

FULL COUNCIL

8TH DECEMBER 2020

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

1. COUNCIL UPDATE REGARDING RESOURCES

1.1 Purpose of Report

1.1 To advise Members of the decisions taken at the Resources decision making session held on 20th October 2020 and of the reports to be presented to my decision session on 1st December 2020.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 This report highlights some of the decisions which have been made, but not all. Members wishing to view all decisions made can find these at <http://eservices.solihull.gov.uk/mgInternet/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

1.2.2 Attached to this report is a list of decisions made.

1.3 Decisions made and to be considered

1.3.1 20th October 2020

1.3.2 The ICT Capital Projects programme for 2020/21 has an approved budget of £1,787,918. Of this funding, all but £110,119 has been committed to the projects that make up the current programme. The remaining £110,119 is available to spend on new projects, subject to my approval. I received an update on the six major projects in the approved programme, which are all proceeding well and on budget and I approved the following further allocations and adjustments:

- £50,000 to upgrade the Council's web site payment system to meet the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and offer functionality improvements for the customer.
- £3,000 to support the provision of a Wi-Fi printing pilot for the Library Service.
- The transfer of an outstanding favourable balance (£12,500) from the Income Management project which is now complete, to the ICT Capital Projects Fund.

1.3.3 In the private part of my decision session, I received two reports on the release of restrictive covenants, which need to be considered on a case by case basis. One was approved and one was not approved.

1.3.4 1st December 2020 – Reports to be considered

1.3.5 At my December decision session, I will receive the Corporate Health and Safety Annual Report for 2019/20. This is a comprehensive report on all health and safety matters for last financial year and includes an action plan where we have identified areas for improvement. The headlines from the Annual Report are:

- That health and safety arrangements are in place within SMBC, but with areas of improvement required as identified in the corporate health and safety action plan.

- There have been no regulatory interventions or enforcement action taken against the Council during the reported period; however there has been some involvement and advice given by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).
- Following further government reviews of building regulations and fire safety in the last year, changes to the industry are taking place which will affect both the Council and Solihull Community Housing (SCH) in the future.
- A new Corporate Health and Safety Board has been formed to consult on the strategic management of health and safety.
- The Council has procured a new online health and safety management system to make improvements to the management of reported accidents and incidents at work, risk assessment and audit.
- The number of employee reported accidents has increased in 2019/20 as a result of capturing behavioural-type incidents in schools and better awareness reporting throughout the organisation.
- A corporate health and safety action plan continues to be maintained to help make improvements to the management of health and safety in the organisation.

1.3.6 I will be asked to approve the Corporate Health and Safety Annual Report for 2019/20.

1.3.7 The Head of Income & Awards will present her report on Debt Monitoring for Quarter two of 2020/21. Our collection levels continue to be impacted by Covid-19 with council tax collection being 0.96% behind this time last year, business rates collection being 4.38% behind this time last year, Sundry Income being 16.42% behind this time last year and rent collection being 0.66% behind this time last year. This is of course a concern for the funding levels within our Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). We continue to make every effort to support residents and businesses to pay their bills, but we will need to assess the likely level of non-payment when we bring together the final proposals for the updated MTFS 2021/22 – 2023/24.

1.4 Council Plan and Priorities

1.4.1 The Council's new website will shortly go live. This has a new fresh design and improved accessibility. The various content will be moved across from the existing website in phases with the old pages then being closed down.

1.4.2 On 9th November, the Resources & Delivering Value Scrutiny Board received an update on progress with the major ICT project to migrate our Oracle system to Oracle Cloud. Despite the challenges caused by Covid-19, good progress continues to be made on the project which is proceeding broadly according to plan. As previously reported to members, the Oracle system is the backbone of all our finance, payment, payroll, procurement and income collection systems and so it is critical that we resource and implement this project properly.

1.4.3 Along with other Cabinet members, I was pleased to support the funding for the Smarter Ways of Working Strategy at the November Cabinet meeting. Officers within the Resources Directorate are now preparing to secure the additional capacity to implement the Strategy and the HR Team have started to review the many HR policies that will need to change to reflect this new way of working.

1.5 Issues of Interest

- 1.5.1 The third meeting of the Budget Strategy Group took place on 30th November. The Group was updated on the outcomes from the 25th November Spending Review which provided some welcome additional support for the significant financial pressures we are facing. The recommendations from the Budget Strategy Group will be presented to the Members Annual Budget Seminar on Monday 14th December 2020. I would encourage all members to attend to hear the current position on service and Covid-19 pressures.
- 1.5.2 I would like to pay tribute to our Income & Awards Division for dealing with the many business grant applications that we have received over the past month to help local businesses with the impact of the second national lockdown. As with the first business grants scheme, we were one of the first local authorities to have our application process up and running and we have been getting the payments out to local businesses as quickly as we can.
- 1.5.3 I was very pleased to attend the Resources & Delivering Value Scrutiny Board meeting on 9th November to discuss the motion that I presented to the October 2020 Council meeting on the financial implications of Covid-19 on our Council, our residents and our borough. We had a good discussion at the meeting and I am grateful to the members of the Scrutiny Board for giving unanimous support to the motion.
- 1.5.4 The legislation to implement the £95,000 cap on Exit Payments for Council employees came into effect on 4th November 2020. There is currently an inconsistency between these regulations and the Pension Scheme regulations which will need to be addressed. I have asked the Head of Human Resources to bring a report to Remuneration Committee on this matter.

1.6 Future Decisions

- 1.6.1 At future Resources decision sessions, reports will be presented on Revenue and Capital Monitoring, Debt Monitoring, Applications for Discretionary Rate Relief, Welfare Reform, the implementation of the Corporate Landlord Model covering all of the Council's land and property assets and the Council Tax Base for 2021/22.