

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
Held in Committee Room, Livesey House
At 6.00pm on Monday 9th September 2024**

PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

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

32/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

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

33/24 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.
------------------------	--

34/24 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 15th July 2024 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 15th July 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

35/24 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

36/24 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 6th July to 31st August 2024. These had been agreed by two signatories before the RFO and Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk uploaded details for payment. No comments or concerns were raised.

RECOMMENDED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 6th July to 31st August 2024 be approved.

37/24 BUDGETING TIMETABLE FOR 2025/26

A report on the 2025/26 Budget was circulated to members prior to the meeting. The RFO drew members' attention to the budgeting timetable. He highlighted that, following this meeting, he would email all councillors to request any changes to current service delivery and ideas for inclusion in next year's budget and invite further discussion in conjunction with the Visioning Exercise and Shropshire Council budget related issues. The draft budget would be brought to the Finance & General Purposes meeting in December. Other notable dates were as follows:

- W/C 30th September 2024 - SMT & Group Leaders - Provisional date to discuss APSE report and implications.
- W/C 14th October 2024 - SMT & Group Leaders - Provisional date to discuss APSE report and implications.
- W/C 11th November 2024 - SMT Meeting to consider budget and operational factors to be considered in budget.
- W/C 2nd December 2024 - F&GP
 - Set budget principles and assumptions and look at forecasted outturn on 24/25 budget.
 - Consider impact of inflation on future budget and pay settlement.
 - Consider submissions from councillors.
 - Set fees and charges.
- W/C 9th December 2024 - SMT & Group leaders - Meeting to consider draft budget to be submitted to F&GP.
- W/C 13th January 2025 - F&GP - Review and recommend 2025/26 budget to Full Council.
- 27th January 2025 - Full Council to approve the budget and submit precept request to Shropshire Council.

Councillor Mosley reiterated that the draft budget would tie-in with the Action Plan which would include projects/items councillors were looking to fund this year. There were many variables this year and the SLA with Shropshire Council was not yet determined. He requested that a working group meet to discuss the budget and the Action Plan; this group consisting of 2 members from the Liberal Democrats and Labour, and 1 member from both the Conservatives and the Green Party.

Councillor Vasmer joined the meeting.

Councillor Wilson remarked that Shropshire Council appeared to be dragging its feet with regard to the SLA and was surprised at this considering the seriousness of the situation. He asked that Councillor Mosley put some pressure on Shropshire Council at a political level to urge a quicker resolution for Town Council budgeting purposes and for the protection of services for residents. Councillor Mosley said he had already sent a letter to the Leader of Shropshire Council, Lezley Picton, expressing concerns but that he would follow it up

requesting more clarity and that the Town Council was willing to have further discussions on possible options.

Councillor Wilson asked if Fees & Charges could be discussed in the Working Groups. The RFO confirmed that this would be the case and that it was not just an inflationary increase that would be considered this year.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report and dates be noted;**
- (ii) That Councillor Mosley sends a follow-up letter to the leader of Shropshire Council expressing members' concerns regarding the delays to the SLA outcome;**
- (iii) That Group Leaders submit membership of the proposed Budgets Working Group to the RFO.**

38/24 END OF YEAR AUDIT

The RFO reported that he was still awaiting the completion of the External Audit from PKF Littlejohn, although a couple of queries had been raised and answered in the meantime. As the accounts had to be published by 30 September 2024, the RFO said it was to be submitted to Council on the same date for sign off.

39/24 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Prior to the meeting, the Town Clerk circulated Shropshire Council's final proposals in relation to the Shrewsbury Community Governance Review which listed the final ward allocations for the parish wards around Shrewsbury together with a Plan mapping these areas.

The Town Clerk summarised that there were parts of Bicton, Great Hanwood, Atcham, Berrington and Uffington Parish Councils that were to be moved into various wards of Shrewsbury Town Council. Also, a parcel of land at Oteley Road would be moved, at Shropshire Council Division Level, from Severn Valley to Oteley & Reabrook to ensure that Town Council ward boundaries were coterminous with Shropshire Council Divisions.

