



WARRINGTON

Borough Council

Professor Steven Broomhead
Chief Executive

Lynton Green
Director of Corporate Services

Quattro 5th Floor
Buttermarket Street
Warrington
WA1 2NH

4th July 2017

Mr A Smith
Reply via: [request-413818-
f135f16b@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-413818-f135f16b@whatdotheyknow.com)

Our ref: **FOI/RASC/2020**

Dear Mr Smith,

Freedom of Information Act Request: 2017 MJ Awards

I am writing in response to your email of 23rd June 2017 regarding the Council's nomination for an award at the Municipal Journal Awards 2017.

Please see the below responses to your enquiries.

Q1: Which organisation nominated the Council? If the Council was nominated for more than one award category, please list each category and the organisation which made the nomination

[Warrington Borough Council submitted a bid for the Innovation in Finance award as part of the Municipal Journal local government achievement awards.](#)

Q2: For any awards where the Council nominated itself, please provide copies of the nomination form submitted

[Please see attached the Council's bid submission form made to the Municipal Journal.](#)

Q3: Please provide copies of any press releases produced by the Council pertaining to the MJ awards 2017 – including any prior to the award ceremony and any which were issued after the award ceremony.

[You can find the Council's press release from March 2017 regarding their nomination and the event here.](#)

Q4: How many personnel attended the awards dinner in London? Please state the number of councillors and the number of officers

[Three Warrington Borough Council employees attended the awards dinner in London.](#)

Q5: How much money did the Council spend on seats at the awards dinner? For clarity, where a place was sponsored by an external body, please do not include in this total ie only include Council expenditure

[The Council did not spend any money on seats at the awards dinner. Therefore, we do not hold any information as specified in your request.](#)



Q6: How much external sponsorship was received to support the event? Please list each sponsoring organisation and the sum provided

The Council did not organise the event, therefore we do not hold any information as specified in your request.

However, the event was organised by the Municipal Journal who may be able to provide further information regarding the sponsorship of the event. Please see their contact details [here](#).

Q7: What were the travel, accommodation and subsistence costs for Council personnel, including councillors and officers, attending the event?

The costs for Warrington Borough Council staff to attend the event were as follows:

Cost Types	Amount
Staff Time	£414
Travel	£167.80
Subsistence Costs – Car Parking	£12
Hotel Accommodation	£218

If you are not satisfied with my response to your request for information, you may ask the Council for an internal review of this decision. You should write to Paul Clisby, Legal Services Manager, Warrington Borough Council, Quattro, Buttermarket Street, Warrington, WA1 1BN, giving details of your complaint. You should do this as soon as possible, or, in any case, within two months of your request being refused.

If, following the outcome of the internal review, you remain dissatisfied with the Council's response to your information request, you have the right under section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to appeal to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Telephone: 01625 545745
Fax: 01625 545 510
Email: enquiries@ico.gsi.gov.uk

Yours sincerely,



Lynton Green
Director of Corporate Services



MJ Local government achievement awards 2017

Innovation in finance

Summary

Most local authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to deliver balanced budgets in the face of continued austerity.

Warrington has experienced cuts of more than £90million since 2010. Last year's Local Government Finance Settlement confirmed that our funding would fall by a further 12.9% in 2016/17 – that's £33 per resident.

We are doing our utmost to protect residents from the worst of the cuts. And, as we seek to save an additional £41million by 2020, we are again reliant on an ethical, socially-inclusive investment portfolio which massively outperforms its peers and provides essential revenue to the council.

Innovation is key.

Our investment strategy explained

Our investment strategy has been very successful. During an era of low interest rates and economic uncertainty the strategy has evolved from the traditional, homogeneous local government treasury management model into a strong, commercially-focused one yielding an average return of 6% per annum over the past two years. This compares extremely favourably to the 0.25-0.45% returns typically available from mainstream banks or money markets funds.

Warrington's investment strategy has generated multi-million pound surpluses that have been invested directly in frontline services.



