

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee  
Held in Committee Room, Livesey House  
At 6.00pm on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

**PRESENT**

Councillors: A Mosley (Chair), P Gillam, N Green, P Moseley, A Phillips, A Wagner and R Wilson

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Clare Turner (soon to be appointed Deputy Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Stuart Farmer (Acting Operations Manager and Projects Manager), Danny Powell (Acting Operations Manager), Max Ball (Communications Officer) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

**75/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**RESOLVED:**

**That apologies be accepted from Councillors Dartnall and Vasmer**

**76/24 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.
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**77/24 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS**

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2025 were submitted and circulated as read.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> January 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.**

**78/24 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

There were no matters arising.

**79/24 BUDGET 2025/26**

**(i) Feedback from public consultation for 2025/26**

The Town Clerk gave a presentation of the interim responses from the recent Public Consultation on the proposed additional service staff which had been collated by the

Communications Officer. The summary showed the results after 300 responses but approximately 500 responses had been received to date. The responses were summarised by the Town Clerk as follows:

**Question 1 Shropshire Council has recently consulted on their proposed changes to services due to ongoing budgetary pressures. As part of the consultation it has asked whether the Parish & Town Councils should do more? To what extent do you agree to Shrewsbury Town Council doing more?**

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Town Council was best placed to take on local services but were less in agreement that Council always put Shrewsbury first.

**Question 2 Overall how clean do you think Shrewsbury as a whole is?**

About half of respondents were not content with the cleanliness of the town.

**Question 3 Are there any specific areas that require additional attention unclean?**

The Town Centre and Pride Hill were mentioned most, particularly the emptying of bins, clearing leaves and litter, and that there were dirty streets.

**Question 4 How important do you rate the following areas?**

The majority of respondents wanted cleaner streets, more frequent litter bin collection, removal of litter from streets, as well as maintenance of the bins and the introduction of recycling bins. Well maintained benches was also important and dealing with graffiti and fly-posting. Many respondents felt very strongly that fly-tipping should be tackled and that it was important that street signage was clean. Clearing ice and snow from footpaths and bridges was also a high priority. Notably, floral features were less of a priority but it was thought that this was because these were already well established.

**Question 5 Many of the items listed in Q.4 are the responsibility of Shropshire Council, but it is only able to provide a basic service. The Town Council is looking to develop a Team working across all areas of the town to enhance the standards. Do you support this proposal?**

91% of respondents said that they supported this proposal.

**Question 6 Is there anything else you think the Town Council should consider in developing this Team?**

Cleanliness was mentioned most for this question but also high on the respondents' list was using volunteers, clearing footpaths, cutting hedges, dog control and enforcement.

**Question 7 How safe do you feel in the town centre?**

The majority of respondents said they felt very safe or somewhat safe – although this did not show that it was a huge concern.

**Question 8 There are a number of initiatives operating in the town centre to keep people safe. How important do you rate the following in making you feel safe whilst visiting the town centre?**

CCTV and its monitoring was very important to respondents. The Town Rangers, park security and footway lighting was also important. There was a neutral response re the taxi marshals in the night-time economy.

**Question 9 Some of these services could be at risk. Do you support the Town Council having an increased role in protecting these safety measures in the town centre?**

92% of respondents supported this proposal.

**Question 10: Are there any specific areas outside of the town centre where you feel unsafe?**

Specific areas were mentioned, particularly The Quarry, Ditherington, the railway station, Pig Trough and the Dana.

**Question 11: The Town Council has looked at adding the above areas to its existing operational activities. This will result in an increase of approximately £15.00 per year to a Band B household (70% of households in Shrewsbury are Band A/B) – this equates to approximately 30p per week.**

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this represented good value for money and that they supported the increase to the Town Council so that it could increase its operational activities. The public also strongly agreed that local decisions should be made by local people.

**Question 12** There was a chance for respondents to add comments and these were amalgamated under different headings. Some of the comments were for services under Shropshire Council's remit. Generally the comments showed positive support and the list would be consulted with a view to possible implementation.

