

Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 February 2024

Written question from Cllr Chris Jarman to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee:

Background:

Cost of external consultants in answering questions submitted to IWC committees.

I submitted a written question ([MQ 01-24](#)) to the last meeting of Corporate Scrutiny of 9th January 2024 requesting clarity by the committee on the correct interpretation of our Constitution relating to the entitlement of Opposition Groups to receive necessary information and support leading to their submission of an Alternative Budget Proposal.

The Committee requested written answers to the questions from the 3 statutory officers. The committee and I have received their response.

The statutory officers choose to engage external consultants on the matter. In doing so the external consultants:

- were asked questions other than those requested and such that the amended questions led the external consultants to consider matters that were not in contention (such as the entitlement by statute of the Cabinet to prepare a budget) and which implied confidentiality issues that were likewise accepted (such as the confidentiality of material post Cabinet input) and,
- were instructed without informing either the Chair of Corporate Scrutiny or the Vice Chair of Corporate Scrutiny of such intention to pursue external consultation at cost to the public purse and,
- were instructed without informing either the Chair of Corporate Scrutiny or the Vice Chair of Corporate Scrutiny of the quotation for the work and hence enabling decision as to the merits of such public expenditure and,
- were instructed without giving either the Chair of Corporate Scrutiny or the Vice Chair of Corporate Scrutiny or the Member submitting said questions, sight of the proposed letter of engagement/instruction.

The result was a report from the external consultants that failed to address the original very specific questions but rather caused them to dilate at length on irrelevant matters. Further, given the nature of the amended questions the external consultants considered matters from an incorrect perspective rendering their response of little, if any merit. This correspondingly led to a reply to Corporate Scrutiny that is, for the most part, irrelevant.

Question(s):

- a) Who authorised the external commissioning of input to the questions referred by Corporate Scrutiny and under which Cabinet Member was this expense incurred?
- b) What were the costs to IWC and hence public purse of the external referral of the amended questions from Corporate Scrutiny Committee?

- c) Will Corporate Scrutiny Committee require disclosure of the associated invoices as attachments online to the answer to this question, said being in the public interest and overriding any issue of disclosure or confidentiality and of having been relied upon in the response to Corporate Scrutiny and of having been commissioned without the agreement of the Chair or Vice Chair of Corporate Scrutiny?

Response

The question was discussed by the committee, and it was determined that further discussion would take place directly between Cllr Jarman and the Chief Executive.