

## FULL COUNCIL

8<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2022

### REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR RESOURCES

#### 1. COUNCIL UPDATE REGARDING RESOURCES

##### 1.1 Purpose of Report

1.1.1 To advise Members of the decisions taken at my decision making sessions held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2021 and 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

##### 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/mglInternet/mglListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

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

##### 1.3 14<sup>th</sup> December 2021

1.3.1 The Public Services (Social Value) Act came into force in January 2013 and requires all public sector organisations to think about how the services they commission can provide additional social, economic and environmental benefits over and above the goods or services directly procured. The Council has had a Social Value Policy in place since March 2015 and it was last revised in July 2019. In addition to quality and cost, social value now forms part of the evaluation criteria in all major procurement exercises.

1.3.2 I approved a revised Social Value Policy which has been updated based on comments from senior officers from across the Council. The updates are based on the following feedback:

- The social value offers from contractors would benefit from being explicitly targeted at delivering locally identified priorities.
- The scope of the policy can be expanded beyond the Council's approach to procurement, to consider wider opportunities and levers.
- The policy should explain how social value is applied and measured when the social value portal is not used, for example, for small and framework contracts, so that the policy covers all scenarios in terms of procurement.
- The policy should be revised to provide a decision making framework to guide decisions around when it may be necessary to vary the approach to social value from that set out in the policy.

1.3.3 I received an update on the financial position for the ICT Capital Programme. The current year capital programme is £1,059,000 and of this sum, all but £158,000 has been committed to ICT projects. There are no significant financial variances against the projects in the programme. Out of the remaining £158,000, I approved an allocation of £35,000 to fund a Project Support Officer for the Office 365 programme, leaving an uncommitted balance of £123,000.

- 1.3.4 The Head of Income & Awards presented a revised Council Tax Discretionary Reductions Policy which I approved. This followed a request I had made at a previous decision session to make sure that discretionary reductions are targeted towards those residents (and in exceptional circumstances landlords/businesses) that need them most. The Council has a limited reserve available to consider applications. In recognition of this, the revised policy confirms that requests will be considered from individual homeowners and landlords who are experiencing financial hardship, but requests from businesses that are liable for council tax for a number of properties will only be considered in very exceptional circumstances.
- 1.3.5 I was also presented with the debt monitoring position for quarter 2 of 2021/22 which showed that at the end of September 2021, council tax collection was at 57.73%, which is 0.22% ahead of the position at the same point last year and business rates collection was 49.98% which is 3.60% behind, compared to this time last year. However, last financial year many ratepayers benefitted from 100% retail discount relief, which would have been recorded as 100% collection. This 100% relief continued until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and then reduced to 66% for the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. At the end of September 2021, sundry income collection stood at 63.43% which was 3.79% ahead of this time last year and rent collection was 97.27% which was 0.64% ahead of this time last year.

#### **1.4 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

- 1.4.1 I received a Health and Safety update report covering the reporting period April 2020 to December 2021 and highlighting the progress against the Corporate Health and Safety Action Plan, which I was satisfied with. Key updates were:
- A system is in place at a corporate level to consult and communicate with employees and trade union representatives, and a Corporate Health and Safety Board has been established to consult on the strategic management of health and safety at a corporate level. The Board is chaired and lead by the Director of Resources and Deputy Chief Executive.
  - The Corporate Health and Safety Board has management representation from all Directorates and trade union representatives and meets on a quarterly basis.
  - A Corporate Health and Safety Action Plan is in place which is updated and monitored by the Corporate Health and Safety Board. The plan is a live working document to drive forward continuous improvement in the management of health and safety throughout the organisation.
  - Each Directorate has their own Health and Safety Action Plan to implement actions identified in the corporate level plan. This is monitored by each Directorate Leadership Team on a quarterly basis, with progress reported back through the Corporate Health and Safety Board and CLT.
  - The Council has documented accident/incident reporting and recording arrangements in place through its online 'Assure' Health and Safety Management System.
  - There are established systems in place to monitor the health and safety performance of Solihull Community Housing (SCH).
  - A Building Safety Delivery Group has been formed to consider the joint risks that both the Council and SCH have for ensuring that building safety standards are in place for the social housing stock.

- 1.4.2 There were a total of 689 reported work-related accidents/incidents between the period April 2020 and December 2021 (employees and non-employees). There were no recorded fatalities. This number covers all Council services and schools where Solihull Council is the employer (community and voluntary controlled schools, community special schools and pupil referral units). 417 of the accidents/incidents related to schools. Details are reported to each meeting of the Corporate Health & Safety Board, where any learning then feeds through to the Corporate Health & Safety Action Plan.
- 1.4.3 The annual council tax base must be calculated in accordance with the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 2012 and must be determined between 1<sup>st</sup> December and 31<sup>st</sup> January for the following financial year.
- 1.4.4 I approved the council tax base for 2022/23 of 78,256 Band D equivalent dwellings. This compares to 77,190 Band D equivalent dwellings in the current year, an increase of 1,066 Band D equivalent dwellings. The assumed collection rate is the same as previous years at 98.81%.

## **1.5 Issues of Interest**

- 1.5.1 On 7<sup>th</sup> January 2022, the Council received further allocations of business grants to help local businesses with the impact of the Omicron variant of the Covid pandemic. The Omicron Hospitality & Leisure Grant is available to those businesses in the hospitality, leisure and accommodation sectors that were liable for business rates as at 30<sup>th</sup> December 2021. This is a one-off grant for the financial year 2021/22. Eligible businesses will receive the following grant amounts:
- Businesses with a rateable value of exactly £15,000 or under will receive a payment of £2,667;
  - Businesses with a rateable value over £15,000 and less than £51,000 will receive a payment of £4,000;
  - Businesses with a rateable value of exactly £51,000 or over will receive a payment of £6,000.
- 1.5.2 We have also received a further allocation of Additional Restrictions Grant funding of £348,268 which is payable to affected businesses who are not entitled to the above grants.
- 1.5.3 As always, we are paying this money out to businesses as quickly as possible.
- 1.5.4 Following the announcement of the provisional local government finance settlement in December 2021, an extra meeting of the Budget Strategy Group was held on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022. The provisional settlement was better than our assumptions which has enabled us to direct more funding towards the financial challenges being faced in children's services. The budget proposals from this extra meeting of the Budget Group were reported to the Resources & Delivering Value Scrutiny Board on 1<sup>st</sup> February and will be presented to Full Cabinet later this week.

## **1.6 Future Decisions**

- 1.6.1 At future Resources decision sessions, reports will be considered on Revenue & Capital Monitoring; Debt Monitoring; ICT Capital Project updates, Applications for Discretionary Rate Relief and an update on Welfare Reform.