**Question 13: Please provide your postcode?**

Postcodes were mapped and showed quite a broad coverage from different areas.

The Town Clerk said that overall the consultation had been positive and showed that respondents very much supported the proposals of this Committee. The data will be refreshed and presented at the next meeting of the Full Council on Monday.

The Communications Officer said that only organic posting on social media had taken place so far but that a spend on boosting posts would be discussed with a view to reaching a target of 1000 responses.

Councillor Mosley was pleasantly surprised at the level of support residents had shown. He was disappointed that respondents did not overwhelmingly agree that the Town Council always put the interests of Shrewsbury first but that this could be addressed. Councillor Phillips agreed and added that the new team's delivery should be focussed on these responses.

Councillor Wagner felt that the responses tallied with conversations with residents and that it created an imperative on the Town Council to deliver. He said the Facebook was showing a good reach and the map a good spread across the town. He also made reference to the SLA Working Group and the cross party way this was being looked at.

Councillor Mosley added that the proposed support to services across the town would be very visible and the challenge was there for the Town Council to make the promised improvements. He did however say that there was a question over how some of these services would be delivered and how it would be managed but that this could be discussed later.

Councillor Green said that the consultation had been important and useful and congratulated all those involved in putting the presentation together. He added that some of the answers showed that the Town Council had not historically advertised its successes.

**(ii) Revised Proposals for 2025/26**

The Town Clerk reported that, due to the length of time working on the detail for the SLA, the work streams for these revised proposals were still ongoing. However, a start had been made looking into the baseline frequency and ward visits. A content management system, that the public and staff could add to, was also being considered. Work was ongoing with Shropshire Council to enable specific issues raised on Fix My Street to be cascaded to the Town Council. There would not be a huge demand for kit for these new proposals and the Council had enough vehicles. The Project Manager was sourcing a mini-sweeper. A schedule of works was not available at this stage.

Councillor Wilson recognised that not all the tasks could be listed as yet but that there was a need for some detail to enable benchmarking and metrics. He suggested a poll to sample the public so that there is a trend going forward. It was suggested that the SLA Working Group monitor activity on a monthly basis and discuss any problems/issues that arose.

Councillor Mosley agreed that the SLA Working Group should continue for the above reason and was meeting this Thursday. A meeting was also taking place with Shropshire Council on Thursday afternoon and Councillor Mosley said that there must be very close liaison with Shropshire Council on this proposal.

**(iii) Revenue budget for 2025/26 financial year**

Details of the draft budget for 2025/26 and the forecast for the current year (2024/25) with summary of earmarked reserves held together with the Stepping Up Fund budget had been circulated to members prior to the meeting for consideration and recommendation to Full Council on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

**Forecast:** The RFO said the forecast showed additional income compared to budget from interest received, open space, commercial, and other works which had helped partly offset the decrease in SLA income for the reduction passed to Shropshire Council. The increase in some costs, such as electricity, were not as high as budgeted and the wage increase was less than budgeted, which had helped to produce positive variances for expenditure.

Wages showed that a number of vacant posts were not filled for either full or a part of the year such as Operations Manager, Deputy Town Clerk and Communications Officer, which further increased the positive variance. Some other posts, such as the Markets Officer, were not recruited but contracted out which increased temporary staff costs – options were being explored on which model to use going forward.

Premises, Grounds and Equipment & Machinery costs were largely in line with the budget.

Professional fees were higher than expected due to the £20k provision for The Dana footpath works. The £97,986 surplus which was forecast, was to be earmarked for future projects at year end or utilised on non-budgeted capital items.

Councillor Mosley asked where the reduction of £250k from the SLA was shown. The RFO explained that a reduction was anticipated so a reduced budget provision made the accounts do not show the full amount of £250k and inflation eroded the figure also.

Councillor Phillips proposed that the £98k surplus be added to the budget which would allow the Precept to be frozen. The RFO explained that some costs had been reduced this year but that this would not continue into 2025/26. Councillor Wilson said that this should be kept for less fortunate years and Councillor Mosley added that this coming year could be a challenge and, together with the loss of the Golf Course maintenance, this surplus may be required.