Since 2009 when we created the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme alongside Capita, we have become the first local authority to invest in the CCLA Property Fund and one of the first to invest in 'Challenger' banks, offered large loans to housing association partners to help them to build desperately-need homes/tackle housing shortage, will establish a local authority investment fund in 2017 and also plan to set up a housing investment company.



LeachRhodesWalker
ARCHITECTS

7461 BRIDGE STREET QUARTER - LEISURE BLOCK : CGI - OPTION 1A
Scale: NTB@A3 Auth By: CJG Drawn By: DL Date: 26.07.16 Orig No: 7461-LJ00103

In addition, Warrington became the first local authority outside London to enter the bond market in the last decade.

A £150million bond deal is financing our ambitious town centre regeneration plans, while investments in green energy schemes are delivering commercial rates of interest and, crucially, reducing fuel poverty within our borough.

Our approach is driven by cutting-edge investment techniques and high quality data analysis, underpinned by rigorous risk management and transparent governance. We have earned a reputation for innovation, but at the same time secured a credit rating from Moody's that puts Warrington on a par with the governments of France, South Korea, China and Kuwait.

The council has a strong governance framework that goes beyond the CIPFA treasury management code. We have a Treasury Management Board (TMB) in addition to the common local government audit and corporate governance committees. The TMB is made up of leading councillors from across the political divide – members have been integral in translating vision into delivery – and senior council officers who meet to discuss new investment products in detail.

Value-for-money, ethical investment is of paramount importance. We strive to ensure that our investment gains arise only from supporting and not exploiting our environment. And we use those gains fund ambitious environmental, social and cultural change programmes. Warrington Council is taking a leading role among local authorities in investing in technology which protects our environment.

Investment strategy in practice

66 local authorities have now joined the aforementioned Local Authority Mortgage Scheme, collectively approving nearly 4,000 mortgages worth £430million. In Warrington, 200 mortgages have helped local people to get on the housing ladder. The government has followed Warrington's example and introduced a similar scheme.

Warrington became the first local authority to invest in the CCLA Property Fund – the fund appointed by the Local Authorities' Mutual Investment Trust (LAMIT) to manage and administer the Local Authorities' Property Fund. The CCLA manages a diverse commercial and industrial property portfolio, and delivers an attractive return to local authorities like ours.

Warrington was also one of first local authorities to invest in 'Challenger' banks – a new breed of bank now challenging that markets' oligopoly. Most recently, the council has taken a 33% share in

Redwood – a challenger bank which aims to boost investment in small and medium sized businesses in our borough and beyond.

By running a bank we'll be able to take deposits from local businesses and get a so-called 'gearing effect'. For example, for every £10million investment the bank may be able to make £50million of loans, making a greater impact for a smaller investment. The council could also sell its share of the bank in future years, generating a large investment return for local council tax payers.

Our ability to offer large loans to housing association partners is also a win-win for Warrington. Loans to Muir Group (£30million), Helena Partnerships (£90million) and Plus Dane Group (£20million). We currently have £275million of loan facilities in place with 10 housing associations, enabling them to build hundreds of desperately-needed homes, aid economic regeneration locally and generate a return on our investment that is reinvested in front line services.

The £150million bond deal mentioned earlier is another win-win for Warrington. Not only will it finance our town centre regeneration plans, the council will retain £100million through the deal to access future funding and has sold £50million to a UK insurance company. Sale of the latter will save the council £12million in interest costs.

The bond structure has enabled us to save on our borrowing costs, diversify our borrowing portfolio and promote the new commercial ethos that the council operates under. In our opinion, this is a great example of the public and private sectors coming together and delivering an innovative solution to bear down on borrowing costs. We hope this is a model local government can develop more widely.

Two green energy/social investment bonds invested in our local community energy company are delivering a commercial rate of interest and, crucially, reducing fuel poverty within the borough.

