be set for the 2008/9 financial year.

Contact Details

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**Report
Approved**



Date 21 January 2008

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Patrick Looker
Principal Accountant

Wards Affected:

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None.

Annexes

None.