SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Held in Council Chamber, Shirehall At 6.00pm on Monday 15th July 2024

PRESENT

Councillors: A Mosley (Chair), R Dartnall, J Dean, K Pardy, A Phillips, D Vasmer and R Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Stuart Farmer (Acting Operations Manager), Andy Hall (Youth & Community Manager), Ian Thorpe (Commercial, Markets and Events Manager) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

14/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

That apologies be accepted from the Councillors Moseley and Green, and Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk).

15/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Shropshire Councillors	Those twin-hatted members declared a personal interest in any matters
	relating to the Town Council's relationship with Shropshire Council.

16/24 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings held on 3rd June 2024 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 3rd June 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

17/24 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Re Min 04/24 (93/23) – Co-operative Council's Network - The Town Clerk advised that there had been no progress as yet on joining the Network.

18.1 Update on Community Grants and Councillor Grants Funds

The RFO circulated the current list of Community Grants and Local Councillor Grants awarded to date. Community Grant Applications this round totalled £39,426 with £15,000 funds available giving a shortfall of £24,426.

18.2 Applications for Community Grants Funds

Representatives from organisations that had applied for funding were present at the meeting and were welcomed by the Chair; there were 14 attendees in total. Each were asked in turn to give a brief overview of their application and answer any questions from members. After the presentations, organisation representatives were asked to leave the meeting for the councillors to discuss the applications and agree on appropriate funding. The notes below reflect both the presentations and the discussions.

- (a) 1st & Bowery already awarded £700 for an anti-spiking initiative in the town.
- (b) Meole Brace Peace Memorial Hall (presented by Peter Dunhill) requested £1,500 of funding towards redecorating the interior and exterior of the Peace Memorial Hall which was showing signs of age. This would be an interim measure for the next 5 years whilst waiting for a new hall to be built. A contractor would supervise volunteers to reduce costs. It was a well-used Hall by residents of Meole Brace and Shrewsbury. It was also hoped that in future a youth group would be able to meet at the Hall.

Councillor Pardy asked whether any decorating had been done when the new floor was laid (using a Community Grant) in 2018; it had not.

Councillor Wilson asked about how many commercial lets there were as opposed to community hire. There were some private lets but the businesses were not commercial in terms of making a profit.

Councillor Mosley asked about the planned new hall which was on land belonging to the Town Council. Mr Dunhill was in discussions with the ward councillor, Bernie Bentick, who was very supportive.

When discussing the merits of the application, Councillor Dartnall said that she had been to the Hall and it was very damp and the Youth & Community Manager remarked that it was unsuitable for a youth club. Councillor Phillips said, however, that the current building did still have some community value. The Town Clerk said that Councillor Bentick had approached the Town Council regarding a new building but nothing had yet been agreed.

RESOLVED:

That £500 be awarded to Meole Brace Peace Memorial Hall.

(c) Shropshire Supports Refugees (presented by Ginny Sales) – requested £2,232 of funding to extend English language tuition to migrant workers who were not refugees. The organisation already offered English language classes for refugees, largely from Ukraine, Hong Kong and Afghanistan which were funded by Shropshire Council and other small grants. The current funding did not include lessons for non-refugees but a growing need had been identified and this grant would be used to fund 12 places for a year on a weekly basis.

Councillor Mosley asked if these classes would be separate. The non-refugees would be integrated into existing classes and the funding request had been calculated as the cost per person, per lesson, per year. The class numbers would not rise above 12.

Councillor Phillips asked about their level of English as people on skilled work visas usually had to have B1 proficiency to work in the UK. Ms Sales said that this proficiency was enough to get by but work placements often required a considerably higher level.

When discussing the merits of the application, Councillor Wilson shared some concerns about the organisation going outside its remit of providing classes to refugees and Councillor Dartnall agreed that it was outside its brief. The Youth & Community Manager said that Government funded tuition was available through County Training at the Gateway.