There were also a number of ward name changes ie Bowbrook would become Bicton Heath, Sutton & Reabrook would become Oteley & Reabrook, and Sundorne would become Sundorne & Old Heath. These changes were to become effective from the next local government elections.

Councillor Dartnall remarked that the name change for Column Ward had not been included under 4.2 of the proposals and it that was to become Column & Sutton. She remarked that these proposals had made huge improvements, specifically for the East of Shrewsbury.

Councillors Wilson and Dartnall thanked the Town Clerk for all her work concerning this.

40/24 YOUTH ACTIVITIES

A report on the Youth Service and its recent activities was circulated prior to the meeting together with youth club attendance statistics. The Youth & Community Manager drew particular note to the following:

- All youth clubs were back up and running for the Autumn Term including the Shropshire Youth Association's club at The Lodge on Thursdays.
- At a recent staff meeting training on Run-Hide-Tell took place. This formed part of the Prevent agenda and was especially pertinent after the recent tragedy in Southport. Posters were to be displayed in the youth clubs.
- The HAF programme in the summer holidays at the Grange and Monkmoor Recreation Ground went well. He added that, unfortunately, HAF funding was likely to be withdrawn at the end of this year – a decision was to be announced in the Autumn Statement. Three out of the four Shrewsbury MPs had visited the HAF activities over the summer and were very impressed with the programmes and clearly saw the benefits to children, young people and their communities. The MPs said they would be asking the Government about the continuance of HAF funding during parliamentary questions.
- The Alternative Curriculum programme was starting again this week with referred students coming from Shrewsbury Academy.
- Funding was available until April 2025 to deliver some targeted activities to help combat the anti-social behaviour taking place around Meole area and other parts of the town. It was proposed that Young Shrewsbury set up a working partnership with The Hive, Trinity Church and Shropshire Youth from the Autumn half-term break.

Councillor Dartnall asked if Run-Hide-Tell posters could be made available for councillor noticeboards and the Youth & Community Manager said he would get that organised.

Councillor Vasmer asked how many students were following the alternative curriculum programme. The Youth & Community Manager said that there were currently 6 but that more were expected to join shortly. Delivery was over 2 days on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Councillor Mosley asked about how this was financed. Schools were charged £200 per session per day and this was funded by EHCPs and SEND funding received by the school. The Youth & Community Manager assured councillors that was no profiteering and that the focus was on offering a good service.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

41/24 TENDER WORK

A report on tendering activity and details on tender progress were circulated to members prior to the meeting. The Projects Manager added that were 2 further tenders that would be drawn up in the next couple of weeks ie Lighting Project and Outdoor Equipment.

Councillor Mosley asked how the Quarry Kitchen café was doing. The Acting Operations Manager, Danny Powell, said that it had looked busy on days of good weather but that it was in competition with Evolution which was trading well.

Councillor Vasmer asked about the ongoing maintenance of bus shelters and specifically about the one on Woodcote Way. The Projects Manager said that this one was on the list to be replaced. He added that bus shelters were inspected for any potential maintenance during routine cleaning and that this was just one way that issues were reported. Once a shelter was allocated a replacement the maintenance of the old one would be cut back.

Councillor Wilson asked about Phase 3 of the replacement of bus shelters programme. The Projects Manager said that after Phase 3 had been installed there would be approximately 30 left and many of these were in the town centre which was currently undergoing various improvement projects that precipitated the delay in replacements in this location. The Project Manager said that the bus shelters in Councillor Dartnall's ward at Springfield Way and Sutton Way were in the Phase 3 programme of replacements.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

42/24 MARKETS UPDATE

The Markets Update was circulated prior to the meeting. The Commercial, Markets and Events Manager confirmed 100% occupancy of the indoor market and that the electronic payment of rents was proving popular with many traders now paying on a monthly basis. This was not only convenient for all but also a safer routine for the Markets Officer who had previously had to handle large quantities of cash payments.

Footfall was brisk but ways to encourage more trade eg promotional activities on the quieter days (Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays) was being considered in conjunction with Shropshire Council.

