

Item 3.

Investments Held as at 31 August 2023

File No: X020701

Summary

This report provides details of the City's investment portfolio and performance to 31 August 2023.

The City's total Investment and Cash position was \$817.51M at 31 August 2023, with investments earning interest of \$2.9M for the month.

The 2022/23 financial year saw the Australian economy enter a sustained period of inflation well in excess of the Reserve Bank of Australia's (RBA) target range of two to three per cent. The annual inflation rate in Australia was 7.0 per cent as at March 2023, down slightly from a high of 7.8 per cent as at December 2022. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 0.8 per cent in the June 2023 quarter and 6.0 per cent annually. While global factors explain much of the increase in inflation, domestic factors also play a role. There are widespread upward pressures on prices from strong demand, a tight labour market and capacity constraints in some sectors of the economy.

In response, the RBA responded with 13 consecutive interest rate increases. The current official cash rate is now 4.10 per cent up from the record low 0.10 per cent level in May 2022. At the July and August RBA Board meetings official interest rates were held steady, however, further increases have been foreshadowed in an attempt to curb inflation.

While the City's cash inflows have been substantial in the past month due to the first instalment of annual rates income some other revenue streams remain negatively impacted by the lingering economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular commercial property income receipts, but also parking related, building development related income and other activity based revenues are yet to return to pre Covid-19 pandemic levels.

The City's cash and investments portfolio is substantially restricted in both internal (\$235.5M) and external (\$90.8M) 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 Community Strategic Plan Delivering Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision.

Key commitments within the City's Long Term Financial Plan include public domain works in the CBD, infrastructure and community facilities in the Green Square urban renewal area and commercial property and open space acquisitions. The balance of investment funds represents working capital and funding required for the City's operating and capital expenditure commitments.

The City achieved an annualized monthly return of 4.80 per cent for August which remains above the 30-Day Bank Bill Rate (BBR) of 4.05 per cent, the latest AusBond Bank Bill Index of 4.44 per cent and the enhanced benchmark of 4.50 per cent (BBR + 0.45 per cent).

Since 2015, the City has utilised an additional strategic benchmark rate to measure its investment performance by exceeding the 30 day benchmark returns, by at least 45 additional basis points (0.45 per cent p.a.). The 45 basis point increase is based on observed historical average increased credit spreads (or margins) over bank bill rates on offer in relation to 30–90 day investments.

The City's annual rolling return of 4.63 per cent continues to exceed the 12 month average 30 Day Bank Bill Rate of 3.38 per cent, the latest AusBond Bank Bill Index of 3.37 per cent and the enhanced benchmark of 3.83 per cent (BBR + 0.45 per cent). The benchmarks were endorsed in the revised Investment Strategy which was approved by Council in October 2022.

It is worth noting that Council's investment opportunities are constrained by a combination of legislation, regulation and any directions and guidelines issued by the Minister for the Office of Local Government. These guidelines were developed, in large part, as a response to the Global Financial Crisis and its impact on the local government sector's investments. They effectively limit the City's investment profile to something similar to a cash managed fund, which generally produce lower returns but provide a high level of security. The City's returns from the investment portfolio remain in line with cash managed funds in the market.

This report includes graphs demonstrating that the City's liquidity profile continues to satisfy the requirements of the Policy, and charts that identify the distribution of the City's portfolio across credit ratings, investment product types and financial institutions. Separate charts depicting the City's cumulative portfolio returns over and above both the 90-day Bloomberg AusBond and 30-day Bank Bill Rate benchmarks have also been included to provide further insight into the City's total investment portfolio performance.

The structure of the City'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. The Policy and Strategy also maintain the City's commitment to sustainable investments where returns and risks are equivalent, under the environmentally and socially responsible investment criteria.

Recommendation

It is resolved that the Investment Report as at 31 August 2023 be received and noted.

Attachments

Attachment A. Register of Investments and Cash as at 31 August 2023

Attachment B. Investment Performance as at 31 August 2023

Background

1. In accordance with the principles of sound financial management, cash that is surplus to the City'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 the City's Investment Policy and Strategy.
3. The benchmark performance goal of the City's Investment Policy and Strategy is to surpass the 30 Days Bank Bill Rate (BBR) by 45 basis points while performance also continues to be measured against the Bloomberg AusBond Bank Bill Index.
4. The City's total Investment and Cash position as at 31 August 2023 is \$817.51M, an increase of \$99.27M from the \$718.24M reported as at 31 July 2023. The monthly movement reflects operating income, most of which was received from the first instalment of rates receipts, in excess of capital works expenditure and other operational payments for the period and is consistent with historical seasonal trends. A schedule detailing all of the City's investments as at the end of August is provided at Attachment A.
5. A substantial portion of the City's cash and investments portfolio is held as internally restricted (\$235.50M) or externally restricted (\$90.8M) 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 Community Strategic Plan Delivering Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision.
6. Key commitments within the City's Long Term Financial Plan include public domain works in the CBD, infrastructure and community facilities in the Green Square urban renewal area and the acquisition of commercial property and open space. The balance of investment funds represents working capital and funding required for the City's operating and other capital expenditure commitments.
7. The City achieved an annualized monthly return of 4.80 per cent for August which remains above the 30-Day Bank Bill Rate (BBR) of 4.05 per cent, the latest AusBond Bank Bill Index of 4.44 per cent and the enhanced benchmark of 4.50 per cent (BBR + 0.45 per cent).
8. Since 2015, the City has utilised an additional strategic benchmark rate to measure its investment performance by exceeding the 30 day benchmark returns, by at least 45 additional basis points (0.45 per cent p.a.). The 45 basis point increase is based on observed historical average increased credit spreads (or margins) over bank bill rates on offer in relation to 30 to 90 day investments.
9. The City's annual rolling return of 4.63 per cent continues to exceed the 12 month average 30 Day Bank Bill Rate of 3.38 per cent, the latest AusBond Bank Bill Index of 3.37 per cent and the enhanced benchmark of 3.83 per cent (BBR + 0.45 per cent). The benchmarks were endorsed in the revised Investment Strategy which was approved by Council in October 2022.
10. The City aims to achieve returns equal to or above these benchmark rates for the period. However, this achievement remains secondary to the critical strategies of maintaining a prudent and conservative risk profile and ensuring adequate liquidity for operational purposes.

