

Coventry City Council
Minutes of the Meeting of Finance and Corporate Services Scrutiny Board (1) held
at 10.00 am on Wednesday, 2 March 2016

Present:

Members: Councillor J Mutton (Chair)
Councillor S Bains
Councillor J Blundell
Councillor G Duggins
Councillor R Lakha
Councillor T Sawdon
Councillor R Singh (substitute for Councillor Skipper)
Councillor D Welsh

Other Members: Councillors Maton (Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Employment)

Employees:

Place: N. Clews, D. Cockroft
Resources: V. Castree, L. Commane, C. Sinclair

Apologies: Councillor D Chater and T Skipper

Public Business

38. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

39. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 January 2016 were signed as a true record. There were no matters arising.

40. Strategic Property Review

The Board considered a briefing note and received a presentation in respect of progress made on the Strategic Property Review.

The presentation set out performance against targets for a 3-year period from 2013/14 to 2015/16. The data indicated that performance was on target to achieve £3m. This had been achieved in a number of ways including disposal of poor performing assets, paying down expensive debts with proceeds, a smaller operational estate, control of property expenditure through centralisation and investment for new income. A project group met monthly to focus on these key areas. It was reported at the meeting that an additional £250k income had been delivered from the property portfolio.

Going forward there would be continued focus on reducing expensive to run and poor performing property, a smaller operational portfolio and further investment in income opportunities.

The Board questioned officers on a number of matters including how the Council could maximise income from current premises, impact on business rate taxes and the process for repaying expensive debt. In respect of the latter, the Board asked that officers provide a briefing note which would explore what additional debts could be paid off using receipts, reserves and underspends.

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Board note the presentation and request that officers provide a briefing note identifying what additional debts could be repaid and setting out methods to achieve this including using capital receipts, reserves and underspends to maximise revenue which could then be built into budgets.

41. Council move to Friargate

The Board considered a briefing note and received a presentation on progress in respect of the Council move to Friargate. Key points made were:

- The office building at Friargate was progressing at pace. All existing buildings had been demolished, infrastructure and utility diversions had been completed, pipe networks for the District Energy System had been installed and the central core of the building was almost complete. There had been some recent utilities issues which meant the timetable had slipped by approximately 6 months, therefore staff moves would be starting in Summer 2017.
- The Customer Service Centre had opened to the public in November 2015, consolidating multiple reception points, the conference suite for Safeguarding and Youth Offending was now in use, the customer “meet and greet” staff and new ways of customer engagement was working well.
- Designs for the new Democratic Centre were progressing. Member and staff consultations had taken place, Planning and Listed Building Consent had been submitted, toilet and kitchenette refurbishment to start in April 2016 as well as works on the Democratic Centre – with an expected completion date of September 2016. The link between the Council House and CC3 would be removed as soon as the new committee rooms were operational.
- There had been investment in a number of other suburban office buildings to support locality based service delivery. City Centre First had been superseded by Connecting Communities.
- The introduction of agile and flexible working arrangements for Council staff.
- The rationalisation of the Council’s operational office buildings from 27 to 9.

- The construction of the Friargate Bridge – project delivered completing Phase 1 of the Friargate Masterplan.
- Communications and engagement – for example, ongoing Comms support, regular attendance at ward forums and community meetings. Training with managers

The Board questioned officers on the Friargate financial model and whether it was on target in respect of costs. It was reported that there was an expected delivery of £500k net savings per year, and were currently on course to deliver that this year. In respect of this, officers agreed to provide further detail of capital and revenue expenditure at a future meeting.

Following a question, it was confirmed that, post-sale of Civic Centres 1-4, Heatline would continue to be viable.

In response to a question on the level of interest in companies re-locating to the Friargate site, it was considered that, now that the building was taking shape, more interest would now be shown in the development as a whole. In addition, as business rates were now part of the Council's income, it followed that the Council would be in a stronger position to help develop properties and therefore maximise business rates income.

Following discussion, it was agreed that a joint meeting with Scrutiny Board 3 be arranged to consider Friargate further.

RESOLVED that the Board:

- a) Request officers to schedule a joint meeting with the Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board (3) to further consider Friargate.**
- b) Receive further details on capital and revenue expenditure in respect of Friargate at a future meeting.**

42. Outstanding Issues

There were no outstanding issues.

43. Work Programme

The work programme was noted.

44. Any other items of Public Business

There were no other items of public business.

(Meeting closed at 12.10 pm)

