

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 in relation to research for overview and scrutiny review work.
2. Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee (CSMC) has a constitutional right, under its delegated authority “to consider and recommend to Cabinet a budget for scrutiny”. This report seeks to consult the Committee on any recommendations it may wish to make to Cabinet prior to the budget setting process for 2015/16.

Background

3. Every year, this Committee receives a report updating the position relating to budget spend on scrutiny research support and inviting it to make a recommendation to Council on the level of budget in this area for the coming financial year 2015/16.
4. Whilst there have been fluctuations in the level of budget allocated to scrutiny research support in recent years, the last 2 years have seen a consistent allocation of £5k per annum.
5. With its £5k allocation for the current financial year 2014/15, Corporate & Scrutiny Management Committee decided to spread that across each of the Overview & Scrutiny Committees (OSC), including itself, giving a potential level of spend of £1k per Committee.

Analysis

6. To date spend against this budget this financial year is approximately £2,215.00. This covers the costs of:

- 3 cross party Members (and 2 officers) travelling to and attending the Annual Centre for Public Scrutiny Studies Conference and Awards;
- £1k contribution to Leeds City Council to cover the cost of running the regional Joint Health & Overview Scrutiny Committee; and
- Some travel expenses for a Councillor attending an event in London to gather information for an ongoing scrutiny review;

7. Members should also be aware that historically, too, spend against this budget, when available, has been variable over the last few years, as follows:

2010/11 - £380

2011/12 – no budget

2012/13 – £1,500

2013/14 - £486

8. Since the financial year for 2011/12, when Council did not allocate a budget for scrutiny research support based on previous levels of spend, an annual budget of £5k has been allocated by successive Councils.
9. 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. During the current Municipal Year, Scrutiny Committees have embarked upon or completed the following reviews:

Economic & City Development OSC

Higher Value Jobs: Final report due January 2015.

Online Skills: Final report due March 2015.

Supporting Older People: Task Group formed, review started but abandoned November 2014.

Health OSC

Supporting Older People: Task Group formed, work ongoing, no date for final report.

Community Safety OSC

A Boards: Final report due January 2015

Domestic Waste Recycling: Final report September 2014

Discretionary Charges in Waste Management: Started but no longer proceeding during this municipal year.

Learning & Culture OSC

Disabled Access: Final Report due March 2015

Entrepreneurship in York Schools: Final Report due March 2015.

Narrowing the Gap: Review agreed, Task Group formed, to be concluded before start of purdah period.

CSMC

Equalities Review: Final report November 2014

New Review Requests:

Local Health Services

Yearsley Pool.

10. 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.
11. 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.

Consultation

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

Options

13. Having regard to the level of spend to date this year and in previous years:
 - (i) to recommend Cabinet retains the current budgetary support for external research and consultancy work, explaining why; or
 - (iii) to recommend an appropriate alternative figure, giving reasons. If the Committee were minded to consider an appropriate increase in this funding, then it would be prudent to provide Cabinet with a detailed explanation, in view of the continuing financial climate and pressures being faced by the Council and in view of the comparatively low levels of spend against this budget in recent years.

Council Plan 2011-2015

14. 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

15. **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' information/advice, where required.
16. There are no Human Resources, Equalities, Legal, ITT, Crime & Disorder or other implications associated with this report. Constitutionally, the Committee has the right to recommend to Cabinet an appropriate budget to support scrutiny research.

Risk Management

17. 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, there continues to be a risk that any budget allocation made in this area could be under utilised, dependent upon the nature of reviews and overview work undertaken in any given year.

Recommendations

18. Members are asked to consider what recommendation they wish to make 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 2015/16.

Reason: To address the constitutional right of CSMC to comment to Cabinet on setting the above scrutiny budget

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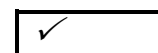
Report Approved **Date** 22 December 2015

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