

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
Meeting of Council
Held at Council Chamber, Shirehall, Shrewsbury at
6pm on Monday 11 November 2024

PRESENT

Councillors D Vasmer (Mayor), E Addams, B Bentick, M Davies, J Dean, P Gillam, K Halliday, C Lemon, P Moseley, A Mosley, K Pardy, A Phillips, A Wagner (Deputy Mayor), B Wall & R Wilson.

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Stuart Farmer (Acting Operations Manager), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources) and Michelle Farmer (Committee Officer).

48/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

Apologies be received from Councillors Dartnall & Green.

49/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Shropshire Councillors	Twin hatted members declared personal interests in matters relating to the Town Council's relationship with Shropshire Council
Councillor A Phillips	Declared he was the ward member for exempt Item 17 on the agenda – Greenfields Recreation Ground

50/24 MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL

The minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 30 September 2024 were submitted as circulated and read.

Councillor Lemon noted an error on the minutes of the previous meeting which showed as:

35/24 The motion was agreed by 125 Councillors For, 2 Councillors against and 2 abstentions.

The minutes should read '12 Councillors' and not '125 Councillors'.

RESOLVED:

That upon the correction of the wording on minute 35/24, the Minutes of the Full Meeting of Council on 30 September 2024 be approved and signed as a true and accurate record.

51/24 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising to report from the Town Clerk.

52/24 ANNOUNCEMENTS

52.1 MAYORAL ENGAGEMENTS

The Mayor reported that since the last meeting of Council he had attended many events including the Shrewsbury Brass Band concert and Remembrance Sunday parade. The Mayor thanked Sally Nicholson, the Mayor's Secretary, for organising the event and the Shrewsbury Town Council staff who were involved in. There was a lot of demanding work that went into organising this event and he would like these thanks to be recorded.

The Mayor also mentioned his Mayoral Fete which was being held in May 2025. He asked if any organisations would like to be involved to contact himself or the Mayor's Secretary.

52.2 TOWN CLERK ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Clerk gave a reminder of the Christmas events the Town Council were planning. The Christmas Light Switch-On would be on the 20 November and Carols in the Square on 18 December.

Additionally, the Town Clerk and the Mayor would be in London the following day for the Academy of Urbanism Awards.

53/24 PUBLIC QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

The Town Clerk reported that standing orders had been followed in seeking questions ahead of the meeting, but she had accepted questions up until 4pm on the day of this meeting.

Two public questions had been received.

Question One was from Christopher Houlston - The elimination of unfair surcharges for plant-based milks in local cafes.

Firstly, I would like to thank the council for recently passing the plant-based motion and acknowledging the importance of sustainable dietary choices in our climate efforts. Following the passing of this motion I would like to ask if the council would now be open to supporting a local initiative aimed at eliminating the unfair surcharge for plant-based milks at local cafes? This initiative would not only make sustainable choices more accessible but also support those with dairy allergies or intolerances by creating fairer pricing for everyone. The council's support could perhaps come in the form of a written statement from the whole council or specific councillors emphasising the need for this change, this could then be included in any communication between café owners and campaigners, also some kind of accreditation from the council for owners who have committed to removing the surcharge could be very effective in bringing this change, a 'green cup' sticker in their window was one such idea that was put forward. At present the surcharge is as much as 50p per drink in many cafes.

Councillor Mosley responded stating that whilst the Town Council had no statutory powers to force local cafes to change their charging structure, they would happily work with the Business Improvement District to see how they might encourage them to take a different approach.

Question 2 was from Jamie Russell – regarding community resilience.

I am sure that members of Shrewsbury Town Council will join me in expressing solidarity with residents in Valencia after the devastating recent floods. Exacerbated by the climate crisis – in particular the record-breaking sea temperatures being seen in the Mediterranean – the tragedy is a reminder of how increasingly vulnerable communities across Europe are to extreme weather events.

Given that the UK is nowhere near on track to achieve its internationally agreed climate and nature targets for 2030, and the global pledge to limit average temperature rises to 1.5C is now increasingly in doubt, towns like Shrewsbury are destined to face more extreme weather events in the coming years. According to the Environment Agency communities across the UK must 'adapt or die'.

