

Report of the Assistant Director, Governance & ICT

SCRUTINY REVIEW SUPPORT BUDGET

Summary

1. This report sets out the current position in relation to available Council funding for research for overview and scrutiny review work.
2. Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee has a constitutional right, under its delegated authority “to consider and recommend to Cabinet a budget for scrutiny”. This report seeks to consult Members on any recommendations it may wish to make to Cabinet prior to the budget setting process for 2014/15.

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, in reality, 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.
6. Since that budget has been provided, Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee has agreed, in principle, to allocate £1k each to the Standing

Scrutiny Committees for use in supporting any research associated with scrutiny reviews.

Analysis

7. To date in the current financial year, total spend against this budget has been £380.00. Largely, this is in relation to sessions held with a variety of consultees on scrutiny reviews and in particular around the collective late night economy review.
8. In 2012/13, the spend against this budget was £1,500 in relation to the workshop design and facilitation for the still ongoing personalisation review conducted by a Task Group of Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee.
9. Members should also be aware that historically, too, spend against this budget, when available, has been very little over the last few years, as follows:

2007/8 - £93

2008/9 - £620

2009/10 - £41 + £17k

2010/11 - £380
10. In 2009/10, a special carry forward to the budget was agreed by Council for the specific purpose of undertaking a public consultation survey in relation to an ongoing review at the time relating to traffic congestion.
11. Despite the comparatively low spend on external research support for scrutiny over the last few years; it does not appear, on the face of it, to have had a noticeable impact on Members undertaking scrutiny reviews. Following a work planning session with Cabinet and Scrutiny Members in May 2013, the Scrutiny Committees are proceeding with the following scrutiny reviews during the current year:

CSMC

Equalities Review

Standing Overview & Scrutiny Committees

Each of the four Overview & Scrutiny Committees are involved with work on their individual night-time economy scrutiny reviews in support of the

corporate review theme agreed by Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee.

Health

Personalisation Review

Men's Health Review (deferred after one Task Group meeting).

Community Safety

Domestic Waste Review

A-Boards Review

Learning & Culture

School Meals Review

Careers, Education, Information, Advice, & Guidance Review (approved by Cabinet on 5 November 2013)

Economic & City Development

Construction Skills Review.

Online Business / Ecommerce Skills Review (Task Group to be appointed 28 January 2014)

12. In addition, the Committees continue with a range of overview activities. In the case of Health and Community Safety, these Committees are also continuing with their statutory overview responsibilities in relation to health and crime and police affairs.
13. Given the explosion in the use of IT facilities and in 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. Traffic congestion being a notable exception, although on that occasion, the specialist consultant used gave his time freely in support of that scrutiny work

Consultation

14. No consultation is required on this report at this stage, given that it provides this Committee with their constitutional opportunity to consider making a recommendation to Cabinet for a budget for scrutiny.

Options

15. (i) Having regard to the analysis section in this report, to note the position and recommend to Cabinet not to provide any budget specifically to support external research and consultancy work for scrutiny in 2014/15 onwards; or
- (ii) To recommend Cabinet retains the current budgetary support for external research and consultancy work, explaining why; or
- (iii) To recommend Cabinet increases the current budgetary support for external scrutiny research/consultancy, explaining why and suggesting an appropriate figure

Council Plan 2011-2015

16. 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 2011-2015, how scrutiny organises itself, selects and conducts its reviews could have a significant impact on how it contributes to the Council's development.

Implications

17. **Financial** – There would, of course, continue to be some financial impact should this Committee recommend continuing with a scrutiny research support budget, if Cabinet supported that proposal. If funding continues at a comparatively low level as currently provided, then that impact of course is minimal in comparison to the potential benefits of receiving expert support, where required.
18. 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 Cabinet an appropriate budget to support scrutiny research.

Risk Management

19. 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, including the existing financial year, there is a risk that any budget allocation made in the future could largely remain unused.

Recommendations

20. Members are asked to consider whether they wish to make a recommendation to Cabinet 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 2014/15.

Reason: To address the Committee's constitutional right to comment to Cabinet on setting the above scrutiny budget

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Specialist Implications Officer(s)

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Wards Affected:

For further information please contact the author of the report

All

Background Papers: None

Annexes: None