

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
Held in Committee Room, Livesey House
At 6.00pm on Monday 15th April 2024**

PRESENT

Councillors: A Mosley (Chair), R Dartnall, J Dean, N Green, P Moseley, A Phillips, D Vasmer and R Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Andy Hall (Youth & Community Manager), Stuart Farmer (Acting Operations Manager) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

82/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

That apologies be accepted from the Town Clerk, Helen Ball.

83/23 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.
Councillor Green	Declared a prejudicial interest in Item 92/23 Markets Update

84/23 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings held on 5th February 2024 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings held on 5th February 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

85/23 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

86/23 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 30th January to 31st March 2024. 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 30th January to 31st March 2024 be approved.

87/23 PREPARE END OF YEAR ACCOUNTS

Prior to this meeting a report on End of Year Accounting was circulated by the RFO to appraise members on the process for the year end accounts and relevant submission dates.

The Council must approve the Accounts, Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and relevant schedules by 30th June 2024 which must then be submitted to the external auditors, PKF Littlejohn, at the beginning of July 2024. The Internal auditor would complete the inspection of the 2023/24 accounts prior to submission of the Accounts to the external auditor. Sign-off of the Annual Return by the external auditors must be published by 30th September 2024.

RESOLVED:

That the Report and timetabled dates be noted.

88/23 INTERNAL AUDITOR

Prior to the meeting, the Internal Audit Report 2023/24: Interim Update was circulated to members. One recommendation was received in relation to Markets: that the Records relating to the stall holders including the signed Rental Agreements and the Insurance and Food Hygiene certificates (where appropriate) was in need of review.

The Deputy Town Clerk explained that the Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager had recently retired and the audit was carried out very soon after. She reassured members that the relevant paperwork was available but that it was in many different files and folders that were currently being re-organised. It was shortly to be all in place and electronic versions created going forward.

RESOLVED:

That the Internal Audit Report 2023/24: Interim Update be accepted.

89/23 YOUTH ACTIVITIES

The Youth & Community Manager circulated a report on youth activities and club statistics prior to the meeting and added that all the youth sessions ran normally up until the Easter break and were now continuing this term.

The Youth & Community Manager also reported the following:

- The new youth club at Ditherington Community Centre had been very much welcomed and numbers had increased.
- A meeting with the CEO of Valour Combat Systems had taken place and it was now offering sessions at Ditherington Community Centre on Thursday evenings. Although attendees had to pay a fee, there was scope to help interested youngsters with the fees.
- The youth club at The Hive was going from strength to strength serving the South of the town helped by an enthusiastic young musician.
- One of the young leaders, Kirin Woodvine, was given a Mayor's Award for her work with the group at The Hive.
- 4 HAF sessions took place over Easter and while numbers were initially low they soon picked up to a full quota. The Hive provided an art session.
- There were currently 8 people accessing Alternative Curriculum, all from Shrewsbury Academy.
- The Stay Safe Campaign was ongoing and had a new date, Friday 24th June, for it to take place in The Quarry.

The Youth & Community Manager appraised members that the Youth Council had now been formed and had been invited to the office to meet the Mayor and Town Council officers next Thursday. There were 17 members made up of youngsters from the SYA, faith groups, schools, scout/guide groups etc. Councillor Moseley asked how members had been selected. The Youth & Community Manager explained that some had already been members of their school councils and were elected for the Youth Council. Councillor Wilson asked if there was a representative for each Ward. The Youth & Community Manager said that he hoped that this was the case.

The Youth & Community Manager asked members if they would join a speed debating event he had planned and all members present volunteered to be involved. It was hoped that BBC Radio Shropshire would host the event.

Councillor Mosley noticed the low attendance numbers at the Grange Juniors youth club. The Youth & Community Manager said that historically this had been the case for some time and that he was organising some 'stepping up' days for Pre-Junior members where they would visit the Juniors group to encourage them to migrate.

Councillor Mosley asked about the progress for Monkmoor youth group arrangements. The Youth & Community Manager was pleased to confirm that the new building should be ready at the beginning of June. In the meantime, detached work in the area was continuing and there were also football sessions (and tennis) available on the Astro pitches on Thursdays. Attendance numbers were up to 70.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

90/23 TENDER WORK

A report on tendering activity and details on tender progress were circulated to members prior to the meeting.

The Acting Operation's Manager updated members that a site meeting was taking place on Friday with contractors re completing works at the Old Riverbed; the date set for completion of the works was 29th April. Councillor Mosley asked where the beavers would come from. The Wildlife Trust had identified a family of beavers for re-homing at the site.

Councillor Moseley asked about the recent spate of vandalism, particularly of the boardwalk, at the Old Riverbed. The Acting Operation's Manager said that there had been no further vandalism in the last couple of weeks but that replacement timbers/materials were now in stock for more rapid repairs if necessary. The vandalism did not compromise the area where the beavers were to be situated.