We have invested £5million in installing solar panels on 3,000 affordable homes, generating a financial return for the council and reducing household fuel bills. Householders have saved on average £223 per annum, and four apprentice electrician and two fuel poverty reduction posts have been created.



Other solar investments amount to enough to supply 11,000 households annually and displaced circa 15million kilograms of carbon dioxide a year.

All our ethical investment schemes have individual business cases that are subject to thorough risk assessment, and independent technical and legal review. Outcomes of proposed investments are identified before investments are made and we manage these outcomes throughout the duration of our investment.



Investments are also subject to independent visits and audits. For example, with our Swindon solar farm investment we held an investor day at the farm itself where investing authorities and other interested authorities could attend, view the farm, ask questions and speak to key stakeholders who would be benefiting from the farms output.

The introduction of innovative, ethical commercial products into the market place, then, is characterised by due diligence.

In 2016, Warrington Council led and designed a £60million+ bond investment in one of the UK's largest solar farms: Wroughton, Swindon. Our investment partners are Thurrock and Newham councils, and the British Museum.

[Swindon Solar Park](#) is one of the UK's largest operational solar PV projects. Developed by British Solar Renewables, the park has been built on a former RAF airfield now owned by the Science Museum Group. The 172-acre site comprises 231,660 solar panels and has a capacity of 60.9 MW, making the project one of the largest solar assets in the UK. It will generate close to 60 GWh of electricity per annum, enough to supply over 15,400 homes, and save around 35 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year.

The site has also been constructed to provide additional environmental benefits, including enhancements to habitat and biodiversity for wildlife at the site. Native plants will colonise and thrive, bringing with them many other animals to become a buzzing, colourful haven for a number of under-threat species.

Warrington Borough Council has invested £20million in a five-year fixed bond. This money comes from the council's cash balances which are kept in reserve to cover council spending commitments (similar to an individual's bank account). By investing some of these reserves, the council's cash can make interest, rather than simply sitting there. The deal expected to deliver £500,000 in returns every year for the council, which can be ploughed back into providing essential council services.

Conclusion

Innovation may be a primary characteristic of our investment strategy, but the strategy's guiding principles are security, liquidity and yield. Cautious risk management, strong corporate governance and prudent diversification are core objectives.

Careful management allows the council to provide the benefits of greater diversification and more sophisticated risk management, while retaining the ethical and best practice stance. Financial and social audits are carried out during the life cycle of investments.

Our success is Warrington's benefit.

Testimonials

“Warrington has shown immense creativity with this inspirational investment in Swindon Solar Park. It shows what can be achieved when public and private sector organisations work in partnership towards a shared goal of economic, ethical and social returns.”

Matt Moore, head of sustainable development and the Wroughton site for the Science Museum Group

“We have worked in a Warrington lead partnership to develop an innovative bond investment product in Swindon that is of the highest ethical, commercial and transparent standard.”

Sean Clark, Director of Finance, Thurrock Council

“Warrington’s investment in creating local community energy bonds has enabled us to assist third sector and voluntary organisations to reduce their energy costs which supports their ability to continue to deliver essential services to our communities in a challenging financial climate. This approach is also enabling our organisation to reduce fuel poverty and start tackling the problem of cold homes which are a bigger killer than smoking.”

David Cowley, Director of Livewire Community Energy

“Warrington's lending approach provides all of the benefits of a traditional bank loan whilst offering great simplicity, flexibility and transparent governance.”

Howard Roberts, Director of Finance Torus Housing Association

“I am delighted to have Warrington Borough Council as a co-investor in this partnership landmark project. Obviously a local authority’s first priority is to invest wisely for the future of its borough, managing risk as effectively as possible. Swindon’s 15-year power purchase agreement with HSBC provides a guarantee that ticks that box.

“But, crucially, this investment is also ethical. By investing in a low carbon asset, Warrington has managed to provide economic and sustainable value for its taxpayers. It is a pleasure to work with partners that have the vision to be innovative without losing sight of their social and corporate responsibility.”

Liam Kavanagh, founder & CEO, Rockfire Capital