In Valencia residents showed true community resilience by coming together to deal with the aftermath of the floods, in the face of a lack of support from national and local government.

Does Shrewsbury Town Council have any plans to encourage community resilience for climate related disasters? During the pandemic local residents and councillors worked together to set up Covid Mutual Aid groups to ensure vulnerable members of our communities were supported through the crisis. Does the council think a similar climate-focussed initiative would be worth pursuing with the help of residents, so that community-led response plans are ready to go in the event of disaster?

Councillor Mosley commented that as Mr Russell had mentioned, the Town Council did play its part in supporting communities during the Pandemic and had subsequently helped communities during other crises. It should however be noted that Shrewsbury Town Council was not the Emergency Planning Authority so had no statutory duty to deal with such emergencies. Notwithstanding that the Town Council was best placed to have more local knowledge in the event of an emergency and he knew the Town Clerk had been discussing this with the Emergency Planning Team to see how they could develop their own Community Resilience Plan as part of one of their key pillars in the Town Council's Corporate Action Plan.

54/24 MOTIONS FROM MEMBERS

'Action on Street Scars' – Presented by Councillor Alex Wagner

In presenting his motion, Councillor Wagner reported that many of Shrewsbury's most historic places were plagued by 'Street Scars', where utility companies left tarmac streaks through paving slabs, cobbles, and other important parts of the street scene. Fines set out in legislation around Street Scars had been unchanged since 1991, where the fine for failing to implement a permanent reinstatement was set at £2,500.

The work done by Create Streets in analysing the root of these problems and outlining potential policy solutions, were being put into practice by other local authorities such as the London Borough of Southwark. Taking proper care of the public realm was integral to the social and economic vitality of Shrewsbury.

Councillor Phillips said that this was a sensible motion, and it should be fully supported.

Councillor Wilson fully supported the motion stating certain areas had been dug up five times in a year and footpaths were becoming more dangerous. This was an important issue that affected all residents.

All Members voted in support of this motion.

RESOLVED:

That this Council write to the Leader of Shropshire Council, MP for Shrewsbury, and relevant Secretary of State to outline its support for updated legislation aimed at protecting the heritage of their streets and combating Street Scars.

55/24 SHROPSHIRE COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW ORDER

The Town Clerk presented the Order to Council and explained that it had been discussed at length both in Committee and Full Council. This was the resultant order which comes into effect from the May 2025 Elections. It was now for Council to note its publication.

Councillor Wilson commented that some of the names of the wards needed checking for accuracy.

Councillor Mosley asked if any comments had been received from the Parish Councils or members of the public and the Town Clerk confirmed she had not been made aware of any comments.

RESOLVED:

That Shrewsbury Town Council notes the publication of the Shropshire Reorganisation of Community Governance No 1 Order 2024

56/24 ENABLING REMOTE ATTENDANCE & PROXY VOTING AT LOCAL AUTHORITY MEETINGS

The Town Clerk reported that during COVID, the Government introduced emergency legislation which allowed all Councils to meet virtually. Once the legislation term expired all Councils had to revert back to face-to-face meetings. Despite significant representations from not just Parish Councils but upper tier authorities, the previous Government was not inclined to develop primary legislation to place the decision of whether to hold face to face or virtual meetings with individual councils.

The new Government had taken a very different approach of releasing that centralised power and putting decision making in local authority hands. They were therefore consulting on introducing powers for local authority members to apply to the relevant authority for a dispensation to attend formal council meetings remotely and vote by proxy in certain circumstances. This consultation would last for eight weeks from 24 October 2024. The attendance of elected members at local authority meetings was a core part of the democratic process at the local level and was integral to members carrying out their functions effectively. In addition to the value of members coming together to debate and discuss the issues which impacted the lives of the people they represented; it was also

important that local residents had the opportunity to engage directly with the people they had elected to take key decisions on their behalf.

At the same time, the government recognised that there were circumstances in which it may not always be possible for members to attend council meetings in person. It was with this in mind that the government intends to amend the law to introduce provisions for remote attendance at local authority meetings.