Councillor Phillips asked if the beavers would be able to get close to the wooden structures given their habit of chewing through this material. The Acting Operations Manager assured him that the beavers would be fenced in.

Councillor Wilson asked if a discussion regarding the tender for the Mayoral car needed to take place regarding its necessity etc. Councillor Dean, as a previous Mayor, said that although he did not use the car himself there was a case for it in terms of looking smart and for consorts to travel. It was also used as a pool car and had been used a lot this year. Councillor Mosley added that this debate had taken place at the time of the first tender.

Councillor Phillips asked if it was stipulated that the car be British made. The Acting Operation's Manager said that this was not specified in the tender documentation. Charging facilities were located at the Weeping Cross Depot.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

91/23 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

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

- The Castle Walk Nature Trail was planned for installation.
- Drainage works at Kynaston Road Recreation Ground had been installed but some additional work was needed to bring it to a conclusion.
- The Beaver Project was progressing and the contractor's return was awaited to install the final pieces of infrastructure.

Councillor Dean and Dartnall asked how the Programme would be updated going forward especially since there was now the Visioning documentation which listed the same projects. For instance, when would the next stage of bus shelters take place as complaints had been received from the public. The RFO said that he would check if there were any funds left in the Earmarked Reserves to replace any further shelters but that this could also form part of the discussions when setting next year's budget.

The Deputy Town Clerk added that when the Visioning Exercise was complete the Capital Programme would be amalgamated with the Visioning Action Plan. Councillor Wilson said

that the current format made it difficult to see progress made. Colour coding would help to indicate progress more easily.

Councillor Vasmer asked about the long-awaited progress on levelling the Castle Walk grounds. The Acting Operations Manager said that a tender specification was being prepared. Councillor Mosley added that the Environmental Agency had to sanction the works to go ahead. The Deputy Town Clerk and the Acting Operations Manager would report back on this project.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the update of the Capital Programme be noted;**
- (ii) That the new programme list be colour-coded for clarity of project progress.**

Councillor Green left the meeting.

92/23 MARKETS UPDATE

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that the stalls at the Market Hall remained at full capacity, was going well and had been awarded Market of the Year again. A replacement market manager for the Town Council area was being sought.

Councillor Phillips asked about what would happen to the building that was slightly separate from the main building following the closure of University Centre Shrewsbury (it was currently used as student accommodation but also for other purposes). The Deputy Town Clerk explained that this building space was under the remit of Shropshire Council but that hopefully the Town Council would be consulted on plans for its future use.

Councillor Wilison asked about the recent changes to Shropshire Council's manager of the Market Hall and the Deputy Town Clerk replied that it had gone well. She added that the canopies had still to be replaced but that this was delayed largely due to finding a period of time that would cause minimum disruption to traders.

RESOLVED

That the verbal report be noted.

Councillor Green re-joined the meeting.

93/23 CO-OPERATIVE COUNCIL'S INNOVATION NETWORK

Last year's Co-operative Council's Innovation Network Case Study publication was circulated to members prior to the meeting. It had been resolved at a previous meeting that the Town Clerk look into membership.

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that the Town Clerk had made contact with the Co-operative Innovation Network which was predominantly for county, district and unitary councils, though there were some town councils who have Associate Membership. The benefits of membership as an Associate were the largely same as full membership and the fee for a town council to join with a £4.5m budget was £500. There was also the possibility

that the Town Council could have some input into this document if membership was confirmed in time.

Benefits included were:

- Access to the **latest ideas** and thinking about putting Co-operative principles into practice
- Position the council as an **innovator**
- Help to **influence** policy thinking at a national level
- Share examples of projects and initiatives and **learn from others** about what works
- Co-produce **tools and techniques** to support the development of co-operative approaches
- Invitation to **Co-operative Conferences** around the country where members can meet and work with peers
- Join an **officer network** leading the development of new approaches
- Access to a cadre of ambitious **political leaders** trying to bring change to their communities
- Access a growing body of **resources** on the CCIN website
- Join the **debate** on various social media platforms
- Access the multi-supplier **Dynamic Purchasing System** of specialist organisations to help council's develop policy, implement prototypes and build capacity when there was a need to move quickly and flexibly
- Profile the council's achievements nationally.

Councillor Mosley enquired about the difference in price for Associate and Full memberships. The Deputy Town Clerk said that the difference was dependent on which sector of Government the council belonged to and that there wasn't any difference in benefits.

The Youth & Community Manager left the meeting.

Councillor Phillips said that Burntwood Town Council was a similar organisation. The Deputy Town Clerk said that she would contact Burntwood and similar sized councils to gauge their experience of membership.

Councillor Mosley agreed that it was good to work locally with co-operative values but that it wasn't just £500 the Town Council would be committing but officers' time as well.

Councillor Dean suggested the Town Council joins for one year and then assess its benefits. He said it had some interesting material on projects re asset disposal and being a neurodiverse-friendly town. A plan could be developed through this project. The Deputy Town Clerk said that the Town Council was already ahead of other councils in terms of being neurodiverse-friendly with its status as a Town of Sanctuary.

