

Report of the Assistant Director – Legal & Governance

Scrutiny Review Support Budget

Summary

1. This report sets out the current position in relation to available Council funding for research in support of scrutiny review work.
2. Corporate & Scrutiny Management Policy & Scrutiny Committee (CSMC) 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 2017/18.

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 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, and since that time this Committee has allocated £1k annually to each Scrutiny Committee for that purpose.

Analysis

6. In this current financial year to date 2016/17, the only scrutiny review that has required research / professional advice has been the Tour de France Scrutiny Review, in the amount of £350.
7. In 2015/16 there was no spending against this budget up to the end of January 2016, at which time it was agreed by this Committee that the budget could be used for member training purposes, subject to detailed proposals being agreed by the Head of Civic & Democratic Services, in consultation with this committee's Chair and Vice Chair. Subsequently, however, this Committee began to review its structure by which the scrutiny function operates. That review is still ongoing with a report due to Committee in February 2017. It was understood that Member training may be identified more specifically dependant upon the model chosen. As a result, it was considered prudent to await the outcome of the structural review before arranging Member training.
8. Members should also be aware that historically, spend against this budget has consistently been very little over the last few years, as follows:
 - 2007/8 - £93
 - 2008/9 - £620
 - 2009/10 - £41 + £17k (agreed by Council for the specific purpose of undertaking a public consultation survey in support of the traffic congestion scrutiny review ongoing at that time)
 - 2010/11 - £380
 - 2011/12 - £0
 - 2012/13 - £1,500 (health work shop facilitation)
 - 2013/14 - £0
 - 2014/15 - £2,500. Following a decision by this Committee in January 2015, the available budget was used for 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

Despite the comparatively low spend on external research support for scrutiny over the last few years; it does not appear to have had a noticeable impact on Members undertaking scrutiny reviews.

9. Given the use of IT facilities and 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. Where external research has been required in recent years, the specialist consultants used gave their time freely in support of that scrutiny work e.g. on the Bootham Park Hospital review completed by the Health & Adult Social Care Policy & Scrutiny Committee in September 2016.
10. Work continues on a number of other scrutiny reviews undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees during the current year:

Corporate & Scrutiny Management Policy & Scrutiny Committee

- E-Democracy Scrutiny Review - ongoing
- One Planet York - ongoing
- Electoral Arrangements – ongoing

Health and Adult Social Care

- Public Health Grant Spending - ongoing

Communities & Environment

- Ward Funding – ongoing
- Hate Crime Strategy – recently abandoned (January 2017)

Learning & Culture

- Tour de France Review – ongoing
- Play Provision – recently completed (January 2017)

Economic Development & Transport

- Impact of the arts and culture sectors on economic development in the city – ongoing
11. In addition, the Committees continue with a range of overview activities, and in the case of Health & Adult Social Care and Communities & Environment, with their statutory overview responsibilities in relation to health, and crime & disorder.
 12. Looking ahead to the coming municipal year, it is possible that there will be changes to the current scrutiny committee structure as a result of this Committee's ongoing review of the scrutiny function referred to previously in this report. In light of this, the Committee may well need to consider how best to allocate any scrutiny research budget most effectively. Equally, if scrutiny structures do change substantially, then there may be a need for more extensive training for Members. Members may take the view that this budget could be used to cover all or some training expenses supporting them in their scrutiny research. This does not prevent the Committee from agreeing in principle that a budget for external research and consultancy work is required for the coming financial year and to make an appropriate recommendation to the Executive, if that is the Committee's view

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 budget for scrutiny.

Options

14. (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 2017/18 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

Council Plan 2015-19

15. 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

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 of course is minimal in comparison to the potential benefits of receiving support, where required.
17. 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

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 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. Although, the ongoing scrutiny function review referred to could require some investment in Member training, to which any approved budget could potentially contribute.

Recommendations

19. 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 2017/18.

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

Contact Details

Author:

Dawn Steel
Head of Civic &
Democratic Services
Tel: (01904) 551030

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Andy Docherty
Assistant Director
Legal & Governance

Report Approved **Date**

6 January 2017

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Debbie Mitchell
Principal Accountant
Tel: (01904) 554161

All **Wards Affected:**

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None**Annexes:** None