Strategy and Resources Meeting
Tuesday 14th February 2023
The Trinity Centre
7:00pm

Present:

Cllrs Ward (Chairman), Cooper, Mackey, Parkin, Pears, Pocock and Raut.

In Attendance:

Olive O'Sullivan – Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Mary Watkins – Finance Manager.

There were no members of the press or public present.

59 Apologies for Absence

The CEO reported apologies received from Cllrs Cairns.

Resolved to accept the apologies received.

60 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Pears and Ward declared a non-pecuniary interest as trustees of the Sutton Coldfield Charitable Trust.

61 Minutes of the Previous Meetings

Resolved to confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 7th December 2022.

62 Matters Arising

The CEO stated that the Town Rangers contract covered works in the bill of quantities and provision had been made in the Council budget for additional uplift works, estimated at about 20%, which could be carried out by the Town Rangers and charged separately. The CEO reported that there was a limit to the percentage increase that would be permissible outside of the Town Ranger contract under procurement rules and that confirmation of this percentage was currently being sought.

The CEO reported that Human Resources Sub Committee had discussed the potential to create an apprenticeship role for the work on Greenspaces and that contact had been made with Pershore College, their next opportunity to advertise an apprenticeship vacancy is Sept 2023.

Cllr Cooper asked for further details from Cllrs Mackey and Pears on the added value and difference that the Town Council budget makes to Sutton Coldfield. Cllr Mackey clarified that the Town Council does not replace the money spent by Birmingham City Council (BCC), the funds allocated by the Town Council are to provide additionality and service enhancements. Cllr Pears added that Town Council funding had ensured that the town centre library service was not lost.

63 Questions from Members

No questions had been submitted.

64 Minutes of Town Centre Regeneration Partnership (TCRP)

Cllr Pears expressed his concern that recent planning applications, approved by Birmingham City Council, were not in line with the Sutton Coldfield Town Centre Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document and asked what could be done to prevent this from happening. Cllr Pears made specific reference to the excessive height of the buildings in the applications that were approved and also that the buildings were out of character for the area. Cllr Pears asked if Design Guidance could be produced for the Town Centre. Cllr Ward responded that this should be raised with BCC by Cllr Pears, in his role as a BCC Ward Councillor. The CEO reported that there was an ongoing dialogue with BCC Senior Officers and concerns had been raised around planning applications that had been approved without due consideration of the Town Council's objections. Cllr Mackey suggested that Cllr Pears could raise his concerns with the BCC Director of Planning, Transport and Sustainability.

The CEO responded to questions from Cllr Parkin and confirmed that officers and consultants had met with We Are Story to discuss key messages on regeneration of the town centre and the Sutton Gateway. The CEO advised that BCC is responsible for the statutory consultation on any improvements to the Highways.

In response to questions from Cllr Pocock, the CEO reported no further update on the Enterprise Task Group and that a meeting had been scheduled with idverde to look at green space improvements in the town centre. The CEO reported there were parcels of BCC highways land within the town centre that could be improved and that the Town Council would like the freedom and flexibility to look at innovative ways to deliver improvements without constraints from BCC.

Resolved to note the minutes of the Town Centre Regeneration Partnership held 20th January 2023.

7:18pm Cllr Pocock entered during discussion of this item.

65 IT Update

The CEO reported that due to some IT issues with the Town Council email accounts, which lead to permanent disruption of officers accounts and loss of service for two days in December, the decision had been taken to fully migrate the email system to Microsoft365. Hubtel had been engaged to co-ordinate and complete the migration, which included collaboration with six different organisations and is now working with individual Councillors and officers to complete set up.

Hubtel has been further commissioned to provide monthly IT support including; monthly Microsoft365 subscription, unlimited support, security and back-ups. The monthly cost of this service will be around £560.

The CEO also reported that NALC had sent a communication about a suspected cyber-attack affecting 37 Councils, this was reported to the ICO as a precaution and investigated by the National Crime Agency. It was quickly ascertained that the information pertaining to Royal Sutton Coldfield was obtained legitimately from the Town Council's website and the ICO was updated. An internal review had been completed and the Bank Reconciliation Summary would continue to be presented to Committee for noting, with a further check on the complete detail to be carried out by a nominated Councillor at the end of the financial year.

