

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 September 2024

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet

1 CONSULTANT USE AT THE COUNCIL

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a review of the Council's use of consultants and a scoping report (Annex 1) was agreed by this Committee. It was agreed that the focus would be on the use of external expertise and not persons employed to provide day to day operational resource.

1.1.2 A summary of consultant use, where external expertise has been provided over the previous four financial years was to be presented to this committee for further consideration. This detail is now attached at Annex 2.

1.1.3 All services across the council have listed external expertise that has been used over the previous four years. The detail includes the total cost, the business need, monitoring and procurement process along with outcomes and possible risks if external support had not been sought.

1.2 Areas for consideration

1.2.1 The details provided in Annex 2 provide the Committee with a concise overview, which highlights commendable practices and areas the Committee may require further information or consideration. It is apparent that some of the external support provided has resulted in cost savings and efficient project delivery, which would not have been possible without external experts.

1.2.2 The Committee may want to consider the details provided in Annex 2, to assess how external support aligns with the council's long-term objectives and priorities. The Committee may want to consider if any of the engagements could have been delivered via internal capacity building or if it continues to be more effective to utilise external expertise for specialist project delivery. The Committee may want to consider if the council is effective at retaining specialist talent, to allow for delivery of projects without the need for external support.

1.2.3 As you would expect there are a variety of projects from across different services, including project management to specialised expertise. In some cases,

collaboration with other councils has led to cost efficiencies and improved outcomes.

- 1.2.4 Different approaches have been adopted depending on the project, with some projects receiving prior agreement via relevant Committee and some projects being service led. Whilst this approach offers potential benefits, such as flexibility and rapid access to specialised skills, there may be cases where Members would prefer more detailed assessments presented of cost effectiveness and longer-term impacts for the council. The Committee may want to ensure services follow robust procurement routes.

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 Procurement is undertaken in accordance with financial regulations and council procurement frameworks. The use of a Waiver is undertaken in certain circumstances.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 The average spend per year over the four years is £533,954 per year, for a total of 135 projects (over four years). It should also be noted that one project resulted in a £2m reclaim returned to the council. In addition, consultants used to assist with the technical design services for carbon reduction measures at the Leisure Centre, resulted in a successful grant application and grant award of £1,164,760.
- 1.4.2 Over half of the external expertise used (55%) was for amounts less than £5,000, making up 8% of the consultancy spend. 5 projects accounted for almost a third of the total spend (30%).

1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 The risks associated with not using external expertise have been highlighted against each project in Annex 2.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.6.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

1.7 Policy Considerations

- 1.7.1 Business Continuity/Resilience
- 1.7.2 Procurement

1.8 Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- 1.8.1 Note the information provided in Annex 2;

- 1.8.2 Consider if further detail is required by this Committee for any specific projects;
- 1.8.3 Ensure the Council continues to closely manage future use of external experts;
- 1.8.4 Ask officers to continue to look for opportunities to collaborate with other councils;
- 1.8.5 Ensure the council is effective at retaining specialist talent, to reduce the need for external experts going forward; and
- 1.8.6 Make recommendations to Cabinet to be approved and/or noted.

Background papers:

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Nil

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