

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
Held in Committee Room, Livesey House
At 6.00pm on Monday 3rd February 2025**

PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

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

81/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received.

82/24 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.
Councillor Green	Declared a prejudicial interest in Item 11/24 Markets Update and was a Trustee of The Hive (Item 08/24)

83/24 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 20th January 2025 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 20th January 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

84/24 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

85/24 GRANTS

85.1 Update on Community Grants and Councillor Grants Funds

The RFO circulated the schedule of Community Grants and Local Councillor Grants awarded to date over the years of this Council. Community Grant Applications this round totalled £11,212.24.

The RFO brought councillors' attention to their individual Local Councillor Grant Funds – some still had small balances. The balances were to be used before Year End (by 31st March 2025). There was to be no carrying forward of funds to the next financial year and then no further spending until after the elections in May. Any councillor funds left over would flow into the community grant fund. The RFO confirmed that each Local Councillor Fund would then be £750.

85.2 Applications for Community Grants Funds

Representatives from organisations that had applied for funding were present at the meeting and were welcomed by the Chair; there were 4 attendees in total. Each were asked in turn to give a brief overview of their application and answer any questions from members. After the presentations, organisation representatives were asked to leave the meeting for the councillors to discuss the applications and agree on appropriate funding. The notes below reflect both the presentations and the discussions.

- (a) **4 All Foundation** – requested £1,000 to fund a comprehensive wellbeing programme for the elderly focusing on physical activity, mental health support, social engagement, nutritious meals, cognitive exercises, and community connection for a fulfilling life. Councillor Mosley wanted to show his support for this application and offered part of his Local Councillor Grant Fund.

RESOLVED:

That £750 be awarded to the 4 All Foundation from the Community Grant Fund and £250 from Councillor Alan Mosley's Local Councillor Grant Fund.

- (b) **Greenfields Community Group** – requested £1,952 of funding for a defibrillator and its installation at Greenfields Recreation Ground together with a bench, solar light and an etched instruction plaque. A statement from the Community Group was read out detailing the installation site and the reasons for their application ie immediate response to cardiac arrest, public safety, strategic placement and increased awareness and training.

Discussions raised the issue that funding applications for defibrillators were normally taken by the local councillor and it was recommended that the Group approached Councillor Phillips who still had funding available. The RFO said he would be in contact with Councillor Phillips on this matter.

There were some concerns raised about the installation. The addition of a bench would need permission from the Town Council, which would need to consider the appropriateness of the location, and this had not yet been sought. It was noted that there was a defibrillator installed at the Bowling Club nearby. Also, it was suggested that the Recreation Ground was not the best position in terms of accessibility – a nearby shop or community centre was deemed to be more suitable.

RESOLVED:

That Greenfields Community Group approach Councillor Phillips for possible Local Councillor Grant Funding and consider an alternative location for the defibrillator.

- (c) **Midlands Air Ambulance Charity (presented by Phoebe Davies)** – requested £2,774 of funding in order to transform a room at the back of its existing charity shop in the Darwin Centre into a community hub for local businesses and communities to use free of charge. It was noted that the Air Ambulance is funded only by the communities it served and received no funding from the Government nor the NHS. This vital service needed approximately £16m per year to run and Shropshire was one of its busiest, in terms of missions, but also in terms of donations. A similar initiative had proved a success in Hereford but it didn't have the ease of accessibility for all as the Darwin Centre location. The Charity would actively promote the hub and ensure that it was welcoming and well-utilised. It would be open during the Darwin Centre opening hours and competing demands for the space would be managed appropriately. No additional funding would be required as it was anticipated that it would be self-sustainable.

Councillor Mosley declared an interest that he managed Castlefields Community Centre and said that there were a few other facilities in the area that offered community spaces. Councillor Dartnall said she was not aware of any spaces in the town being offered free to use. Councillor Moseley asked about the length of its lease, and it was established that the lease had just been re-signed for another 10 years.

Councillor Vasmer agreed that it was accessible and easy to find. Councillor Dartnall said the venue had social capital and pointed out that there would be no ongoing costs.

RESOLVED:

That £1,500 be awarded to the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity.

- (d) **Royal British Legion** – the RFO explained that a joint venture to install a plaque in the pavement of The Square came via the Royal British Legion and would involve negotiation with Shropshire Council. A fund in the region of £1,000 was required for its installation and the Town Council had acquired quotes for the plaque and the work. It was in commemoration of Armistice Day and was to be situated in the place where people congregated each year in celebration of the event. The Town Clerk said that the wording had already been agreed.