The Deputy Town Clerk promised to report back to this committee with more information on what an Associate Membership would offer.

RESOLVED:

That the Deputy Town Clerk reports back on the benefits to the Town Council of Associate Membership of the Co-operative Council's Innovation Network.

94/23 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Shropshire Council's Community Governance Review of the Parish of Shrewsbury and Adjoining Parishes was circulated prior to the meeting. The Consultation Boundary Review was discussed at a recent Full Council Meeting but the formal consultation had now been reached.

A number of councillors remarked that they had thought a reply to this process had already been agreed however it was noted that this was now at the *formal* stage (it had previously been *informal*). Councillor Mosley said that the Town Council would reiterate its previous informal response for this formal stage.

RECOMMENDED

That *formal* representations on the Community Governance Review be submitted by the Town Council.

95/23 VISIONING WORK

The Visioning Public Survey 2024 and Action Plan were circulated to members prior to the meeting. The Deputy Town Clerk said that it would be launched at the Annual Town Meeting and then be submitted for wider consultation with a final version of the Action Plan brought to Full Council for agreement.

Before the consultation is launched formally to the public on Monday, the Deputy Town Clerk asked members for any comments within the next couple of days. Councillor Phillips asked if there would be any scope to change anything later should it be necessary and the Deputy Town Clerk said that this would be possible.

Councillor Dartnall expressed concern about the use of the words "To review..." at the start of so many of the questions in terms of how the public answer. She suggested that there should be a clear question, for instance about development, eg "To continue to develop youth provision?"

Councillor Mosley asked that the survey choices be switched around with the first one as the most positive answer and the last as the most negative. The Deputy Town Clerk agreed to change the order.

Councillor Mosley asked what the Young Mayor would be asked to do. The Deputy Town Clerk said that it was intended that they work alongside the Mayor as ambassador for the Town Council. The Youth Council would be involved with making the appointment. Councillor Vasmer, as Mayor next year, would welcome the appointment of a young person to work alongside him.

The Deputy Town Clerk said that the final strategy and action plan would be submitted to Full Council for ratification but that feedback would be given to the Finance & General Purposes Committee first because there may be a need for further visioning work before it was completed.

Councillor Wilson asked about the length of the consultation. The Deputy Town Clerk said the last one ran for 30 days and that there had been 67 comments (Survey Monkey) and no attendees to the open in-person public sessions.

RESOLVED

- (i) **That the Survey be amended as requested by members.**
- (ii) **That the Consultation period be one month.**

96/23 GREEN WASTE COLLECTION

Shropshire Council was planning to introduce an annual subscription fee for the collection of garden waste and to reduce the number of recycling centres in the county. A link to further details had been circulated to members prior to the meeting. Councillor Mosley said that, although this was a Shropshire Council concern, it was of interest to the residents of Shrewsbury and would in all probability impact on the Town Council's work eg with possible increased fly-tipping etc. He asked members if the Town Council should express its opinion.

Councillor Dartnall said it was difficult to express a view as a collective but that it would be useful to draw residents' attention to the matter and publicise Shropshire Council's consultation. The Town Council could also give information on other alternative initiatives etc community composting (although there was not much evidence of this). The Deputy Town Clerk said that alternatives for disposing of garden waste could be advertised on social media.

Councillor Phillips said that Shropshire Council should be asked about what the potential impact of these measures, for instance if green waste was put into general waste bins and sent to landfill this material would emit CO₂ and therefore undermine its own environmental targets.

Councillor Mosley said that, although he was not in favour of commenting as a collective, a Statement expressing concern about the negative impact on the street scene should be submitted.

RECOMMENDED

That the Town Council issue a Statement to Shropshire Council expressing concern about the negative impacts of changes to the county's Green Waste Collection service.

97/23 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.

98/23 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.

99/23 CCTV

A letter to the Town Clerk from the Executive Director of Resources at Shropshire Council was distributed to members prior to the meeting. The letter requested detailed discussions with the Town Council and other local partners to explore alternative ways of providing the town's CCTV services or funding services in a different way.

RECOMMENDED

- (i) That the Town Council replies to Shropshire Council's letter expressing its abhorrence and that discussions would take place with others through Team Shrewsbury with an aim to reaching a collective solution.**
- (ii) That the Town Council issues a statement to say that Shropshire Council was best placed to manage the CCTV infrastructure.**

100/23 LAND DISPOSAL

A notice from Shropshire Council to transfer the Freehold Ownership of Land at Smithfield Road, Shrewsbury, together with a map was circulated to members prior to the meeting.

After some discussion, it was agreed that the Town Council respond that it was minded to make this parcel of land available on a leasehold basis to Shropshire Council but that any exchange would be conditional on the long awaited transfer of leases for other lands.

RECOMMENDED

That the Town Council responds that it was minded to make this parcel of land available on a leasehold basis to Shropshire Council but that any exchange would be conditional on the long awaited transfer of leases for other lands.