

Board Budget 2024

Purpose of Report

For decision.

Summary

This paper set out proposals for the Board's budget over 2024.

LGA Plan Theme: Championing climate change and local environments

Recommendation(s)

That the Safer and Stronger Communities Board agree the draft budget outlined at paragraph 13.

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Board Budget 2024

Background

1. At the Lead Members meeting in December a process for setting the Board's budget was agreed.
2. To account for the fact the LGA's board cycle runs from September to August, while the LGA's financial year runs from April to March Lead Members agreed that:
 - 2.1. an end of year budget review report and draft budget allocations are brought to the first Lead Members meeting in the new year.
 - 2.2. These draft allocations include an amount that is not allocated for any particular projects to provide in-year flexibility to respond to changes in the Board's priorities and work.
 - 2.3. Subject to revisions based on Lead Members' comments these draft allocations are put to the closest Board meeting before the start of the financial year.
3. At that meeting Lead Members also agreed the criteria for allocating the Board's budget:
 - 3.1. to commission additional policy related work where (a) the team supporting the Board does not have the capacity to undertake the work and it was capable of being provided externally, or (b) there is not the relevant expertise within the LGA; and
 - 3.2. to provide improvement related support to councils not covered by government grants and which also assists with delivery of the Board's priorities and objectives.
4. This paper provides an end of year budget review report and suggests draft budget allocations for 2024.

End of Year Budget Review

5. The LGA financial year concludes on 31 March 2024 so final expenditure figures are not yet available. However expenditure against the budget agreed by Lead Members in July 2023 is as follows:
 - 5.1. The SIGCE facilitation role (including bespoke support and expertise, project planning and delivery, delivery of roundtable series and event write-ups, specific workstream exploring the impact of anti-asylum activity and resettlement). Budget £20,000. Current expenditure: £16,800.

- 5.2. Academic support on Islamist extremism, to increase practitioner confidence in identifying and tackling Islamist extremism. Budget £5,000. Current expenditure: £0.
- 5.3. 2 x Prevent/Counter Extremism Leadership Essentials courses, supporting councillors to understand the changes to Prevent delivery arising from the IRP: £15,000. Current expenditure: approx. £15,000 (event to be held in March).
- 5.4. In person events on community engagement and asylum scenario workshops. Budget £3,000. Current expenditure: £1,600 (anticipated).
- 5.5. 1 x Licensing Leadership Essentials courses. Budget £7,500. Current expenditure: £7,500 (event delivered in November).
- 5.6. Produce licensing 'visual minutes' from the LE events, summarising how licensing links into different council agendas: £2,500.
- 5.7. Unallocated contingency of £5,000.

2024 Budget Proposal

6. As Members will recall the Board agreed six areas of activity at its September meeting. These were:
 - 6.1. Community safety
 - 6.2. Prevent, counter-extremism and cohesion
 - 6.3. Regulatory services and licensing
 - 6.4. Blue light services and civil resilience
 - 6.5. Crematoria, funerals, coroners and registrars
 - 6.6. Voluntary, community and social enterprise.
7. The work plan tracker has been circulated to the Board (most recently in January and a copy is attached), which shows progress against these areas of activity, and the specific work strands that deliver against those areas of activity.
8. Having reviewed progress against the work plan tracker this paper sets out proposed budget expenditure over 2024. These proposals are designed to ensure delivery against the Board's work programme based on areas where additional capacity and expertise is needed, and/or where there is no other funding available to support activity.
9. The LGA is currently in the process of setting its internal budgets for 2024/25. These are due to be finalised shortly. As the LGA Board decided not to increase subscription fees for the coming financial year the Board's budget for 2023/24 is likely to remain at £65,000 but there is possibility it may be smaller than that.
10. The most critical area where additional capacity and expertise is needed is around the Prevent, counter-extremism and cohesion work strand. The separate

paper on the SIGCE work programme elsewhere on the Board's agenda outlines the range of issues councils are facing in this area of the Board's activity, which are likely to persist over the remainder of this board cycle and into the next. This area is sensitive and the issues facing councils manifest themselves in varied ways. Being able to draw on external expertise has been, and will continue to be, important in the successful delivery of the Board's work programme, and especially in supporting those councils seeking the LGA's existence.

11. We also propose the budget is used to fund two further licensing leadership essentials (LE) courses for a cohort of around 30-35 licensing committee chairs and vice chairs. The feedback we have had after resuming in-person courses from March 2022 has been extremely positive and it has therefore become a valued part of the LGA's wider leadership essentials offer, with courses usually over subscribed.
12. However, unfortunately, we are no longer able to access LGA improvement grant funding to support the cost of the events and these are required to be funded directly from the policy budget. We believe that this is still a sensible way to target our limited resources, because it directly supports the work of councillors and good governance, and we know that there are concerns about the quality and depth of licensing training by some committees, and hence the quality of committee decision making. To reduce the overall cost of the events, we have trialled a £200 fee to attend the course, which does not seem to have impacted on the numbers attending the events.
13. It is therefore proposed the budget is used as follows:
 - 13.1. SIGCE facilitation role; Islamist extremism working group; research on cohesion and resilience and guidance on tension monitoring: £31,000
 - 13.2. 1 x Prevent/Counter Extremism Leadership Essentials courses: £12,000
 - 13.3. 2 x Licensing Leadership Essentials courses: £15,000
14. Board Members will note this leaves approximately £7,000 unallocated at this time. This could be used to provide flexibility over the course of the financial year to enable to Board to respond to policy developments.

Implications for Wales

15. The suggested support outlined in the programme would be accessible to Welsh authorities.

Financial Implications

16. The proposals set out in paragraph 13 will be met from the Board's budget of approximately £65,000.

Equalities implications

17. The proposals set out in paragraph 13 will assist councils in delivery of their duties under the Equalities Act, and ensure they are better placed to support residents with protected characteristics in line with the legislation.

Next steps

18. If members agree the draft budget outlined here, officers will take forward the work outlined in the report.