The CEO noted that a full business case for the recording and webcasting of Council meetings was still to take place and that this would likely take place in late summer.

Cllr Mackey stated that it was important to ensure that it was done properly and was cost effective.

Resolved to recommend to Full Council approval of use of Direct Debit for Hubtel IT.

66 Performance to Date

Cllr Pocock asked if any underspend on Community Grants and Health and Wellbeing could be moved to the earmarked reserves at the end of the financial year.

Cllr Ward proposed that the overspends on Subscriptions/Memberships, which was due to a new subscription for Heath and Safety advice and Mayors Allowance be covered by the Budget Contingency.

Resolved to approve the virement as detailed above.

Cllr Ward reported that the CEO would be bringing a General Reserve Policy for Committee to consider at the next meeting, once the level of reserves at the end of the financial year were known.

In response to a question from Cllr Parkin, the CEO confirmed that the Allotment earmarked reserve was to build a fund to deliver improvement works to the allotment sites, as identified in the capital investment report presented to the Allotment Sub Committee. Cllr Pocock stated that the earmarked reserve was a provision for the improvement works but the decision on carrying out the work and how this would be done, had not yet been taken.

The CEO confirmed that a meeting had taken place with the city archivist and funding for an archivist for two years, as identified in the Archive Skills report, would be in the region of £85k and that a full report would be brought to Committee.

Cllr Mackey asked if there was anything the Town Council could do to support additional bus routes across Sutton Coldfield and improve services for residents. Cllr Ward suggested that it should be raised with Transport for West Midlands.

Cllr Ward proposed that Committee consider allocating further earmarked reserves of:

- Town Centre Regeneration - £500k
- Active Travel - £150k
- Health and Wellbeing – underspend from current year
- Community Grants - underspend from current year

Resolved to approve the movement in earmarked reserves as detailed in the report and proposed above.

67 External Auditor

The CEO confirmed that the new appointed External Auditors were 'Moore East Midlands' for the next five years. AGAR Forms, guidance and deadlines were not yet available but Internal Audit had been booked to complete their report on Tuesday 11th April and accounts are expected to be presented to Committee at the April meeting.

68 Falcon Lodge Hub

In response to a question from Cllr Pears the CEO confirmed that the audited accounts would not be available until mid-July and that if Council supported the application, funding could be released in 6 monthly intervals.

In response to a question from Cllr Mackey, the CEO confirmed that the lease from Birmingham City Council (BCC) was a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) lease on a 5 year basis.

Cllr Parkin spoke in support of the application, stating it was an active and vibrant community centre and the Town Council should support organisations working to help residents in the Lower Super Output Area (LOSA).

Cllr Cooper also spoke in support of the project but raised concerns that the building remains owned by BCC.

Cllr Pocock said he would welcome a report back on the outcome indicators, possibly a presentation.

Resolved to recommended approval of a financial contribution of £110,000 to Compass Support over five years, to support operation costs at Falcon Lodge Hub.

69 Investment Strategy 2023/24

Cllr Pears noted the investment limits per banking institution, the CEO confirmed that these are regularly reviewed to ensure they are adhered to.

Resolved to recommend the Investment Strategy 2023/24 to Full Council for approval.

70 Policy Review

Resolved to recommend the Health and Safety Policy, Statement of Internal Control and Asset Register Policy to Full Council for approval.

71 Risk Register

Cllr Pears asked that the following items be considered for inclusion on the Risk Register, when next presented to Committee:

- Allotments, inc risk of flooding,
- Climate change
- Energy costs
- Cyber crime
- Fossil fuels and banks that invest in that area.

Cllr Mackey asked if the Civic Regalia had all been returned to the Town Council from BCC. The CEO confirmed that items were currently held at BCC for safekeeping and would physically transfer to the Town Council once appropriate permanent accommodation had been sourced.

Resolved to note the Risk Register.

72 Bank Reconciliations

Resolved to note the bank reconciliations from September 2022 to January 2023.

73 Date of the Next Meeting

18th April 2023 at the Trinity Centre.

The meeting ended at 8:35pm.