Strategy and Resources Meeting
Tuesday 29th April 2025
The Trinity Centre
7:00pm

Present:

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

In Attendance:

Olive O'Sullivan – Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Steve Hollingworth-Head of Open Spaces & Environment and Mary Watkins – Head of Finance.

There was one member of the public and no press present.

A resident asked for an update on the sale of the Red Rose Centre and the current situation regarding negotiations with the City Council to run Sutton Coldfield's libraries.

Cllr Ward responded that conversations around libraries are ongoing and stressed the importance of a long term, sustainable solution for the future of Sutton Coldfield libraries. Cllr Ward said the Red Rose Centre is a key site in the Town Centre Masterplan and that updates about the sale were frequently asked of Birmingham City Council by the Town Centre Regeneration Partnership. Cllr Mackey stated that it had not yet come to the Birmingham City Council Property Committee and that less complex properties were being sold first.

73 Apologies for Absence

The CEO reported apologies from Cllr Cairns.

Resolved to accept the apologies received.

74 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

75 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded during discussion of agenda 86 under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s3.

76 Minutes of the Previous Meetings

Resolved to confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 11th February 2025.

77 Matters Arising

Steve Hollingworth gave an update on the Cultural Strategy Tender. He reported that there had been a strong response and a report would be taken to Full Council in May for a decision.

78 Questions from Members

No questions were received.

79 Minutes from the Town Centre Regeneration Partnership

Cllr Parkin noted that funding for the Sutton Gateway Scheme had been protected past the March 2027 deadline and asked if it was likely that there would be any activity before 2027 and if there was any update on which framework route would be used.

The CEO responded that discussions are ongoing and clarification is being sought on the procurement arrangements but it was possible that a formal procurement process would need to take place which would take longer than using an existing framework.

Resolved to note the minutes of the Town Centre Regeneration Partnership meeting held on 7th March 2025.

80 Grounds Maintenance Procurement

Steve Hollingworth reported that a further 22 sites had been identified for inclusion in the Bill of Quantities (BOQ) following feedback from Councillors. At the contractor's open day, feedback had been received that electric vehicles and equipment can give poor performance on large site areas and would increase the cost of the contract as they are more expensive and would need to be depreciated over the guaranteed contract term of three years. There are different ways to decrease the impact on the environment, for example the use of different fuels that can result in a 90% reduction in harmful emissions, and it is proposed to ask contractors to specify what vehicles, equipment and working methods they propose to use, to minimise the environmental impact of the contract, as part of the tender quality evaluation.

The CEO reported that there had been some challenges in the existing Town Ranger contract with electric vehicles and equipment.

Cllr Pears said it was a good report and that electric vehicles and equipment could be accommodated by contractors, as where there is a will there is a way.

In response to questions from Cllr Parkin, Steve Hollingworth confirmed that items had not been removed from the BoQ's but that some works at Allotments had been amended to accommodate the specific requirements of the Allotment Associations at each site. The tender does include the Devo Deal sites, assuming that they will be maintained by the Town Council from the start of the contract. The maintenance at each of these sites is based on the list previously provided by Birmingham City Council (BCC) with a few changes following site visits. Nine contractors had attended the open day and eight had shown an interest in tendering for the contract.

Cllr Parkin asked about the wildflower meadows and Steve confirmed that the Town Rangers would be weeding the sites to give them the best chance to grow. Cllr Raut asked if wildflower seeds would be distributed to the community again this year and the CEO agreed to look at progressing this.

Cllr Mackey spoke about an area just off Little Sutton Road that the Town Rangers had stepped in to cut the grass as BCC did not have suitable equipment to cut grass once it reached a certain height. He noted that with no mow May and less regular cuts by BCC, there may be further sites that require assistance this year.

Cllr Cooper raised concerns about roadside verges at Thornhill Rd and Streetly Lane as these had been neglected over many years, resulting in the fence being knocked over. Steve confirmed that the Town Rangers litter picked this area but did not cut back the vegetation.

In response to a question from Cllr Parkin asking if the grass cutting on the BoQ is in addition to grass cutting carried out by BCC, Steve confirmed that it was assumed that BCC would not be carrying out any grass cutting. Cllr Ward asked that this be reviewed to see if money could be saved if BCC continued to carry out cuts.

Resolved to note the report, approve the further 22 sites in the bill of quantities outlined in Appendix C of the report and approve the inclusion of winter/spring florals from Feb 2026.

81 Annual Return and Financial Year 2024/25

In response to questions from Cllr Parkin it was confirmed that the Precept is received by the Town Council in two tranches and the amount does not change depending on the actual payments received by Birmingham City Council as a non-payment percentage is built into the original calculation. The Cycle Hire Scheme is in its final year and the CEO will bring an update to Committee in June 2025.

Cllr Mackey asked if there had been any changes to the rate of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) since it was introduced in 2014. The CEO responded that she would report back on the detail in relation to CIL.

Cllr Ward asked why the Plan for Neighbourhoods (PfN) capacity building monies sit on the Town Council's balance sheet. The CEO responded she had received advice that the PfN funds are held by the Town Council as a custodian, and this creates a liability on the Town Council to disburse them on behalf of the PfN Board. The funds are not included in the Town Council's income and expenditure but are included in the cash and bank balances on the balance sheet. PfN funds are assured through three lines of defence – the first by the CEO of the Town Council as Chief Finance Officer via the annual Statement of Grant usage, the second via checks by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and the third by MHCLG's independent auditors.

Cllr Pears asked if the PfN would have separate banking arrangements and if the cost of Town Council Officer time could be recharged. Cllr Ward said that the Town Council is acting as secretariat, but this should not be at the expense of Town Council business.

Resolved to note the Annual Governance Statement, Accounting Statements and unaudited Statement of Accounts.

82 Internal Audit Report 2024/25

Resolved to note the internal audit report for the financial year 2024/25.

83 Use of Delegated Powers

No use of delegated powers was reported.

84 Bank Reconciliations

Resolved to note the bank reconciliations for January, February and March 2025.

85 Date of the Next Meeting

Due to a clash with a Birmingham City Council meeting, Committee discussed rescheduling the next meeting.

Resolved that the next meeting of the Strategy and Resources is scheduled for 24th June 2025.

7:57pm end of session held in public.

86 Exclusion of the Press and Public

a) Office Accommodation

Committee discussed the Town Council Office lease that is due for renewal.

Resolved that the CEO be delegated responsibility to agree terms with the landlord on the lease for the Town Council Office space.

The meeting ended at 8:09pm

Signed as a true record

Cllr S Ward

24th June 2025