RESOLVED:

That a sum in the region of £1,000 be awarded for the purpose of installing an Armistice plaque in The Square.

- (e) **Shrewsbury Interfaith Forum (presented by Rev Ken Chippindale)** – requested £750 of funding to fund its annual Multi-Cultural Fun Day which was a free event to draw the community, religious or otherwise, together. Faiths represented

were Buddhism, Baha'iism, Islam, Christian, Jewish and Humanist. Activities included dancers, musicians, storytellers and food from around the world. The Forum had previously secured funding from the Town Council in 2013 and 2016 to fund the event. There were no questions from members.

RESOLVED:

That £750 be awarded to the Shrewsbury Interfaith Forum.

- (f) **Shrewsbury Sub-Aqua (presented by Christopher Molena)** – requested £3,000 of funding to replace the scuba diving kit for sub-aqua pool sessions at The Quarry Pool. The Club had approximately 70 members and was usually self-sustaining but over the past few years had struggled with pool closures. It was run by volunteers who paid for their own training. The group wanted to offer try-dives again for youth groups (eg scouts) etc which it was unable to do last year. Equipment was expensive and, although safe, did need replacing.

Membership was around £200 per year and 60% of that went on pool fees. Equipment was available to divers who were not obliged to buy their own. About 10 kits were available and funding would provide 10 new ones in addition to about 5 retained kits.

Councillor Wilson and Mosley recognised that the cost of scuba diving was a high barrier to entry to many but recognised that it provided an opportunity for a niche sport, particularly for young people. Councillor Green added that funding the training would allow the group to do more and upgrade the kit.

RESOLVED:

That £1,500 be awarded to Shrewsbury Sub-Aqua.

- (g) **Shropshire Youth Association (SYA) (presented by Claire Purcell)** – requested £736.24 of funding for a Community Intergenerational Regeneration Project to bring community members of all ages, cultures and backgrounds together. The newly formed Youth Forum would help run and organise the series of events that would take place approximately once per month. Funds would help buy equipment for this eg a dart board and bingo machine.

RESOLVED:

That £600 be awarded to the Shropshire Youth Association.

86/24 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 23rd November 2024 to 24th January 2025. These had been agreed by two signatories before the RFO and Town Clerk and uploaded for payment. No comments or concerns were raised.

RECOMMENDED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 23rd November 2024 to 24th January 2025 be approved.

87/24 QUARTER 3 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated a report to appraise members of the financial position of the Council for the third quarter of the 2024/25 financial year. There was an overall positive variance of £51,547.

There was a positive variance for Q3 on expenditure of £79,408 which was driven by £68,441 on wages and associated costs, which arose from unfilled/delays in recruitment and overproviding for the wage settlement agreed and paid in December. Some of the unfilled posts had required temporary/casual recruitment hence the negative (£23,267) variance. Other positive variance such as electric, water due to timing and meter readings offset negative variances. Looking at the YTD position the positive variance was to continue to end of year.

Income in Q3 was behind budget for the quarter by (£27,861) due to lower interest from timing of bonds (£31,138) and SLA income was lower than budgeted (£23,230). Sporting income was ahead of budget due to increased income and earlier invoicing. Looking at the YTD position, income was to remain slightly behind budget.

The Balance Sheet continued to be strong and expected lower net assets as lower bank balances held.

Looking to the future, the budget had been set and in the remaining two months the Town Council was to utilise any underspends on expenditure and finalise January's management accounts.

Councillor Mosley asked the RFO to provide a glossary on the terminology to ease understanding.

RESOLVED:

That the Quarter 3 Management Accounts report be noted and accepted.

88/24 INTERNAL AUDITOR

Prior to the meeting, a report on the Effectiveness of the Internal Audit was circulated to members together with an Internal Audit Review.

The RFO said the audit was done on an annual basis and that there were minimal changes year to year to the programme, until the Council's responsibility or services change, which will be considered. The auditor visited the site to carry out audits and produced reports 3 times per year.

RESOLVED:

That the report into the Effectiveness of Internal Audit be accepted.

89/24 YOUTH ACTIVITIES

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

- Youth club attendee numbers were going strong.
- HAF (Holiday Activity Fund) funding had been agreed for Shropshire for 2025 and HAF clubs were planned for Easter (Grange) and Summer (Grange and Monkmoor) holidays. The funding bid would be submitted shortly.
- The AC (Alternative Curriculum) delivery was continuing and there was to be a new starter. 8 places were currently taken and there was capacity for 2 more. All attendees were from Shrewsbury Academy.
- The Youth Town Council met on 20th January where it was agreed that working groups would be formed to work on the following projects: Schools' Roundabout Planting Competition; Loggerheads Mascot creation; new Youth Council webpage, Instagram and WhatsApp group.
- The Stay Safe Event was confirmed for 25th June in The Quarry and partners and stakeholders had been emailed.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

90/24 TENDER WORK

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

The Projects Manager drew particular attention to the adult gym proposed for Greenfields Recreation Ground. Following a tender process and a meeting with the Greenfields Community group, a location for the gym could not be agreed upon and so therefore the Lottery funding secured by the group was to be returned.

