

To: Cabinet

Date: 14 September 2022

Report/Comments of: Scrutiny Committee

Title: Scrutiny Feedback to Cabinet – Consultancy and Agency Use

SUMMARY OF REPORT CONSIDERED

Report Title: Consultancy and Agency Use

Purpose/Description of Report: Provided an overview on the Council's approach to resource management, including recruitment, retention, vacancy management and the use of consultancy and agency spend in support of the Council's corporate objectives.

Key Decision: No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Cllr R Child, Scrutiny Committee Chairman

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Cllr R de Burle, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Governance, Finance and Resources

1. Introduction and Overview

The Scrutiny Committee met on 25 July 2022 to consider a report on Consultancy and Agency Use.

The report provided a comprehensive overview on the Council's approach to resource management, including recruitment, retention, vacancy management and the use of consultancy and agency spend in support of the Council's corporate objectives.

The report sets out the rationale for responsible and effective resourcing, flexible management of capacity and capability including where the use of consultant support or capacity is considered the right solution.

2. Summary of Feedback/Recommendations for Cabinet Consideration

- A question was asked about whether there was an occasion where the Council had hired a consultant or expertise to produce a report and/or recommendations but the Council had not acted on the information it had received. Members were informed that the information and advice that the Council receives from a consultant or expert is used in one capacity or another and that the case studies within the report seek to demonstrate this.
- Following this point, a Member questioned what happens to information that isn't used, a specific example was given in relation to consultancy support to the previous leisure procurement undertaken in 2016/17. Officers were clear that the previous leisure procurement had not been realistic in its expectations, a position formally confirmed and accepted by the Council in 2018. The current corporate strategy recognises that consolidation of leisure centres will be necessary to establish a sustainable future and that significant focus is being given to establishing whether an affordable way forward exists.
- A Member questioned whether the Council continue to receive consultancy services from the consultant who delivered the Health and Leisure Park presentation in January 2022, as there was concern that the consultant does not understand the needs or market of Melton. Officers have previously acknowledged and reiterated recognition that the January 2022 briefing did not hit the mark and that this feedback had been taken on board. The consultants involved were part of a wider multi-disciplinary team and the firm engaged were properly procured and remain industry experts, recognised across the sector, and who have helped many other councils deliver their leisure centres. As mentioned the key focus for their engagement currently is answering the fundamental question regarding affordability of future provision.
- A query was raised as to how much the Council had spent on consultants, as it was noted that the figures provided did not include monies spent on consultants to create the baseline energy study. Subsequent clarification was provided that the document provided represented a comprehensive overview of the last 3 years and the reason the baseline energy study was not included was because expenditure was being incurred in this financial year.
- A comment was made whether the Council needed additional in-house capacity as opposed to consultants. In response it was highlighted that the Council is committed to building the strongest possible in-house team, but there are occasions, as set out in the report, where it represents greater value for money to commission external expertise.

It was also noted that the Council's spending power is 42% smaller now than in 2010 and therefore the Council has to be extremely innovative at utilising resources and leveraging external funding, something Officers have been extremely successful in doing over recent years.

- A question was raised as to whether the Council are receiving value for money in relation to consultancy fees spent on tourism. It was clarified that funding provided to the external provider had been reduced over recent years, and that an in-house resource had been appointed over the last 18 months to strengthen the local provision. It was recognised that the Scrutiny Committee had identified this as an area of interest for their work programme and that the Committee would consider the issue in more detail at a future workshop.

Written by: Scrutiny Committee Chairman in consultation with Members of the Scrutiny Committee