Strategy and Resources Meeting
Tuesday 20th February 2024
The Trinity Centre
7:00pm

Present:

Cllrs Ward (Chairman), Cairns, Cooper, Mackey, Pears, Puri and Raut.

In Attendance:

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

There were no members of the press or public present.

70 Apologies for Absence

The CEO had received apologies from Cllr Parkin.

Resolved to accept the apologies received.

71 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

72 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved to confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 7th December 2023.

73 Matters Arising

The CEO reported that the Birmingham City Council (BCC) draft budget had been published today ahead of a Cabinet meeting on the 27th February 2024. Further details of the impact of the BCC's Section 114 notices and intervention of the Commissioners should be clearer following the approval of their 2024/25 budget. Cllr Ward confirmed that monthly Leaders' meetings were diarised with Cllr Cotton. Cllr Ward commented that an additional Strategy and Resources meeting may be needed in March to discuss the impact of the BCC Budget.

In response to a question from Cllr Cooper, the CEO confirmed that the 2024 formal summer bedding scheme was considered at Full Council in January and the CEO has been delegated to progress the summer floral ornamental bedding scheme for 2024 up to the value of £20,000. Further discussions with BCC have confirmed that the annual cost to provide and install planting and maintenance to all sites would be £45,000. The CEO has now commissioned BCC to deliver the summer formal bedding at Vesey Gardens, King Edwards Square and Mill Street traffic island. The remaining traffic islands, the Parade and Boddington Gardens will be provided by Idverde. Idverde have been commissioned to deliver the wildflower scheme for 2024, the area on Shepherds Pool Road has been removed from the scheme and Idverde commissioned to carry out works for the area to be reinstated to grassland.

7:04pm Cllr Raut entered during discussion of this item.

74 Questions from Members

No questions had been received.

75 Update from the Human Resources Sub-Committee

The CEO provided a verbal update that the job description for the Head of Operations and Estate would be redrafted, and the next recruitment phase would be for four roles.

Resolved to note the update from the Human Resources Sub-Committee meeting held on 20th February 2024.

76 Minutes from the Town Centre Regeneration Partnership

Resolved to note the minutes from the Town Centre Regeneration Partnership meetings held on 7th December 2023 and 2nd February 2024.

77 Grounds Maintenance and Allied Services Contract

Cllr Pears asked that the wording in 5.1 be amended to read; 'Overall performance of operational staff is largely satisfactory'.

The CEO stated that the Town Ranger service is valued by residents and extending the contract would provide continuity of the service.

Cllr Ward commented that the contract was complicated and takes time to manage. Cllr Mackey commented that once running smoothly it would provide a model for future asset devolution.

Resolved to note the update on the delivery of the Town Ranger Service and to recommend to Full Council an extension of the contract for a further year from February 2025 subject to satisfactory negotiations with Idverde.

78 Performance to Date

The CEO reported that the performance to date figures gave the expected financial position at the end of the year and that actual figures would be presented to Committee in April 2024. Any overspends shown in Floral Displays and Allotments will be adjusted at the end of the year to be taken from the Earmarked Reserves.

In response to the emerging picture around BCC's financial position, Committee is requested to consider increasing the Earmarked Reserve for the Devo Deal. The CEO stated that any additional ongoing funding requirement would need to be found from future annual budgets, either from reallocation of other budgets or from a precept increase.

Resolved to approve the movement in Earmarked Reserves at the end of the Financial Year.

79 Investment Strategy 2024/25

The CEO stated that the main amendment to the strategy was in Appendix B, the Minimum Revenue Provision Statement (MRP). MRP is the accounting practice employed by local authorities to set aside funds for the future replacement of assets. It's essentially a way for councils to ensure they have adequate financial resources when the time comes to replace or upgrade capital assets, such as infrastructure, buildings, or equipment. Ther are draft regulations around MRP that once finalised will become law. The CEO reported that she had attended a Warwickshire Association of

Local Councils (WALC) meeting that included a presentation from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on borrowing and that she would look to provide the presentation to Councillors, should the Council look to borrow funds.

The CEO asked Committee to consider moving the deposit with Lloyds bank into a 95 day notice account that would attract an interest rate in line with other investments. Cllr Ward suggested that the DMADF deposit could be increased in receipt of the first tranche of Precept as it provided high security alongside an interest rate comparable with other investments.

Resolved to recommend to Full Council that the Investment Strategy for 2024/25 be approved.

Resolved to approve that the deposit with Lloyds bank be moved from a 32 day notice account to a 95 day notice account and that the deposit with DMADF be increased in April 2024.

80 Policy review

Cllr Pears raised some questions on the circulated policies and Committee agreed that:

- The Statement of Internal Control would be amended to 'Full Council meets around 9 times a year'
- That a typographical error is corrected on the Privacy Notice to 'purchase'.
- That all are updated with – reviewed February 2024.

In response to a question on the Training and Development Policy the CEO confirmed that the Training and Development is a priority in the Strategic Plan and there will be regular monitoring reports to the responsible Committee for all the priorities.

The CEO reported that there were more policies to review and that these would be brought to Committee over the coming months. The model Financial Regulations are currently under review by the sector and will be presented to Council for review once this is completed. The Scheme of Delegation will be reviewed at the same time.

Resolved to recommend to Full Council that the above policies be approved with the amendments discussed.

81 Bank Reconciliations

Resolutions to note the bank reconciliations for October, November and December 2023.

82 Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 23rd April 2024 at the Trinity Centre but there may be an extraordinary meeting called in March to discuss the implications of the BCC Budget.

The meeting closed at 7:54pm.

Signed as a true record.