

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL  
FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE  
2 DECEMBER 2024**

**Officer:** Helen Ball – Town Clerk

**HORTICULTURAL SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT**

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**Purpose of Report**

To determine a way forward in relation to the current Horticultural Service Level Agreement which determines on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

**Background**

At the time of Local Government reorganisation in 2009, Shropshire Council entered into a Service Level Agreement with the Town Council to maintain its grounds both in Shrewsbury and the Central Rural Area. This at the time was a 10 year agreement and was extended in 2014 when a change in works was introduced. The extended SLA is due to expire on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

Throughout the whole of 2024 Town Council officers have been in discussion with Shropshire Council officers, under the direction of the SLA Working Group made up on Councillors Mosley, Moseley, Wilson, Wagner, Dean & Phillips. This group has met regularly throughout the year and includes the Town Clerk, RFO and Operations Managers.

Shropshire Council has undertaken an independent review of the SLA by the Association of Public Sector Efficiency (APSE) which concluded that Shropshire Council should continue the unique arrangement it had with Shrewsbury Town Council but not through a contract, but through its statutory powers under s101 Local Government Act to delegate services to another authority. Shropshire Council's Cabinet is to consider this recommendation when it meets on 6<sup>th</sup> December; a copy of their report is appended to this report.

**SLA Future**

The Shropshire Council Cabinet Report sets out the arrangements for a service delegation and delegates the fine arrangements of any agreement to the Executive Director of Place (this maybe subject to change given the recent announcement of the current incumbent's departure); these arrangements will need to include formalised arrangements for financing, term of the agreement and level of standard/required outcomes.

This agreement will mean that all of the assets that are currently maintained through the SLA will continue with the exception of the Golf Course. It was recommended within the APSE Report that this asset should be removed from the SLA to allow for greater potential of raising revenue. Shropshire Council is proposing that Kier maintain the contract from 1<sup>st</sup> April. There

have been initial discussions with Shropshire Council with regards to TUPE regulations and out of openness and transparency Town Council Management has informally spoken to affected staff.

It should be noted that the Town Council was requested to find a £250k reduction in the contract value of the SLA with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, which it has done.

This future arrangement for the Golf Course has disappointed the SLA Working Group who all see the area as a Community asset and not just a revenue generator. They are equally disappointed the Golf Professional has reported a significant increase in course through-put this summer. Officers have questioned the potential for huge income generation given the ongoing effect on climate change and in the case of the Golf Course the proximity to the Reabrook which regular floods and results in a localised increase in the water table making the course unpassable. Officers remain of the view that the Town Council, given an opportunity to manage the course completely would be in the best place to reduce any deficit. Members may wish to consider more formalised requests to maintain this as a local community asset.

### **Beyond the SLA**

Aside from the SLA, both Officers and the SLA Working Group have continued in discussion with Shropshire Council Officers and Members about the potential for taking on more public services, particularly given the strain on funding non-statutory services. Shropshire Council Officers and Members have maintained an open door to discussions particularly around having a more co-ordinated arrangement for the management of the wider public realm.

The Town Council remains sited on the potential impact of both spiralling budget cuts on the Council but also larger political demands of becoming part of any combined authority and the need to retain the management of those local services as close to the electors, residents and tax payers as possible.

Therefore priority of planned works is as follows:

- (i) Agreement on an extended Horticultural Service Level Agreement;
- (ii) Agreement on a wider Town Team approach to managing the public realm;
- (iii) Agreement on the future of town specific non-statutory services and assets

### **Land Matters**

As part of the above discussions there are wider discussions with Estates around the transfer of various assets including:

- (i) The transfer of Countryside Assets through a long-term lease; initially this was deferred pending the outcome of Biodiversity Net Gain Arrangements in the planning system and the potential benefits to the land. This has not been as quickly forthcoming and could be done at a later date.

- (ii) The transfer of Shorncliffe and Monkmoor Recreation Grounds through a long-term lease; this would allow these to be developed further as strategic recreational sites.
- (iii) The transfer of the Grange Community Centre in its current location by way of a Community Asset Transfer; originally it had been suggested that this might have to be relocated elsewhere as part of a wider Masterplan for the former Grange Secondary School site.
- (iv) The transfer of the open space on Smithfield Road to Shropshire Council to be incorporated into the Riverside Development of Roushill Park; it is likely the Town Council will take a future management role in this new park.
- (v) The possible transfer of The Hive as a Community Asset Transfer to safeguard its continuity.
- (vi) The continuation of Depot Leases (including the Recycle Centre at the Golf Course) to allow for the maintenance of the Horticulture SLA.

### **Recommended**

- (i) That the Town Council be happy to extend the Horticultural Service Level Agreement by way of delegation of service subject to agreement on funds, timescales & specification.
- (ii) That Officers and the SLA Working Group continue to pursue resolution in the priority areas as set out above.
- (iii) That the Town Council agrees to all asset transfers both to and from the Town Council as set out above and the Town Clerk be granted delegated authority to undertake the necessary legal processes.
- (iv) That members establish any future requests in relation to the maintenance of the Golf Course.