

ITEM 11 STATEMENT OF INVESTMENT - MARCH 2022

This report provides an overview of Council's investment portfolio performance for the month of March 2022.

Council had an average weighted return for March 2022 of -0.14% which was below the benchmark return of 0.00%. This result was primarily due to negative valuations of the consolidated Floating Rate Notes and the NSW TCorp Growth funds reflecting the continuing volatility in the market. These valuations have impacted unfavourably on the phased investment income to budget during the months of January and March. However, both growth funds are expected to achieve their long term return objectives over time. The remainder of Council's portfolio continues to provide a high degree of credit quality and liquidity, but historically low interest returns.

RECOMMENDATION

Council receive the Statement of Investment for March 2022

REPORT AUTHORISATIONS

Report of: Brian Jenkins, Chief Financial Officer

Authorised by: Renee Campbell, Director Corporate Services - Connected + Engaged City

ATTACHMENTS

- 1 Statement of Investment - March 2022
- 2 Investment Income Compared to Budget 2021-2022

BACKGROUND

Council is required to invest its surplus funds in accordance with the Ministerial Investment Order and Office of Local Government guidelines. The Order reflects a conservative approach and restricts the investment types available to Council. In compliance with the Order and Office of Local Government guidelines, Council adopted an Investment Policy on 10 December 2018. The Investment Policy provides a framework for the credit quality, institutional diversification and maturity constraints Council's portfolio can be exposed to. Council's investment portfolio was controlled by Council's Finance Division during the period to ensure compliance with the Investment Policy. Council's Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee's (ARIC) role of overseer provides for the review of Council's Investment Policy and the Management Investment Strategy.

Council's Responsible Accounting Officer is required to sign the complying Statement of Investment contained within the report, certifying that all investments were made in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993 and the Local Government Regulation 2005.

Council's investment holdings as at 25 March 2022 were \$172,509,471 (Statement of Investment attached) [26 March 2021 \$165,687,715]. These figures include Council's interest in CivicRisk Mutual Ltd recognised at fair value as at 30 June 2021.

Council had an average weighted return for March 2022 of -0.14% which was below the benchmark return of 0.00%. This result was primarily due to negative valuations of the consolidated Floating Rate Notes and the NSW TCorp Growth funds reflecting the continuing volatility in the market. The remainder of Council's portfolio continues to provide a high degree of credit quality and liquidity, but historically low interest returns. The global markets are still experiencing unprecedented turmoil and volatility in the wake of COVID-19 and may still provide uncertainty for the foreseeable future.

At 25 March 2022, year to date interest and investment revenue of -\$58,478 was recognised compared to the year to date budget of \$781,375. While there remains a high level of volatility and valuations are expected to move up and down during the year it is now considered that the budgeted returns from investments will require adjustment at the March Quarterly Review.

Council's 17 floating rate notes had a net decrease in value of \$303,678 for March 2022. During March we experienced strong volatility in short and long-term rates, further driven by expectations that inflation pressures will worsen due to the ongoing Ukraine war and COVID-19 lockdowns across China.

Council holds two Mortgaged Backed Securities (MBS) that recorded a net increase in value of \$1,452 for March 2022. The coupon margins on these investments reflect pre-Global Financial Crisis (GFC) pricing. For example, the Emerald A is paying 45 basis points over the BBSW where a comparative investment is now paying 100 basis points over the BBSW. This is reflected in the coupon rates on both investments. While the maturity dates are outside Council's control, the investment advisors had previously indicated capital is not at risk at that stage and recommended a hold strategy due to the illiquid nature of the investment.

Council has three investment holdings under the NSW TCorp Hour Glass Facility: the Long-Term Growth Fund; the Medium-Term Growth Fund and the Cash Fund. The Long-Term Growth recorded a net decrease in value of \$20,914; the Medium-Term Growth Fund recorded a net decrease in value of \$80,308 and the Cash Fund recorded a net decrease in value of \$845 in March 2022. The fluctuations in both the Long-Term Growth and Medium-Term Growth Funds are a reflection of the current share market volatility both domestically and internationally and is diversified across a number of different asset classes that have differing risk and return characteristics.

Negative valuations during the months of January and March have impacted unfavourably on Council's phased investment income to budget. However, both growth funds are expected to achieve their long-term return objectives over time. The Medium-Term Fund has returned 1.73% over the past 12 months and the Long-Term Fund 4.77%. The TCorp Cash Fund generally provides relatively stable returns over extended time periods with low potential for capital loss while maintaining high levels of liquidity, similar to an at call account, and only invests in Australian cash and fixed interests. The current environment of historically low interest rates and credit spreads mean the future returns for the funds will, as a result, be lower.

At their April 2022 meeting, the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) maintained the official cash rate at the record low of 0.10%. The RBA will continue to assess the outlook and adjust policy as needed to foster sustainable growth in demand and inflation outcomes consistent with the inflation target over time.

The current Investment Policy sets a 40% maximum exposure limit to individual institutions within the AAA category. This limit is currently considered to include funds held within the NAB (Council's banker) savings account that is used daily to hold cash. Through the banking services contract with the NAB, that includes a fixed margin over the current cash rate, this account is providing a better return than alternate short to medium term investments available to Council. At the end of March 2022, the exposure to NAB was 31.42%, which was above the 25% target set in the Investment Strategy but within Investment Policy requirements. The NAB savings account is currently providing a better return than the TCorp Cash Fund and is currently the best option available for surplus cash, however this will be continually monitored to ensure best value.

To take advantage of the returns that can be achieved through the NAB savings account, it is expected that Council will operate above the targeted institutional exposure described in the current Investment Strategy for NAB while the Cash holdings exceed the targeted 15%. Transitioning from higher cash to longer term investments will take time based on appropriate opportunities in the market.

The current investment portfolio complies with Council's Investment Policy which was endorsed by Council on 10 December 2018. Council's Responsible Accounting Officer has signed the Statement of Investment contained within the report, certifying all investments were made in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993 and the Local Government Regulation 2005.

PLANNING AND POLICY IMPACT

This report contributes to the delivery of Wollongong 2022 goal ‘*We are a connected and engaged community*’. It specifically delivers on the following:

Community Strategic Plan	Delivery Program 2018-2022	Operational Plan 2021-2022
Strategy	4 Year Action	Operational Plan Actions
4.3.2 Resources (finance, technology, assets and people) are effectively managed to ensure long term financial sustainability	4.3.2.1 Effective and transparent financial management systems are in place	Monitor and review achievement of Financial Strategy
		Continuous budget management is in place, controlled and reported
		Provide accurate and timely financial reports monthly, quarterly and via the annual statement

CONCLUSION

The investments for March 2022 recorded an average weighted return below the annualised Bloomberg Bank Bill Index Benchmark and performed unfavourably when compared to the year-to-date budget.

