
Scrutiny Management Committee

1 February 2009

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 2009/10. It also seeks Members views on the available budget for 2010/11, with a view to making a recommendation to the Council as part of the budget setting process.
2. The Chair of Scrutiny Management Committee has agreed to accept this report onto the agenda for the meeting of this Committee on Monday 1 February, 2010, at short notice, to enable a constitutional requirement to be met providing Members of this Committee with the opportunity to comment upon the level of budget which may be set for supporting scrutiny reviews in 2010/11.

Background

3. Scrutiny Management 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.
4. For the 2009/10 financial year, scrutiny was allocated a basic budget of £17,000 to support its reviews. However, an additional sum of £22,000 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.

Budget Monitoring

5. As at January 2010, expenditure against this budget stands at £808. It is likely due to ongoing reviews and commitments that a further £1,500 will be spent this financial year on scrutiny topics/events.
6. A breakdown of expenditure against this budget over the last 3 years is attached. is annexed to this report.

7. The full resident survey on traffic congestion is about to be published and distributed to residents in February 2010. It can be assumed with relative confidence therefore that the money for this survey will be spent in the current financial year, bringing the budget in 2009/10 to an estimated total spend of £22,308 approximately.
8. In January 2008, this Committee agreed an initial sum of £500 per Committee to cover research/marketing expenses which may be incurred on reviews. Any requests for funds in excess of that amount would still need to be approved by SMC.
9. In May 2009, the Council changed its scrutiny structures and appointed 5 Standing Scrutiny Committees instead of 2. Potentially, this could, of course, increase the demand for funds from SMC. However, to date no additional requests have been made to SMC this financial year and none are identifiable at the moment.

Consultation

- 10 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 2010/11.

Options

11. The information on budget expenditure in 2009/10 to date is provided to inform Members in considering what recommendation they wish to make to Council (via the Budget Executive meeting on 16 February 2010) in relation to the allocation of budget for supporting scrutiny reviews in 2009/10. Members need to take this into account to consider whether, in the current financial climate, it would be appropriate to recommend an amount significantly in excess of likely spend.
12. 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 £500. It is suggested that it would be reasonable to retain £500 as the appropriate initial amount per Committee in that regard, currently.

Analysis

13. 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?

14. 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. Training events in relation to any Member training on scrutiny or an ongoing review
 - f. Surveys/questionnaires
 - g. Venues for consultative sessions
 - h. 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.

15. Based on the levels of spend against this budget in previous years, it is not unreasonable to assume that the levels of spend in the next financial year will be somewhat similar, despite the new scrutiny structure. For that reason, the Head of Civic, Democratic & Legal Services has authorised the Head of Financial Services to vire between £8-10k from this budget to cover the cost of local Standards Board assessment cases and the ongoing maintenance of a Mansion House website (neither of which has any current available funding). It should be noted that the base budget will then remain at £7k for supporting scrutiny reviews. The analysis attached shows that that amount should be more than adequate for the purposes of supporting scrutiny reviews, based on previous levels of spend. Any more costly research projects would, in any event, need to be considered by SMC, as was the case with funding for the survey on traffic congestion.

Corporate Strategy

16. This report in terms of budget monitoring and making recommendations on a suitable level of budget for supporting scrutiny reviews, helps contribute to an organised and effective scrutiny process. This in turn supports the Council's aims to become an 'effective organisation'.

Implications

17. **Financial** - Constitutionally, SMC should be consulted upon an appropriate support budget for scrutiny reviews. Details of current and previous levels of spend against this budget over the last few years are set out in Annex A to this report. An analysis of the situation is set out above.

18. There are no Human Resources, Equalities, Legal, ITT, Crime & Disorder or other implications associated with this report

Risk Management

19. There are no known risks associated with the recommendations in 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 this Committee failed to make a recommendation of any kind.

Recommendations

20. Members are asked to
- (i) note the current budget position for 2009/10, together with the level of spend in recent years and to recommend an appropriate budget to the Council (via Budget Executive meeting) for supporting scrutiny reviews, in light of that information;
 - (ii) confirm that the amount from the budget allocated directly to Scrutiny Committees should remain at £500 initially, subject to requests for more funds from those Committees being made to SMC if necessary.

Reason: To enable Council to set an informed scrutiny review support budget for the 2010/11 financial year.

Contact Details

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Services

**Report
Approved**



Date 27 January 2010

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

Annex A – Budget Expenditure