**Revenue budget 2025/26:** The RFO said that the Expenditure budget had incorporated the Stepping Up Fund of £529,690 but also removed the Golf Course which was not extended. This had skewed some of the figures such as the computer/IT costs £20k increase for CRM application to manage the demands of the new team. A breakdown of costs for the Stepping Up Fund was provided to members.

Looking at wages, the RFO said that the budget for wages had increased due to a net increase of 4 staff in 2025/26 and that the National Insurance budget had been increased by £91k to cover the increased percentage and the lowering of the threshold.

Bank charges also had an increase in its budget due to more payments being received online (but this did have efficiency savings in terms of staff time and other benefits).

The Town Clerk asked the RFO to clarify the Election Costs for members. He reported that the Town Council spread the cost of the elections over the 4 year term as well as making provision for a by-election year on year. Since there had been no call for by-elections, there was enough in the Election Reserve Account to pay for the 2025 Local Elections.

The RFO brought members' attention to the 2 new budget codes that had been added to the Budget under Capital and Other Costs. 4930 was for the Shropshire Council Service contribution which was budgeted at £80k. 4935 was for Visioning objectives and £150k was budgeted. Transfers to Earmarked reserves was at the bare minimum with the usual election and Astro turf re-surfacing but none of the play provision, etc of previous years.

The expenditure budget showed some of the upside from the forecast such as overprovision of wage increases that helped offset the National Insurance increase (effective April 2025) and reducing the electricity budget. No other service changes had been made, hence figures being very similar to previous years making allowance for inflationary increase and then +/- for changes as explained above.

The RFO noted that Sports Lettings had risen slightly due to more income received due to the efforts of the Ian Thorpe, Commercial, Markets & Events Manager, and Heather Phillips, Finance & Administrative Support Officer.

The SLA budget had decreased due to the loss of the Golf Course but otherwise had a similar inflationary increase.

Councillor Phillips asked if the budget calculations considered recent movements in money market rates. The RFO said that it had and the interest received was a challenging target of £205k, down from £217,290 last year.

For the Precept, the proposed band D rate was increased by 2% to balance the budget for inflation or £1.33. A further 28.45% ie £19.29 generated £529,690 for the proposed Stepping Up Fund to a total precept of £2,389,594, at £87.04.

Overall there was a small deficit (£448) taken from Reserves.

The Stepping Up Fund was allocated a budget of £529,690 but this was not all for the community team. The RFO explained that some of it covered the reduction in the SLA of £20k, the CCTV contribution of £40k, the Museum and Castle contribution of £40k and Visioning objectives of £150k. The community team was budgeted as having 5 operatives and 1 foreman together with 3 vehicles and associated costs. Some general equipment was also needed.

Councillor Wilson thanked the RFO for the work that had gone into the Budget.

It was noted that the Taxbase, the proposed Fees & Charges and the capital programme had all been previously discussed.

**(iv) Precept for 2025/26 for recommendation to Full Council**

Overall a 31% increase to the Band D rate was recommended to cover the costs of inflation and the proposed Stepping Up Fund. Councillor Phillips proposed that the only increase on precept was for the Stepping Up Fund; this was not seconded.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- (i) That the forecast out-turn for the 2024/25 Financial Year as presented be noted;**
- (ii) That the Taxbase for Shrewsbury required to calculate the Precept be noted;**
- (iii) That the proposed Fees & Charges for 2025/26 Financial Year as agreed by both the Finance & General Purpose Committee and the Recreation & Leisure Committee be approved;**
- (iv) That the capital programme for 2025/26 and any allocation from revenue budget and/or existing reserves be approved;**
- (v) That a Precept be set of £2,389,594, or equivalent to £87.04 Band D.**

## **80/24 CLOSING REMARKS**

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked members of the public that had logged in. All papers relating to this meeting could be found on the website [www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk) and the minutes would appear in draft on the website within the next month. He thanked Councillors and all staff involved in the meeting.