Councillor Dean saw merit in Shropshire Supports Refugees being able to offer language tuition to the wider community and liked the model proposed. Councillor Mosley agreed that this sort of work should be encouraged. The Town Clerk questioned whether offering classes to non-refugees was contrary to its charitable aims. It was decided that any funding would be subject to Shrewsbury Town Council's Power of Competence.

RESOLVED:

That £500 be awarded to Shropshire Supports Refugees subject to the Town Council's General Power of Competence.

(d) Shrewsbury Arts Trail CIC (presented by Phil Langstaff) – requested £3,000 of funding towards the project management of the Arts Trail, local artists delivering 10 workshops (150-200 children) and materials culminating in a creation which was to be displayed in the Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery. The Arts Trail was in its 4th year and always aimed to build on its scope each time. The aim this year was to provide more opportunities for children to be involved especially as there had been a reduction in arts provisions at some schools. The project was to be inclusive and have an element of environmental awareness. Recent research had suggested that involving young people in community cultural activities make them more likely to engage in civic and social activities resulting in a stronger community.

Councillor Mosley asked how many schools were involved. The workshops would be facilitated in school or community settings. Councillor Phillips approved of the workshops especially as it included an element of climate awareness.

RESOLVED:

That £1,000 be awarded to Shrewsbury Arts Trail CIC.

Councillor Dean arrived at the meeting.

The Youth & Community Manager briefly left the meeting.

(e) The Severn Community Charitable Trust (Babystop) (presented by Joanna Purslow) — requested £700 of funding in order to purchase clothes rails etc which would improve the storage and display of stick as well as improve access for midwives between shares. Babystop was a scheme for recycling baby items. Young families attended events to collect and/or donate items which saved them money and promoted sustainability. The events were always very well attended, were not means tested and had no obligation to pay. Since being awarded a community grant in 2022, Babystop had put on 15 pop-up events using a trailer. There were 15 volunteers. Events were successful due to the items being presented well and carefully stored but this was in need of improvement.

Councillor Vasmer arrived at the meeting.

Councillor Mosley remarked that these events were very successful and asked about how the shares were publicised. Babystop used social media but also its links to health visitors and midwives. Awareness was also raised at fund-raising events.

Councillor Wilson praised the group for being able to do a lot with very little.

RESOLVED:

That £700 be awarded to the Severn Community Charitable Trust (Babystop).

(f) Shropshire Beekeepers Association (presented by Jeremy Charlton) — requested £3,000 of funding to improve the Visitor Information Centre based at Nobold Lane, Shrewsbury, which had a lecture hall, a viewing platform, kitchen and honey extraction processing facilities. It is was a community asset growing in popularity with visitors. The work required was to clad part of the wooden wall in order to form an undercover visitor information display area. The grant was to cover materials as the work itself would be done by members.

Councillor Wilson asked about visitor numbers. The Centre is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays and 10-20 people would visit on a given day as well as groups of visitors. The Association was the custodian of the site and the platforms needed to be restored as part of the lease terms.

RESOLVED:

That £1,000 be awarded to the Shropshire Beekeepers Association.

(g) Crane Quality Counselling (presented by Lin Foley) – requested £10,000 of funding to deliver mental health counselling for children ages 7-18 years. The service was initially given a 3-year contract from Shropshire Council's Public

Health during the Covid pandemic to work with bereaved families and this finished in 2023. A contract was awarded to work with young people in schools but, due to the huge demand, three quarters of the grant had already been spent and financial support was sought to maintain this work, particularly in the Shrewsbury area. For the best outcomes, it was important that intervention was started within 7-14 days of an event and not months later. Six sessions was the norm.

Councillor Pardy asked about the charges for the service. Some people contacted the service privately and they contributed to the counselling and this contributed to wages and overheads. The service also had a bursary that can be used for exceptional circumstances and the local Free Masons helped with covering costs for those struggling to afford it. Crane Quality Counselling was only based in Shrewsbury.