The intent was that this increased flexibility would strike the balance between the principle that significant in-person engagement remained vitally important, and a recognition that there would sometimes be a need to accommodate members' requirements to attend council meetings remotely.

In addition, they were seeking views on the possible introduction of proxy voting for those occasions when an elected member, due to personal circumstances, may be unable to attend even remotely, for example during maternity, paternity or adoption leave.

In line with the government's commitment to working with local government to establish partnerships built on mutual respect, genuine collaboration, and meaningful engagement, this short consultation sought the Town Council's views on the detail and practical implications of this proposition to inform their ongoing policy development. Responses were invited from local authority elected members, all types and tiers of authorities, and local authority sector representative organisations.

The members needed to consider what it meant for the town council. Members would need to ultimately consider whether their default position remained for Council Meetings to be Face to Face but it would allow members to remotely access those meetings and vote. It may also mean that some of the Council's Committee Meetings could be online – they had in the past had to convene the Personnel Committee where the Meeting had lasted less than 15 minutes; this would be a perfect example of where a virtual meeting might be more beneficial.

Members were therefore asked to consider any response to this consultation.

Councillor Mosley stated that this consultation needed more thought, and it should be referred to Finance & General Purposes Committee. Councillor Mosley personally preferred Face to face meetings but understood the need for remote. He asked if the Town Clerk could prepare a response to the questionnaire. It was an extensive consultation and they needed to work within what government asked them to consider.

Councillor Dean said that every Member needed to consult on this. He personally valued face to face meetings as human contact was important, but there should be an opportunity for people who could not attend to be part of the meeting. Local Government should let them come up with what was appropriate.

Councillor Wilson said it should be discussed at Full Council and not Finance & General Purposes as all members needed to be involved. It needed to have the widest range of flexibility possible.

Councillor Phillips suggested that Full Council was kept as a face-to-face meeting but steer all other committees to online, it was easier when it was remote.

RESOLVED

That the response to the consultation would be considered at the next Finance & General Purposes Committee in December.

57/24 RECREATION & LEISURE COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Recreation & Leisure Committee held on 4 September 2024 were circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Recreation & Leisure Committee meeting held on 4 September 2024 be received and adopted

58/24 PLANNING COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 8 October and 29 October 2024 were submitted as circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 8 October and 29 October 2024 be received and adopted.

59/24 CLIMATE EMERGENCY & NATURE RECOVERY COMMITTEE

The minutes of the Climate Emergency & Nature Recovery Committee meeting held on 1 October 2024 were submitted as circulated as read.

Councillor Dean recommended all Councillors read the report on Grounds Maintenance that had been produced for this meeting as it set out the difficulties Town Council faced in managing grounds in light of the climate emergency. He also thanked Tom Endacott who was an external member of the Committee, for the work he undertook on the Climate Audit.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Climate Emergency & Nature Recovery Committee meeting held on 1 October 2024 be received and adopted.

60/24 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT WORKING GROUP

The minutes of the Service Level Agreement Working Group meetings held on 17 October and 7 November 2024 were circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Service Level Agreement Working Group meetings held on 17 October and 7 November 2024 be received and adopted.

61/24 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.

The Mayor advised that live streaming of this meeting would now stop. He thanked members of the public for logging in. All papers relating to the meeting could be found on the website www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk

62/24 GREENFIELDS RECREATION GROUND

The Town Clerk reported that pursuant to additional legal matters in relation to Greenfields Recreation Ground, Officers were to attend a Mediation Meeting the following day. As stated at the previous Council meeting The Mayor proposed that the Town Clerk and Head of Resources be given delegated authority to make their valued judgement on how to proceed at the meeting, in conjunction with the Leader of the Council and any legal advisers present.

RESOLVED:

That the Town Clerk & Head of Resources be given collective delegated authority to proceed with a decision in the best interests of the Council, in conjunction with the Leader of the Council and the Town Council's legal advisers.

63/24 CLOSING REMARKS

The Mayor thanked members and staff for their attendance and closed the meeting.