Councillor Wilson asked for an update on the replacement of canopies. The Commercial, Markets & Events Manager said that he had received 3 quotes; these were requested with a particular emphasis on fire-retardancy. He hoped to report further progress on this soon.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

43/24 SUNDAY MARKET

A report on the Sunday Market was circulated prior to the meeting. The RFO explained that it ceased trading last weekend as Tony Bromierski, who managed the site, had retired. Thanks were expressed to Tony and his family for their work over the last 20 years in making the Sunday Market a success.

Another operator was now required so a search began via a soft 'expression of interest' process. Unfortunately, none of these alternatives were viable. The Town Council had also considered running the market itself but this did not appear to be financially viable either. Therefore, a new Sunday Market operator was being sought via a formal tender process.

Enquiries received from interested organisations would be invited, alongside an open market tender, to submit an application.

Councillor Mosley enquired about the £30K income that an operator would receive. The RFO explained that there were other costs that the operator would have to meet eg insurance and cleaning. The market also required an early start and quite a long working day. There were no utilities on site.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

44/24 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

An update on the Capital Programme was circulated prior to the meeting. The Town Clerk had no further progress to report.

Councillor Mosley said that any uncompleted items would be carried over to the next year.

Councillor Wilson commented that it had been difficult working with Shropshire Council on the land transfer at Shorncliffe and that this issue had been ongoing for the last 12 years. He said that it was beyond frustrating that this was still not resolved and asked that Councillor Mosley add to his letter in item 37/24.

The Town Clerk said that one of the reasons for the delay was the new regulations on biodiversity net gain on new development sites hence the stall on decisions concerning countryside land. She had requested guidance on the rationale for retaining it but had yet received no response.

Councillor Dean asked about the County Ground and what was happening with the sports ground and buildings at the Shirehall site in relation to Shropshire Council staff moving out of Shirehall. Councillor Mosley said that the Unison building was not included in the Shirehall site area. The Acting Operations Manager, Danny Powell, said meetings had taken place with the bowling and cricket clubs at Unison; they received no funding and were stand-alone self-funding sports clubs.

Danny Powell added that usage of the County Ground was at its maximum and that the pavilion was currently struggling to accommodate facilities for women, men and children. On Thursdays there were up to 60 children aged 12/13 using the downstairs WC, which was very basic and prone to flooding. Councillor Dean said that a facility development was needed at County Ground. The Town Clerk said that £400,000 of Neighbourhood Fund had been set aside to fund improvements as well as some S106 funding from the Copthorne Barracks development. Officers were due to meet Cricket Club Members to discuss plans and she would keep the ward member informed.

Councillor Phillips asked about the status of the Beaver Project. The Projects Manager said that contractors were back on site for the final snagging of the enclosure after which beaver release could be planned. This could happen any time up to 31st March 2025. Councillor Mosley enquired if the public would be able to see the animals ie would there be trap cameras. The Projects Manager reported that beavers were very private animals so it was highly unlikely that they would be spotted. There were however plans to increase

community engagement about the beavers once they had been released. There was however a need to manage expectations.

RESOLVED:

That the update of the Capital Programme be noted.

45/24 VISIONING EXERCISE

The Town Clerk reported that, as members were aware, the Town Council had carried out a thorough review of its aspirations and over time had developed areas of priority. The public had been consulted on those overarching priorities and an Action Plan had been developed. A further consultation exercise had taken place in the summer and the details of which had been sent to members in advance of this meeting. Over 500 responses had been received, which was considered a good number for a population of 75,000, and therefore provided some level of assurance that it reflected the overall aspirations of the populous.

The Town Clerk said that priorities to note were:

- 91% were in favour of a campaign to reduce the use of CSOs in the town – the Town Council was already active on this priority.
- 87% were in favour of the Town Council having a more active role in the management of the public realm and that this was being addressed in conjunction with Shropshire Council.
- 87% wanted to see the Town Council create increase its apprenticeships. An apprentice administrative assistant was starting next week, however there had been other apprentices taken on, including some with learning difficulties.
- 86% wanted the Town Council to support initiatives to maintain the conservation qualities of the town.
- 81% wanted the footpaths improved.
- 80% wanted a Management Plan for the Quarry.

The Town Clerk said that there was a need to review these aspirations against the Action Plan to ensure that these were prioritised accordingly; it was hoped that this would form part of the Town Council's budget-setting discussions which were due to start in November.