Councillor Wilson asked if parents would be asked for a contribution towards counselling if they could afford it. They would if they had contacted the service privately. Referrals only came via schools.

Councillor Dean asked about the contribution from Shropshire Council. In January, Crane Quality Counselling had been in receipt of £25,000 and, once the money ran out, schools would no longer be able to make referrals.

Councillor Mosley remarked that the request was for funding for 2 years and asked about sustainability if Shrewsbury Town Council was not able to continue its funding. Ms Foley said that they were currently looking for a premises to open a charity shop in order to help generate income.

When discussing the merits of the application, the RFO reminded members that the guidelines stated that only one year of funding could be applied for. Councillor Wilson said that the £25K already obtained from Shropshire Council was nearly gone but that it had gone beyond its targets. Councillor Mosley questioned whether the Town Council should take on responsibility for residents' mental health. Councillor Dartnall said that it would be advantageous to the community in a diverse way. Councillor Wilson said that the school referrals came from trusted professionals and Councillor Dean added that the process itself should be trusted.

RESOLVED:

That £2,500 be awarded to Crane Quality Counselling for one year and for the benefit of Shrewsbury residents.

(h) Harlescott Grange Community Hub (presented by Helena Williams and Nadine Brooks) – requested £790 of funding to provide free activities at the Family and Youth Engagement Day on 19th July 2024 at Kynaston Road Green Space. The purpose of the day was to bring families and the local community together to find out what they want from their local community hub, generate projects and generally allow their voices to be heard. The area was one of the most deprived in Shrewsbury and the aim was to give the young people there the best start in life.

Councillor Wilson remarked that other funding was also available to encourage a community voice. Councillor Mosley added that the Hub could also apply for a Local Councillor Grant Fund from their local councillor, Elisabeth Addams.

RESOLVED:

That £790 be awarded to the Harlescott Grange Community Hub.

(i) Shrewsbury Samaritans (presented by Liz Jones) – requested £3,000 of funding for Samaritan volunteers to provide a face-to-face service for those accessing the Food Hub at the Barnabas Centre. Financial hardship was a growing concern and in particular its impact on people's mental health. The funds would go towards training 2 volunteers for this work.

When discussing the merits of the application, Councillor Dartnall supported funding for this work as there were some very distressed people visiting the Food Hub at the Barnabas Centre and she wanted to be consistent with what had been offered to Crane Quality Counselling. Councillor Phillips agreed that the work was well evidenced and well supported.

RESOLVED:

That £1,500 be awarded to Shrewsbury Samaritans from the Community Grant Fund and £675 would be awarded from Councillor Mary Davies' Local Councillor Grant Fund.

(j) Loopfest in the Community CIC (presented by Jamie Smith) – requested £3,000 of funding to help support young local musicians at grass roots. The funds were to run a series of workshops at The Hive up until Loopfest 2025 where they would perform. It was to make the event more inclusive and accessible. Loopfest had been running for two years with increasing success and events had increased the footfall in the town.

Councillor Wilson asked about ticketed events that had been included this year. Mr Smith said that he hoped that the event would develop into a revenue generator but that there would still be free events. Money raised would be put back into the event. Councillor Wilson congratulated Mr Smith on the level of success the event had reached in only 2 years. It had also encouraged lots of people to come via train as this had been part of its promotion strategy.

When discussing the merits of the application, Councillor Wilson said that the success of this event had driven real footfall through the town and was accessible to many. Councillor Vasmer praised the aims of Loopfest and its local and non-local input. It was noted that Councillor Wagner (not present) might be interested in making a contribution from his local councillor grant fund and would be approached outside of this meeting.

RESOLVED:

That £1,500 be awarded to Loopfest in the Community CIC.

(k) Evolution Roller Derby (presented by Sarah Evans and Liz Whelan) – requested £2,964 of funding to help cover the costs of hiring one of the few suitable skating spaces in Shrewsbury Sports Village. This was to ensure that membership of the club remained at an affordable level. The not-for-profit club was an accessible and inclusive club and was great for all different ages and helped improve people's mental wellbeing.

