

Scrutiny Management Committee

16 June 2008

Report from Democratic Services Manager

Request For Funding

Summary

1. This report re-presents a request from Traffic Congestion Ad-hoc Scrutiny Committee for additional funding to finance a citywide survey on the broad strategic options available to the city to tackle traffic congestion.

Background

2. In January 2008, this Committee considered an interim report from the Traffic Congestion Ad-hoc Scrutiny Committee which detailed the work completed to date, sought approval to extend the timeframe for the review and requested additional funding in the amount of £17,000 for a consultation exercise which would gather residents views on the broad strategic options available to the city to tackle traffic congestion. This consultative work would be specific to the scrutiny review and not part of any ongoing work being carried out by City Strategy.
3. This Committee considered the alternative options for gathering responses from York residents and noted that the preferred method of consultation, a postal survey to all York households, would ensure residents participation and engagement, rather than just gathering statistical analysis. A breakdown of the costs involved are shown at Annex A.
4. Members discussed in detail the differences between holding a talkabout special and sending a survey to all residents through the Your Ward/Your City route. Some Members thought that the talkabout panels were not comprised of a good socio-economic cross-section of the community; they also questioned how much could be achieved for £6,000. Officers commented that it would be possible to ask more in-depth questions by using the talkabout facility.
5. The Chair of the Traffic Congestion Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee stressed that these issues were relevant to the whole of the York public and therefore everyone should be consulted which is why the request was for £17,000 to enable full consultation to take place.

6. This Committee raised a number of queries about alternative funding sources and ways in which the costs involved could be reduced, and their legal powers to request additional scrutiny funding from the Executive to cover the request made by the Traffic Congestion Ad-hoc Scrutiny Committee. It was agreed to defer the decision on funding the survey until a later meeting to allow further information to be provided and to ensure an appropriate officer was in attendance to answer questions on consultation and engagement mechanisms.
7. In February 2008 a further report was presented which confirmed that there were no alternative funding options to support local transport research and that scrutiny had no legal powers to enforce the Executive to allocate funds to support the scrutiny review process. It was therefore agreed to make a request for the required additional funding from the Executive.
8. On 6 May 2008, the Executive considered the request and having noted the advice of the Shadow Executive, agreed to provide additional funding for the scrutiny function in the amount of £17,000 and invited this Committee to choose between the following two options:
 - **Option A** – to agree to release the £14k currently allocated in the contingency provision for Scrutiny activities, plus £3k from reserves, for use in fully funding the application from the Traffic Congestion Scrutiny Committee.
 - **Option B** – to make available appropriate funding from reserves, up to a value of £6k, to facilitate an assessment of public opinion on the options for addressing traffic congestion issues in the City using existing mechanisms such as ‘Your City’, ‘Talkabout’ and the Council’s on-line consultation module.
9. The Traffic Congestion Ad-hoc Scrutiny Committee are meeting on 12 June to consider a draft of their final report which details their findings to date. It also shows how they intend to include the views of York residents in their final report and use them to inform their final recommendations – see Annex B (to follow).

Consultation

10. The Head of Marketing and Communications was consulted on the various methods available for engaging the public. He drew a distinction between consultation and research by defining research as ‘the collection and analysis of data to provide greater understanding’ and consultation as ‘a process of dialogue that leads to a decision.’ The Finance Manager from City Strategy also provided information on the financial implications associated with the preferred option for funding.

Options

11. Having considered all of the information provided within the report and annex Members may:
- provide the relevant funding in line with one of the options offered by the Executive, or;
 - reject the application from Traffic Congestion Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Sub-Committee for additional funds for a consultation exercise.

Analysis

12. The table below details the relative advantages and disadvantages of the 'Talkabout Special', compared to the proposal from Traffic Congestion Ad-hoc Scrutiny Sub-Committee to produce a full survey distribution as part of Your Ward/Your City. It contrasts the two available suggestions based on advice received from the Head of Marketing & Communications.

	Cost	Advantages	Disadvantages
Your Ward/Your City Survey	£17k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteed distribution to all York households in an effort to secure the views of a diverse cross section of residents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expensive • Consultation 'fatigue' may undermine feedback / engagement • Self-selecting and responses not guaranteed from cross section of community • Timing of survey restricted to production of Your Ward
Talkabout Special	£6k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known research tool representative of the community • Guaranteed engagement from cross section of community • Proven record as representative sounding board • More financially viable • Flexibility over timing of 'consultation' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not reach 90,000 households

Corporate Direction & Priorities

12. In regard to the recommendation within this report, it is recognised that the additional funding of £17,000 will enable ad-hoc scrutiny committee to identify the views of residents and inform any future decisions made in regard to tackling congestion, which is in line with our corporate value to 'Deliver what our customers want'.

Implications

13. **Financial** - At its meeting in January 2008, SMC agreed to make a recommendation to Budget Council to increase its research support budget for 2008/9 to £20k. This was not approved, but Council agreed to put £14,000 into contingency for future scrutiny use that SMC could request, subject to requirements.
14. The direct financial implications associated with approving either "consultation" proposed are set out against each option in paragraph 8 of the report.
15. **Human Resources (HR)** – Irrespective of the method used i.e. a survey of all York residents via the 'Your Ward/Your City' publication, or a talkabout special, Marketing & Communications would seek to absorb the extra work into the existing workloads in the research team. Given the subject matter, they will require a six week lead-in time to ensure the right information is presented and the relevant questions are included.
16. **Legal** - With the exception of urgent action, the Executive may only make decisions within the confines of the budget allocated by Full Council, subject to any flexibility afforded by the council's financial regulations. Any decision resulting in expenditure outside of the budgetary framework will be conditional upon the approval of Full Council. (Legal Implications provided by Quentin Baker).
17. There are no known, Equalities, Crime & Disorder, ITT, Property or other implications associated with the recommendation within this report

Risk Management

18. There is a potential risk associated with the consultation exercise in that it may not truly engage residents in the way that Members of the Ad-hoc Scrutiny Sub-Committee are hoping. Equally, any form of consultation about broad strategic options for dealing with congestion could raise public expectations about future Council decisions.

Recommendations

18. Members are asked to consider whether they wish to now provide additional funding in relation to the request and if so at what level, given the advice of the Executive on this matter.

Reason: To enable consultation to proceed, as appropriate.

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Report Approved



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Specialist Implications

Legal Implications:
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Financial Implications:
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HR Implications:
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Wards Affected:

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: Traffic Congestion Ad-hoc Scrutiny Review – Draft Final Report dated 12 June 2008

Annexes

Annex A – Costings for carrying out a survey via ‘Your Ward/Your City’

Annex B – Draft Final Report from the Traffic Congestion Scrutiny Review (*to follow*)