11. It is worth noting Council's investment opportunities are constrained by a combination of legislation, regulation and any directions and guidelines issued by the Minister or the Office of Local Government. These guidelines were developed, in large part, as a response to the Global Financial Crisis and its impact on the local government sectors investments. They effectively limit the City's investment profile to something similar to a cash managed fund, which produces lower returns but provides a high level of security.
12. The City's returns from the investment portfolio are in line with cash managed funds in the market. The recent increases to official cash rates have seen improvements in rates of return offered by the market, allowing maturing deposits to be re-invested at higher rates. This trend is anticipated to continue as investments placed during the period of suppressed interest rates reach maturity and are re-invested.
13. The annual inflation rate in Australia was 7.0 per cent as at March 2023 down from a high of 7.8 per cent as at December 2022. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 0.8 per cent in the June 2023 quarter and 6.0 per cent annually. Global factors explain much of the increase in inflation, but domestic factors are also playing a role. There are widespread upward pressures on prices from strong demand, a tight labour market and capacity constraints in some sectors of the economy along with recent weather events.
14. In response to the current sustained period of inflation, well in excess of the it's target range of two to three per cent, the RBA has lifted official cash rates a record 13 consecutive times from the record low 0.1 per cent level in May 2022. The current rate is 4.10 per cent. While following their July Board meeting the RBA held interest rates steady, further increases remain a possibility if inflation remains high.
15. Despite these recent increases in interest rates, low investment yields on a number of older existing investments are expected to continue to adversely impact the City's portfolio return over the next twelve months. Most of the investment portfolio (currently 73.39 per cent) is held in fixed return term deposits. Improved returns are anticipated as these investments mature and are reinvested in products offering higher rates where the funds are not otherwise required for operating purposes. As around 73.84 per cent of the portfolio, including at call account, is due to mature in the coming year the City will be able to take advantage of improving returns.
16. The City's cash inflows, whilst reasonably resilient, have been negatively impacted for a prolonged period, as the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic have continued to affect major revenue streams, in particular commercial property income receipts.
17. The report includes graphs depicting that the City's cumulative portfolio returns over and above both the 90-day Bloomberg AusBond, and 30-day Bank Bill Rate benchmarks have also been included to provide further insight into the City's total investment portfolio performance.
18. The structure of the City's investment portfolio continues to reflect the conservative approach outlined in the Investment Policy and Strategy which was last revised and approved by Council in October 2022 remains appropriate for the current global and domestic economic conditions.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

19. The City's investments accord with all legislative and policy requirements, as detailed below, and aim to achieve returns above minimum benchmark rates.

Financial Implications

20. The City's investments earned interest of \$2.9M for the month of August 2023, which is well above the monthly budgeted earnings of \$1.7M.
21. The interest income budget for the 2023/24 financial year has been set at \$20M. Anticipated higher interest rates offered in the market are forecast to be offset by reducing cash balances as the City's capital works program is delivered over the course of the coming financial year. The annual forecast will be further reviewed as part of the preparation of the Quarter 1 report to Council. At this stage it is anticipated that interest revenue will be at least \$25.0M.

Relevant Legislation

22. Council is authorised to invest its surplus cash under section 625 of the Local Government Act 1993.
23. The Local Government (General) Regulation 2021 (section 212) requires the City to provide a written monthly report of all monies invested, under section 625 of the Act.
24. The Investment Policy and Strategy was last revised in October 2022, maintaining Council's commitment to give preference to sustainable investments where returns and risks are equivalent to other investments.
25. The City'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 31 October 2022.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

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

Public Consultation

27. Consultation is regularly undertaken with a number of financial institutions and investment advisers to consider options and ensure the City continues to maximise its investment return within appropriate legislative and risk parameters.
28. City staff meet regularly with representatives of each of the 'Big 4' banks and NSW TCorp. At these meetings City staff actively advocate for Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) opportunities.

29. The banks acknowledge the appetite in the market for these products and they continue to investigate the development of suitable products, however it has been challenging to match the level of funds to available Socially Responsible Investment opportunities that meet the credit risk and maturity profile requirements of the City.
30. As noted in previous Investment Reports, Westpac were able to bring a Green Tailored Deposit product to market, which delivers a comparable return while achieving the City's preferred outcomes. The City currently holds \$45.0M in seven tranches with this Green Tailored deposit.
31. The City currently holds \$5M in a sustainability bond/FRN with Bank Australia due to mature on 24 November 2025 and the City also invested an additional \$4.5M in February 2023 due to mature on 22 February 2027. This is based on an investment framework that is in line with the 2021 versions of the ICMA Green Bond Principles (GBP), Social Bond Principles (SBP) and Sustainability Bond Guidelines (SBG). This Socially Responsible investment opportunity meets both the credit risk and maturity profile requirement of the City.

BILL CARTER

Chief Financial Officer