

ITEM 2. INVESTMENTS HELD AS AT 28 FEBRUARY 2017

FILE NO: X005605

SUMMARY

This report provides details of Council's investment portfolio and performance to 28 February 2017.

Council's total Investment and Cash position was \$574.3M at the end of February, with investments earning interest of \$1.2M for the month.

The majority of the City's cash and investments portfolio are held as internally restricted (\$346.2M) and externally restricted (\$88.5M) cash reserves to satisfy the City's legislative responsibilities and to set aside specific funds for Council's funding commitments to the major initiatives within the Sustainable Sydney 2030 Community Strategic Plan.

Key commitments within the City's Long Term Financial Plan include public domain works in the CBD to support the implementation of the CBD and South East light rail project and stormwater, town centre infrastructure and community facilities in the Green Square urban renewal area. The balance of investment funds represents working capital and funding required for the City's operating and capital expenditure commitments.

Council achieved an annualised monthly return of 2.85% for February, significantly above the 30 Day Bank Bill Rate (BBR) of 1.62%, the AusBond Bank Bill Index, published by Bloomberg, of 1.61% and the enhanced benchmark of 2.07% (BBR + 0.45%) as included in the Investment Strategy endorsed by Council in October 2016.

Council's annual rolling return of 2.92% also continues to exceed the 12 month 30 Day BBR of 1.75%, AusBond Bank Bill Index of 1.98% and the enhanced benchmark of 2.20% (BBR + 0.45%) as included in the Investment Strategy endorsed by Council in October 2016.

The structure of Council's investment portfolio continues to reflect the conservative approach outlined in the Investment Policy and Strategy, which remains appropriate for the current global and domestic economic conditions and have recently been further strengthened to state the City's preference for re-investing its surplus funds in line with its community environmental expectations as identified in Sustainable Sydney 2030.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that the Investment Report as at 28 February 2017 be received and noted.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Register of Investments and Cash as at 28 February 2017.

Attachment B: Investment Performance as at 28 February 2017.

BACKGROUND

1. In accordance with the principles of financial management, cash that is surplus to Council's immediate requirements is invested within acceptable risk parameters to optimise interest income while ensuring the security of these funds.
2. Surplus cash is only invested in authorised investments that comply with governing legislation and Council's Investment Policy and Strategy.
3. The benchmark performance goal of Council's Investment Policy and Strategy is to surpass the 30 Day Bank Bill Rate (BBR) by 45 basis points while performance continues to be also measured against the Bloomberg AusBond Bank Bill Index.
4. Council's total Investment and Cash position as at 28 February 2017 was \$574.3M, an increase of \$26M from the \$548.3M reported at 31 January 2017, reflecting rates and revenue receipts offset by capital works expenditure and other operational payments. A schedule detailing all of Council's investments as at the end of February is provided at Attachment A.
5. The majority of the City's cash and investments portfolio are held as internally restricted (\$346.2M) and externally restricted (\$88.5M) cash reserves to satisfy the City's legislative responsibilities and to set aside specific funds for Council's funding commitments to the major initiatives within the Sustainable Sydney 2030 Community Strategic Plan.
6. Key commitments within the City's Long Term Financial Plan include public domain works in the CBD to support the implementation of the CBD and South East light rail project and stormwater, town centre infrastructure and community facilities in the Green Square urban renewal area. The balance of investment funds represents working capital and funding required for the City's operating and other capital expenditure commitments.
7. Council achieved an annualised monthly return of 2.85% for February, significantly above the 30 Day Bank Bill Rate (BBR) of 1.62%, the AusBond Bank Bill Index, published by Bloomberg, of 1.61% and the enhanced benchmark of 2.07% (BBR + 0.45%) as included in the Investment Strategy endorsed by Council in October 2016.
8. Council's annual rolling return of 2.92% also continues to exceed the 12 month 30 Day BBR of 1.75%, AusBond Bank Bill Index of 1.98% and the enhanced benchmark of 2.20% (BBR + 0.45%) as included in the Investment Strategy endorsed by Council in October 2016.
9. The outperformance of both the industry and enhanced benchmarks has continued due to the acquisition, over the last three to four years, of investments with locked in higher yields in anticipation of future rate cuts. The situation has gradually declined as the investments steadily mature.
10. The RBA cut the official rate to 2.50% in August 2013 where it remained until further reductions of 0.25% each in February, May 2015, May and August 2016 left the rate at 1.50%. The market has responded accordingly by offering lower yields on investments which is likely to have an adverse impact on Council's future investment returns, noting that longer term interest rates have increased slightly in recent weeks.

11. Council has, for an extended period, outperformed the industry benchmarks and enhanced benchmarks (Investment Strategy benchmarks are based on returns currently available in the 30-90 day investment market) on both a monthly and annual rolling basis. Council was able to lock in, over the past two to three years, a number of investments that had fixed rates above 5.00% p.a. as well as floating rates that had fixed margins which were significantly above the risk free rate. As these investments mature, Council will only be able to achieve the lower rates offered in the market.
12. The structure of Council's investment portfolio continues to reflect the conservative approach outlined in the Investment Policy and Strategy which remain appropriate for the current global and domestic economic conditions.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

13. Council's investments accord with all legislative and policy requirements, as detailed below, and continue to achieve returns above minimum benchmark rates.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

14. Council's investments earned interest of \$1.2M for the month of February 2017, which coincides with the current month's budget of \$1.2M. Earnings for the full year are forecast to achieve \$16.5M and exceed the annual budget of \$14.1M.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

15. Council is authorised to invest its surplus cash under section 625 of the Local Government Act 1993.
16. The Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 (clause 212) requires Council to provide a written monthly report of all monies invested, under section 625 of the Act.
17. The Investment Policy and Strategy were revised in October 2016, strengthening Council's commitment to sustainable investments (where returns and risks are equivalent) by changing the word 'desirable' to 'preferred' under the environmentally and socially responsible investment criteria. The revision also expanded the definition of environmentally harmful activities to include specific reference to coal, gas and oil.
18. Council's investments accord with the Minister's Investment Order, the Office of Local Government's Investment Policy Guidelines, and the City's own Investment Policy and Strategy as adopted by Council on 24 October 2016.

CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES

19. A monthly investment report must be submitted for Council's information and review within the following month.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

20. Consultation is regularly undertaken with a number of financial institutions and investment advisers to consider options and ensure that Council continues to maximise its investment return within appropriate risk parameters.

21. Council officers meet regularly with representatives of each of the 'Big 4' banks and with other Authorised Deposit-taking Institutions (ADI). At these meetings, Council officers actively advocate for socially responsible investment (SRI) opportunities. To date, feedback from these meetings indicates that there is a well-known appetite in the market for these products and financial institutions continue to investigate the development of suitable products, however, it is difficult to match the level of funds to available SRI opportunities while meeting both the credit risk and maturity profile requirements of Councils.

BILL CARTER
Chief Financial Officer