
**Customer & Corporate Services Scrutiny
Management Committee**

22 January 2018

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. Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management 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 2018/19.

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 2017/18, spend against this budget totals £1,426.40 in respect of the scrutiny training workshops provided by the University of Birmingham for Scrutiny Chairs (as referred to at paragraph 6 below) and including travel and subsistence costs for the trainers, as well as lunchtime refreshments for attendees.
7. In 2015/16, this Committee agreed to allocate the available budget to cover required training costs for Scrutiny Chairs when appointed to reflect new working arrangements following the changes Council agreed to the scrutiny structure which became operational in June 2017. This training also doubled up as refresher training in scrutiny skills and feedback from those Members attending was extremely positive. Total costs for this training are as set out in paragraph 6 above as they materialised in 2017. The only costs recorded therefore in 2015/16 against the budget were £350 in relation to support costs for the Tour De France Scrutiny Review.
8. Members should also be aware that historically, spend against this budget has consistently been very little over the last few years, as follows:
 - 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 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

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.

8. At Council in December 2017, a motion was agreed by Councillors as follows:

“Council notes:

- That under the new Schools National Funding Formula, the Government is imposing real term cuts on schools by freezing per-pupil funding while inflation and school costs, such as staff salary costs, employer pension and national insurance contributions, which affect all schools and academies, increase.
- That schools in York are set to remain the lowest funded, when compared to any other local authority area in the country.
- That every child deserves the best possible start in life, and that an excellent education is pivotal to this, yet this Government’s Funding proposals will make it difficult for schools to meet the increasing demand of pupil numbers or address the growing national crisis in teacher recruitment and retention.
- The importance of the York Youth Council in providing a vital link between the Council and young people in facilitating a space where young people can actively engage in decisions which affect their future.
- The excellent contribution of staff and youth councillors to the Youth Council in its activities to support young people across the City, particularly in their campaign efforts to protect and develop mental health support in local schools.

Council resolves:

- To write to the Secretary of State for Education to highlight that York continues to remain the worst funded local authority and ask for her to reconsider York’s position.
- That the Council supports schools as much as possible during the implementation of the new National Funding Formula.

- That we urge the Executive to find ways to increase funding to the York Youth Council, including possibly **using some of the scrutiny budget** which is regularly under spent. York puts the views of young people at the heart of everything it does, therefore giving the Youth Council more resources to increase participation in influencing decision making and events for young people supports this and recognises the excellent efforts of the youth councillors.”
9. This Committee should note that there may be a consequential effect upon the scrutiny research budget should a financial contribution from it during the 2018/19 financial year be required, as approved in the above motion (see 3rd paragraph of under ‘Council resolves’ above). It is not anticipated, at this stage, that the contribution would use up the entire scrutiny research budget.
 10. 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 former Health & Adult Social Care Policy & Scrutiny Committee in September 2016.
 11. Work continues on a number of other scrutiny reviews undertaken by the Scrutiny Committees during the current municipal year:

Customer and Corporate Services Scrutiny Management Committee

- One Planet York – completed May 2017
- Electoral Arrangements – completed November 2017

Health, Housing and Adult Social Care Policy & Scrutiny Committee

- Public Health Grant Spending – completed June 2017
- Partner Engagement – ongoing

Children, Education & Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee

WW1 Commemorations 2018 – completed January 2018

- The Health & Wellbeing of Young People in York (topic currently under consideration for review)

Economy & Place Policy Development Committee Impact of the arts and culture sectors on economic development in the city – completed November 2017

- CYC Fleet Replacement Policy – ongoing

Economy & Place Scrutiny Committee

No specific review yet started

12. In addition, the Committees continue with a range of overview activities, including the statutory overview responsibilities in relation to health, crime & disorder, education, and floods.

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 2018/19 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 note the commitment agreed by Council on 15 December 2017 to fund some support to the Youth Council from within this budget should it be necessary.

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 would be 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 continuing risk that any budget allocation made in the future could largely remain unused.

Recommendations

19. Members are asked to:
 - (i) 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 2018/19; and
 - (ii) note the commitment given by Full Council at its meeting on 15 December 2017 to fund some support for Youth Council work from within this budget, should it be required.

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**

8 January 2018

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

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All ☒

Wards Affected:

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes: None