There were no questions from members.

When discussing the merits of the application, it was established that the cost for members to join the club was £30 per month and recognised that finding a venue with a suitable floor was limited. Councillor Dean said that it appeared to reach an audience that had reduced opportunity outlets.

RESOLVED:

That £1,000 be awarded to Evolution Roller Derby.

(I) Shropshire European Organisation – requested £3,000 of funding to put on two community events. There was no-one from the Organisation able to attend the meeting but a statement was submitted and read out by Councillor Mosley and summarised as below:

The Organisation had organised several cultural events and had two events planned to enable communities to participate and present their cultural heritage: International Community Buffet and International Children's Day. The events were to involve dance, music, international food and crafts, and were to be accessible to everyone. The events helped minorities with their queries re local authorities or public services. The Organisation supported victims of hate crimes or abuse.

The main outcome of events was to raise interest in other minorities living in the neighbourhood and connect them with the local community. The events were taking place in venues which were easily accessible by public transport or within walking distance from neighbourhoods.

Through its community work the Organisation had been able to build strong connections and networking in the area.

When discussing the merits of the application, Councillor Dean said that the Organisation hosted unique events that brought international communities in Shrewsbury together and recommended that the Town Council support it. Councillor Dartnall said that there were no bank details on the application form but the RFO said that grant funding had been provided on previous applications and this would be checked. Councillor Phillips suggested that the cost of the food be covered.

RESOLVED:

That £800 be awarded to the Shropshire European Organisation.

(m) Shrewsbury Food Hub – requested £3,000 of funding to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables to supplement and raise the nutritional content of the items on offer to families at the Food Hub. There was no representation from the organisation at this meeting.

When discussing the merits of the application, Councillor Dartnall said that the Food Hub served many people and addressed issues of food wastage and its associated emissions at the same time. The organisation did not ask visitors for money.

RESOLVED:

That £1,500 be awarded to Shrewsbury Food Hub.

(n) 4 All Foundation – requested £2,540 of funding to help provide weekly workshops for adults in the Ditherington area. There was no representation from the Foundation at this meeting.

When discussing the merits of the application, Councillor Mosley said that he would contribute £1,000 from his Local Councillor Grant Fund.

RESOLVED:

That £1,000 be awarded to the 4 All Foundation from the Community Grant Fund and £1,000 would be awarded from Councillor Alan Mosley's Local Councillor Grant Fund.

Councillor Wilson thanked all the applicants for their presentations and for all they were doing for their communities. Councillor Mosley added that these were examples of the wonderful work that was taking place in communities around the town. Thanks were given in advance of the support for the work of councillors and town residents and hoped that the funds would make Shrewsbury a better place for all.

Representatives of the above organisations left the meeting.

The meeting was suspended for 20 minutes for members to have a break.

19/24 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 26 May to 17 July 2023. These had been agreed by two signatories before the RFO and Town Clerk. No comments or concerns were raised.

RECOMMENDED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 26 May and 17 July 2023 be approved.

20/24 QUARTER 1 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated a report showing members the financial position of the Council for the first quarter of the 2024/25 financial year, for the 3 months to 30 June 2024 and added the following:

Overall, for the quarter there was a positive variance of £198,273 compared to the budget.

However, whilst there was a positive variance for Quarter 1 on expenditure of £64,082 this was driven by no provision for the 24/25 pay-award which was factored into budget and if removed would have given rise to a negative (£16,653). Over the various expenditure headings, there were small positives and negatives due to timing of expenditure, and, taking all into account, the accounts would come in around budget.

Income in Quarter 1 was always distorted by the Neighbourhood Fund hence the positive variance of £234,191. However, if discounted, would have led to a negative (£12,622). Like expenditure, it took into account small variances and timings. Income was on budget.

