

Scrutiny Support Budget

Purpose of Report

1. This report advises Members of the new support budget allocated to scrutiny by Cabinet and endorsed by Council in setting the budget for 2012/13. It is for this Committee to determine how it wishes to allocate the available budget.

Background

2. Prior to the 2011/12 financial year, scrutiny had always had a support budget to assist with research, consultation and marketing associated with its reviews. Spend against that had been variable for a number of years when the Council decided not to renew any form of budget support for reviews in February 2011.
3. In December 2011, the then Scrutiny Management Committee (SMC) lobbied the Cabinet for a budget of £5,000 to be reinstated. SMC felt that not having any budget to spend in supporting their work considerably restricted what work or reviews scrutiny could take on. In the light of those representations, Cabinet recommended to Council in February 2012 that a support budget for scrutiny reviews/activities of £5,000 be reinstated. That was agreed by Council at its February Budget meeting.

Analysis

4. At the Annual Meeting in May 2012, two scrutiny Committees became one (SMC and Effective Organisation Committee merged) and the Corporate Scrutiny & Management Committee was formed. It is this Committee (CSMC) which is responsible for the overall effectiveness and performance of the other 4 Standing Scrutiny Committees: Economic & City Development; Learning & Culture; Health; and Community Safety. It falls to this Committee therefore to 'manage' the £5,000 support budget and allocate spend accordingly.

5. There are 4 main Standing Scrutiny Committees on the Council's Structure, as referenced above, plus this Committee which has the right to set up cross cutting Ad-Hoc Scrutiny Committees.
6. One way to allocate the £5,000 would simply be to divide that equally between all 5 Scrutiny Committees, leaving this Committee to allocate its £1,000 in supporting its work of those of cross cutting Ad-Hocs as it sees fit. The other Standing Scrutiny Committees would then manage their allocation of £1,000 each as they saw fit in support of their scrutiny work.
7. Naturally, this budget cannot be spent by individual Members, nor can it be used to support expense claims on travel or subsistence for Members or Officers working on scrutiny reviews. These are the types of activities these funds can be spent on in the furtherance of good scrutiny work:
 - Commissioning specialist research work on appropriate reviews, including consultant time where appropriate;
 - Undertaking/contributing to targeted consultation or surveys associated with agreed review work;
 - Expenses associated with gathering information/evidence in support of reviews, eg undertaking site or field trips, purchasing written material;
 - Hiring specific venues to run sessions in communities or places of specific relevance to the review, including drop-in surgeries
8. There are alternative approaches to allocating the funds. For instance, CSMC could retain the funds and ask the Standing Scrutiny Committees to make an application to CSMC when they want to spend on any of the above related activities. Undoubtedly, this approach would slow the scrutiny process down considerably. In terms of monitoring the progress and performance of the Scrutiny Committees, CSMC can request bi-annual reports from Chairs and can invite Chairs to report to it at any point in the Municipal Year.

Consultation

9. The Chair of this Committee has introduced regular Scrutiny Chairs/Vice-Chairs meetings and at the first meeting, all Chairs/Vice Chairs present were specifically consulted on how this spend should be allocated. All those Members present indicated that dividing it up equally at £1,000 per Committee was the fairest option.

Council Plan 2011-15

10. Providing some financial support to undertake scrutiny reviews aimed at improving the overall performance or standards of the Authority, is in keeping with the improvement targets and direction statements driven by the Council Plan.

Options

11. Having considered the different approaches to allocating this spend set out in the analysis above, this Committee may choose to:
 - Allocate the funds equally at £1,000 per Committee, subject to the uses set out in paragraph 7 above; or
 - Retain the funds for spend based on application from Committees; or
 - Propose an alternative approach

Associated Implications

12. There are no known implications associated with the recommendation in this report, other than the potential for Committees to wish to 'overspend' their allocation. It will be the role of CSMC to ensure that overall the funds remain within budget. CSMC will have the authority to redirect expenditure if some Committees have a very specific or more deserving case for higher spend and other Committees are well below the allocated budget. Standing Scrutiny Committees will need to apply to CSMC if they believe they have a case for spending in excess of their allocated provision.

Risk Management

13. There are no known risks associated with the recommendation below, other than the risk of variable spend identified in paragraph 12 above. To mitigate the risk of the funds not being allocated in overall terms where they may be best used, CSMC is advised to request an update on allocation of funds in 6 months time.

Recommendations

14. Members are asked to consider how they wish to allocate funds from the £5,000 support budget to ensure provision is made available to all Scrutiny Committees.

Reason: To enable the work of Scrutiny Committees to progress effectively

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Report Approved



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10 July 2012

Wards Affected:

For further information please contact the author of the report

All



Background Papers: N/A