Councillor Mosley was pleased with the public response rate to the consultation and reiterated that it should be used to educate members for the Action Plan and feed into the work of the upcoming working parties. Councillor Dartnall said that it was informative and could shape the style in which members approach the Plan. She was also pleased to see the responses regarding CCTV as this had already been attended to.

Councillor Wilson remarked that the Town Council could work with Shropshire Council regarding the Street Scene and footpaths.

Councillor Dean said that there should be some public relations work done to show that the Town Council had consulted the public and changed what it was focussed on in response.

RESOLVED:

That the results of the consultation results be noted.

46/24 TRACKS TO TRANSFORMATION

Prior to the meeting, members were sent a report from Midlands Connect entitled *Tracks to Transformation: Unlocking the Growth on the Shrewsbury to Birmingham Rail Line* together with a statement of support from local businesses.

The Town Clerk said that the report detailed the fact that the current rail provision on this route was presenting a challenge to business operations and the economic prospects of the region. Inadequate timetabling, insufficient capacity, and a generally unreliable service contributed to a lack of business and organisational use, with it affecting everything from daily commutes to strategic business decisions.

The growth of hospitality, tourism and the nighttime economy was being constrained by an unappealing service, with some organisations outlining that better rail connectivity would be a catalyst for Shropshire's growing role in the national tourism sector.

All organisations agreed that a more attractive rail connection between Shrewsbury and Birmingham would be a catalyst for growth in the region, delivering economic and social benefits. However, it also felt that, while investment in this corridor was important, businesses truly felt that to be connected to the wider economy, they would require a direct service to London.

Local firms and organisations were clear that improving the Birmingham to Shrewsbury rail service was not just a matter of convenience; but a strategic imperative for boosting the region's economy, thus forming a strong basis to make representations to Government for funding.

Councillors were asked for their comments. Councillor Wilson remarked that that the line needed to be electrified for real direct line improvements. Shropshire Council were discussing the installation of a parkway station as part of the Movement Strategy.

Councillor Phillips remarked that the current service to London was very unreliable. He added that the report should have mentioned the high cost of tickets which was currently in the region of £150 return from Shrewsbury. It was cheaper to travel from Liverpool, which was not only a direct service but was quicker despite being a greater distance. From Shrewsbury, driving was a much more economical option. He said that any package to encourage opportunities must include fare prices and that the formula for working these out was left over from British Rail and was out of date. It was not just market forces that made some fares to London cheaper.

The Town Clerk said that the Town Council will contact Midlands Connect regarding these issues raised and respond to the conclusions of the report. It appeared that the Wolverhampton leg of the journey to London from Shrewsbury was the sticking point, and staff had found it quicker and cheaper to drive to Stafford or Crewe and catch a train to London from there.

Councillor Dean added that the report was based on a Midlands point of view but that accessibility for tourists coming into the area from other regions, eg Heart of Wales etc, must not be ignored.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Report be received;**
- (ii) That the Town Clerk contact Midlands Connect to raise concerns about reliability and costing of services through to Shrewsbury.**

47/24 ACADEMY OF URBANISM

As an addition to the agenda the Chairman wanted to raise the recent visit by the Academy of Urbanism Judges for the Great Town Awards.

The Town Clerk reported that the Mayor had received a nomination for Shrewsbury to accept a nomination to compete in the Academy of Urbanism Great Towns Award. Four judges visited last week for a full day's programme of activities. Shrewsbury was commended on its Big Town Plan, the Movement Strategy and Town Council's submission on Shrewsbury's merits. These initiatives and the day's programme were well received and commended by the judges.

Councillor Mosley said that the judges had been highly complimentary and that the programme had been well planned and comprehensive; Shrewsbury was a good place and stood at the forefront of many initiatives. The judges were impressed by the town and what was presented to them, as well as by the presenters themselves. He praised all those staff involved. Councillor Vasmer added that the booklet, produced to accompany the day, was superb.

The award ceremony was to take place in November, and it was hoped that Shrewsbury would be successful.

48/24 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 and the minutes would appear in draft on the website within the next month. He thanked Councillors and all staff involved in the meeting.