The balance Sheet continued to be strong and net current assets showed a slight increase, although in reality the sum attributable to the Greenfields purchase sat in prepayments and was to be capitalised at Year End reducing this. But there was no impact to working capital and cashflow, other than lower returns on balances held.

Looking to the future, other than pressure that arose from Shropshire Council, there were no current concerns.

RESOLVED:

That the Quarter 1 Management Accounts be accepted and approved.

21/24 YOUTH ACTIVITIES

The Youth & Community Manager circulated a report on youth activities and club statistics prior to the meeting and added that it was the end of the school Summer Term next week. HAF would be delivered during the holidays. He summarised recent activities as follows:

- The Hive had worked behind the scenes with Let's Rock
- The football sessions on Thursdays at Monkmoor Rec were going well and a partnership with Shrewsbury Town Football Club had allowed increased delivery from one to two hours from 4-6pm on Thursdays including school holidays.
- The Youth Council had its first meeting on 11th July which was very successful.
 Members had taken part in events eg The Great Big Green Week and the Stay Safe Day.
- The dates for the summer HAF delivery at The Grange Centre were 23rd, 24th, 30th and 31st July from 4-7pm. There were also 2 trips planned in August.
- There were currently 7 youngsters on the Alternative Curriculum programme but it was hoped that this would increase.
- Stay Safe Day on 28th June in the Quarry went well with a good attendance from young people. Exhibitors included Young Shrewsbury youth services, Shropshire Youth, SYA, NHS – public health & School Nurses, Rapid Relief Team, Fire & Rescue,

Police, Town Rangers, Shropshire Supports Refugees & Shrewsbury Town Football Club.

Councillor Mosley asked whether youth workers were engaged in the football sessions at Monkmoor. The Youth & Community Manager confirmed that there were 2 in attendance throughout the sessions. He also added that the Lodge Youth Centre was now complete and would be opening on 5th September and would run a Pre-Junior club from 4-5pm and a Senior Club from 5-6pm.

Councillor Mosley asked whether the youth club at Ditherington was well attended. It was, and there were newcomers as well as those that had previously attended the Sundorne club.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

22/24 SLA FOR DITHERINGTON COMMUNITY CENTRE

A draft Service Level Agreement between 4 All Foundation and Shrewsbury Town Council for Ditherington Community Centre was circulated prior to the meeting. This was the consolidation of an agreement which had been entered into a year ago but a longer-term arrangement was now necessary.

Councillor Mosley expressed concern about the leadership structure and said that there needed to be more clarity about responsibilities e.g. utilities and the significant building work. The RFO said that the Town Council, as landlords, was currently covering all the costs for Ditherington Community Centre while George Hounslow was overseeing the activities. The Agreement was a formality.

A long-term arrangement with 4 All Foundation was agreed in principle but the SLA required more detail.

RECOMMENDED:

That the draft Service Level Agreement be agreed in principle but that more clarity and detail be included.

23/24 TENDER WORK

A report on recent tendering activity had been circulated by the Project Manager prior to the meeting. There were no additional comments.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

24/24 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

An update on the Capital Programme was circulated prior to the meeting and the Town Clerk updated members as follows:

- War Memorial, Quarry the dome had been sealed to avoid water ingress.
- The Beaver Project this was nearing completion with just the final snagging left to do before sign-off. It was hoped that the enclosure would be ready to receive the family of beavers between September and March (non-breeding season).
- Dana Footpath this was making progress. Shropshire Council's Legal Team were in discussions regarding the formal lease of land from the Horticultural Society.
 Permission was also required from the owners of the prison to break through the wall between the footpath and outer bailey of the Castle. The Prison was supportive of the initiative. Planning permission was required before work started.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

25/24 MARKETS UPDATE

The Commercial, Markets and Events Manager reported that the indoor market was 100% occupied and that there was a good mix of stable traders. He continued to receive enquiries from prospective traders about stall availability or requests from current traders to expand. Positive feedback had been received from both traders and customers. Late night openings were continuing to be successful but there was a small reduction in the number of visitors to these events (the next event was scheduled for Saturday 7th September). Footfall was strong.

