

Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 February 2024

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

Background:

Use 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 answers to Corporate Scrutiny that were, for the most part, irrelevant.

Question(s):

Do the Corporate Scrutiny Committee agree:

- a) Questions referred to Officers from any committee should not be forwarded to solicit input (or otherwise at cost) to external consultant(s) or to any non-IWC Officer(s) without prior discussion and with the explicit agreement of the Chair and Vice Chair of said committee, having due regard to the costs to

the public purse, rationale for Officers being unable to answer said questions themselves and the delay in addressing the matters.

- b) Member questions referred to Officers from any committee that are subsequently forwarded to external consultants must be forwarded without amendment and any guidance or letter of instruction to be with the explicit agreement of the Chair and Vice Chair of the said committee and of the Member submitting said question(s).

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.