
Scrutiny Management Committee

17 December 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 2008/9. It also seeks Members views on the available budget for 2009/10, 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 2008/9 financial year, scrutiny was allocated a basic budget of £6,000 to support its reviews. However, an additional sum of £14,000 was also set aside by Council from the Contingency Fund to undertake further research/consultancy work requested by the ongoing Traffic Congestion Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Sub-Committee. As a result, it is understood that year on year a research/consultancy support budget of £20,000 is now available, subject to any savings cuts which the Council may, of course, decide to make against this budget at its Budget Meeting in February 2009.

Budget Monitoring

4. As at December 2008, expenditure against this budget is £570. So, far the full resident survey planned by the Traffic Congestion Ad Hoc Scrutiny Sub-Committee has not yet been effected and was originally estimated to cost around £17k. It is still possible that that survey could be commissioned, undertaken and charged for within the current financial year. However, that would become more unlikely as time progresses.
5. 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).

6. Only one request for additional funds has been made to SMC this year so far – this being from Education Scrutiny Committee in respect of its school governors review, when they requested a further £650 to undertake a full survey.

Consultation

7. 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

8. The information on budget expenditure in 2008/9 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.
9. Members also have the option to review the sum allocated for spend on each agreed review. As referred to in paragraph 5 above, that amount is currently £250 but is relatively low. Given the on year increase in this support budget, Members may wish to consider revising the sum initially awarded for reviews, by increasing it to £500.

Analysis

10. 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 2009/10;
 - c. The current budget climate in general;

What is or Could the Budget be Used for?

11. 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 taking place
 - d. Publicity associated with any of the above
 - e. Conferences and training events in relation to any Member training on scrutiny or an ongoing review.

- f. Surveys/questionnaires
 - g. Consultant fees (where appropriate). In the last 2 years, technical experts (eg. In relation to Traffic Congestion Review) have been co-opted onto the Scrutiny Committees and given their time, freely.
12. In the next financial year, it is anticipated that the budget will be largely used in much the same way. However, it is envisaged that the decision taken by Council to adopt an alternative scrutiny structure will have an effect upon this budget. As from the Annual Meeting in 2009, there are likely to be more standing scrutiny committees with wider remits and in turn, it is possible that they will undertake a greater number of reviews and commission more of the above information gathering exercises.

In view of the decision by Council, Members may take the view indeed that they should make no comment on this budget to the Executive at this time, until further progress has been with the structural arrangements arising from Council's decision.

Corporate Direction & Priorities

13. 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.

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. This may be considered to be particularly relevant at a time when the Council is changing its existing scrutiny structure.

Recommendations

17. Members are asked to

- (i) note the report, the current budget position and to recommend a budget to the Council for supporting scrutiny reviews;
- (ii) consider whether they wish to increase the amount initially allocated for research supporting agreed reviews to £500 per review.

Reason: To enable a robust scrutiny review support budget to be set for the 2009/10 financial year.

Contact Details

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**Report
Approved**



Date

12 December
2008

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.