Work with Shropshire Council had commenced to improve public awareness of the entrances to the building to help increase the number of first-time visitors.

The Commercial, Markets and Events Manager reported that the current Manager of the Sunday Market had submitted his intention to retire but had said that he would willing to help find a replacement. The opportunity was taking during this meeting to thank him for his sterling service over the years. The draft tender documentation had already been drafted to explore all available options for the future operation of the Sunday Market.

RESOLVED

That the verbal report be noted.

26/24 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING 2025 FORMAT

The format of the Annual Town Meeting for 2025 was to be discussed because the last one had no members of the public in attendance nor listening in to proceedings (and only 1 person in attendance the year before). Councillor Dartnall said that if the public do not want to engage in this way then members need to discuss an alternative sociable event that people would want to attend e.g. at Livesey House or The Square.

Councillor Mosley suggested that this item be discussed at a one-off Working Group. Members of the Working Group to discuss the format of the Annual Town Meeting 2025 were Councillors Dartnall, Wilson, Mosley and Dean.

RESOLVED

That the Working Group have a one-off meeting to discuss the format of the Annual Town Meeting 2025 Format.

27/24 TERMS OF REFERENCE

A report detailing the Terms of Reference for Committees was circulated prior to this meeting. It was decided that these would be discussed by the Working Group in item 26/24 along with the Mayor Making event.

RESOLVED

That the Working Group agreed in item 26/24 discusses the Terms of Reference for Committees and the Mayor Making event.

The Town Clerk left the meeting as a Trustee of The Hive.

28/24 LET'S ROCK

The RFO reported that the Let's Rock promoters were given licence to hold the event in The Quarry on 13-14th July 2024 providing there was an added benefit to the town. There was a sum of £10,000 (£5,000 for each event) donated by Let's Rock for community music arts funding. As members of The Hive had worked with Let's Rock, it was suggested that the £10,000 be awarded to The Hive. Councillor Dean supported this suggestion. The Youth & Community Manager said that The Hive was involved with many projects around performance and drama and its impact around Shrewsbury was amazing and valuable. It was also noted that The Hive was struggling to secure funding and that therefore, from a youth perspective, the Youth & Community Manager gave his support.

RESOLVED

That the £10,000 donation from the promoters of Let's Rock for community music funding be awarded to The Hive.

The Town Clerk re-joined the meeting.

29/24 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That in accordance with s1(2) Public Bodies (Admission of Meetings) Act 1960, members of the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following items being considered involve the disclosure of confidential information.

30/24 CLOSING REMARKS

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked members of the public that had logged into listen as well as Councillors and staff involved in the meeting. All papers relating to this meeting could be found on the website www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk and the minutes would appear in draft on the website within the next month.

Live streaming of the meeting ended.

31/24 CCTV

The Town Clerk reported that the future of the town's CCTV provision would be discussed at a meeting of the Cabinet on Wednesday. The Cabinet Report gave a number of scenarios for reducing the costs of CCTV and she wanted to gauge members viewpoint to report to Cabinet. The Town Clerk would circulated the consultation documentation to members.

This issue had been discussed in the SLA Working Group. All partners agreed that the service was important and essential. At the minimum, maintenance costs needed to be covered but as the system had recently been upgraded these were not predicted to be too high. Levels of monitoring costs were considered.

It was noted that CCTV provision was a non-statutory service and other town councils usually contributed towards their town's provision.

The RFO confirmed that costs discussed could be absorbed in the budget (using Reserves) and then included in the budget for 2025/26 in September. Members agreed that at least some level of service should continue for the benefit of the residents of Shrewsbury.

RECOMMENDED

That the Town Council puts forward its offer re CCTV provision in the town to Cabinet.