Strategy and Resources Meeting
Tuesday 24th June 2025
The Trinity Centre
7:00pm

Present:

Cllrs S Ward (Chairman), Cairns, Cooper, Parkin, Perks 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 were four members of the public and no press present.

A resident asked if Councillors would be in support of planting a hedgerow on the central reservation on Tamworth Road to dissuade inconsiderate parking.

Cllr Ward responded that parking around schools is tricky and as a highways issue, sits with Birmingham City Council but is very much on the Town Council's agenda. He advised that a petition had been submitted by the Ward Councillor around the need for safety measures at Tamworth Road and would be considered at the next Planning and Highways Committee meeting.

A resident asked if Councillors would commit to saving Sutton Coldfield library from permanent closure and handed in a petition.

Cllr Ward responded that Birmingham City Council (BCC) had chosen to close Sutton Coldfield library, and this was not a decision taken by the Town Council. He said it was really disappointing that BCC chose to close three libraries across the town and that the Sutton Coldfield library building had been allowed to become as dilapidated as it is. He further advised that the mobile library provision in the town centre is inadequate, and conversations are ongoing with BCC. The Town Council is looking at library provision across the whole town.

The Chair of Friends of Libraries in our Sutton Coldfield (FOLIO) gave examples of groups that use Sutton Coldfield Library and asked if there is the possibility of creating a library community hub in the town centre.

Cllr Ward responded that it is heartbreaking to hear of the groups that have been let down by BCC and commented that libraries are so much more than books. He suggested a practical solution of relocating the groups to alternative locations within the town centre and that the Town Council would look to support them via the Community Grant Scheme or an emergency grant. Cllr Ward added that a civic centre is included in the Masterplan and a hub could fit into the future regeneration of the town centre.

A representative of the three Crown Bowling Clubs, that use Mere Green Community Centre as a club house, asked what the Town Council could do to save the Community Centre as it is an excellent resource for 70 user groups.

Cllr Ward responded that BCC is looking to close Walmley Community Centre at the same time as the library service but have been unclear on the timeline for Mere Green Community Centre. Steve

Hollingworth confirmed that BCC has no budget for Community Centre provision at Mere Green or Walmley in the current financial year. Cllr Ward stated that the report this evening included Mere Green community centre and that the Town Council would be looking for a sustainable model for library and community centre provision for the town.

The CEO advised that a resident had submitted some comments in relation to agenda item 8 that expressed gratitude for the Town Council in its commitment to libraries and disappointment of the City Council's decisions in relation to all four libraries. She had stated that she would welcome Town Council support of either options two or three or a hybrid of them and also urged the inclusion Sutton Coldfield Town Centre library.

1 Election of Deputy Chairman

Resolved that Cllr Parkin be elected as Deputy Chairman of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

2 Apologies for Absence

The CEO reported apologies from Cllrs Mackey, Pears and Raut.

Resolved to accept the apologies received.

3 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Cairns declared an interest in agenda item 15 as a trustee of Royal Sutton Coldfield Community Town Hall Trust. The CEO advised that a dispensation has been requested and granted to allow Cllr Cairns to speak on the item as her knowledge in the matter could be useful to Committee in their discussions.

4 Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved that the press and public be excluded during discussion of agenda 15 under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s3.

5 Minutes of the Previous Meetings

Resolved to confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 29th April 2025.

6 Matters Arising

No matters arising were reported.

7 Questions from Members

No questions were received.

8 Sutton Coldfield Library Service and Community Centres

Cllr Ward said that if the Town Council decides to move forward and have a sustainable library service at Mere Green, Walmley and Boldmere it must be financially sustainable and robust. He stated that the arrangement cannot be the same as the existing arrangement for Sutton Coldfield library which saw the Town Council providing funding to BCC but not having any say over the provision delivered or opening hours. Residents supported the continuation of a library service during the Strategic Plan consultation and the solution needs to be robust and provide certainty.

Cllr Cairns spoke about the Town Council financial contribution over seven years and the building decline of Sutton Coldfield library. She stated that libraries are a vital part of the community and urged Committee to choose an option that retained the service but gave the Town Council control.

Cllr Parkin thanked Town Council Officers for their hard work and suggested that option three would be the best interim solution, to give more control over the service and an opportunity to identify savings and improvements. He also spoke on the need for a firm deadline around negotiations for asset transfers and raised concerns that high priority maintenance work may not have been undertaken.

Cllr Puri said this was an opportunity for the Town Council and supported option three in the short term while efficiencies were explored.

Cllr Cooper said that BCC had proven that it was uncaring toward the library service and that he was in favour of option five – to bring the service in house.

Cllr Cairns agreed with Cllr Cooper as a long-term proposition, as work will need to be undertaken to establish the condition of the buildings and affordability.

Cllr Perks asked if BCC is open to the asset transfer of Walmley library and community centre, as the location is prime real estate for shops and businesses. Cllr Ward responded that if BCC retains the building for a period the Town Council would be looking for a solid agreement that the service would continue to run from the location.

Cllr Perks also asked if the community centres could generate enough income to fund themselves and contribute to the building maintenance. Cllr Ward responded that this would be explored as part of the business plan alongside investment from other stakeholders.

Cllr Ward summed up that Committee supported option three with a longer-term plan towards option four or five.

Resolved to note Birmingham City Council`s position on libraries in Sutton Coldfield.

Resolved that officers develop option three and bring a future report for consideration, with the potential for options four and five in the longer term.

9 Regular Payments

Cllr Ward provided clarification that all invoices are processed through the approved process that includes CEO approval and authorisation by two approved Councillors. Use of variable direct debit and BACS was needed for some payments including payroll.

Resolved to recommend to Full Council approval of the use of BACS and variable direct debit for items as detailed in section 5 of the report.

10 Review of Banking Arrangements

Cllr Ward advised that a Current Account opened for Plan for Neighbourhoods (PFN) funds would be used to facilitate payment of PFN expenditure and funds would remain in the CCLA account, accruing interest, until required.

Resolved to recommend to Full Council approval for Cllrs Parmar and Wood to continue to review and note the Council's monthly bank and investment reconciliations and that Cllrs Allan, Griffin, Mackey, Pears, Puri, Raut and S Ward continue to be authorised signatories for the Council bank and investment accounts.

Resolved to recommend to Full Council that a new Current Account be opened for administration of Plan for Neighbourhoods Funds with Unity Trust bank.

11 Risk Register

Resolved to note the risk register.

12 Policy Review

Resolved to recommend to Full Council approval of the Code of Conduct and Councillor – Officer Protocol.

13 Bank Reconciliations

Resolved to note the bank reconciliations for April and May 2025.

14 Date of the Next Meeting

The next meeting scheduled is 14th October 2025 at the Trinity Centre. Cllr Ward noted that a further meeting may be required in September.

7:46pm end of session held in public.

15 Exclusion of the Press and Public

a) Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Hall

7:54pm Cllr Cairns left the room.

Resolved that Royal Sutton Coldfield Community Town Hall Trust loan repayments be rescheduled and the final repayment date on loan one, be amended from November 2025 to December 2026.

The meeting ended at 7:54pm

Signed as a true record

17th September 2025