The Town Clerk explained that the work surrounding the outdoor gym proposal had been very labour intensive. The tenderers (which were specialists) for the outdoor gym had all cited the same location based on safety, access, easy maintenance, and distance from the play area, but the Community Group had not agreed. Councillor Mosley said that this matter was to be considered closed from the Town Council's point of view.

It was recommended at a meeting of the Recreation & Leisure Committee that the Town Council match any funding raised for solar lighting at Greenfields. This was in the region of £19k. The group were applying to Severn Trent Water as an alternative to previous funding received. The Town Clerk added that a wide range of applications were received during the tender process but that a parity of service across the town was required. The whole scheme would be £38k for 10 lighting poles.

Councillor Mosley asked where the solar lights were to be installed and it was established that there were to run along the pathway from the allotments to the railway line. Councillor Wilson was concerned about this kind of funding for footpath lighting.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) That £19K be allocated for the installation of a solar lighting scheme at Greenfields Recreation Ground.**
- (ii) That the report be noted.**

Councillor Green left the meeting.

91/24 MARKETS UPDATE

The Markets Update was circulated prior to the meeting. The Commercial, Markets & Events Manager was pleased to report that the Indoor Market was voted 'Britain's Favourite Market' at the 2025 Great British Market Awards for an unprecedented third year running and a record fourth time in total. There were 13 award categories and this was the most coveted and involved a public vote.

The Commercial, Markets & Events Manager reported that TST Shading Ltd had been chosen to replace the canopies and that installation had begun.

Councillor Wilson was pleased with the news about the award and the canopies. He asked if a new banner announcing the award could be hung? The Commercial, Markets & Events Manager said he was in discussion with Shropshire Council re installing a trophy cabinet.

The Sunday Market had recommenced on 15th December 2024 and was being run by Places for Community Spaces Ltd. Councillor Mosley asked about how many stalls there were and it was established that there were 15-20 but there was lots of space on site. Places for Community Spaces Ltd had wanted to run car boot sales on the site but this was contrary to the agreement. The RFO said that the site had not yet had much promotion and that there was no evidence that car boot sales would increase footfall.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

Councillor Green re-joined the meeting.

92/24 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

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

- Dana Footpath – this was progressing.
- Shorncliffe Drive and Countryside projects – progressing and should be finished by the time of elections
- Monkmoor Rec – works here would include the property on site.

- Upton Lane Rec – Danny Powell, Acting Operations Manager, would be asked to look to assess the path which was very boggy and frequently used by children. The Town Clerk added that the Police have put in a bid for CCTV to be installed in the area in an effort to reduce ASB.

The Town Clerk added that meetings to discuss the SLA covered depot leases too.

RESOLVED:

That the update of the Capital Programme be noted.

93/23 RISK MANAGEMENT

The following Town Council papers were circulated to members prior to the meeting:

- (i) Risk Management Strategy
- (ii) Risk Management Action Plan
- (iii) Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy

The Town Clerk explained to members that every year the Council was required to undertake an assessment of risks. This was part of the Audit Process which fed into the requirements of the Annual Return. It was broken down into two areas: the general assessment of risk and the assessment of potential financial fraud and/or corruption. The Town Clerk was responsible for overseeing the general risk assessment and the RFO for undertaking the financial risk.

To assess the Council's general risks, a piece of software called the Local Council Risk Service was used; this software was bespoke to Parish and Town Councils. Every year the Council uploaded its service delivery, the kind of corporate risks faced in carrying out its services and the likelihood and severity of those risks if they were to happen. Following this, control measures were uploaded, and the likelihood and severity of risks was run again. The system then looked at whether additional action needed to be taken and an action plan produced. It also produced various checklists that staff used to control risk.

The Action Plan had been circulated to all members of the council. The most significant risks were those around anti-social behaviour and its potential risk to both the public and staff. Whilst measures were being taken to control such risks, the Council was subject to matters outside its control. Coronavirus also remained a risk, albeit at reduced severity.

The Town Clerk commended the Town Council's approach to risk management to the Committee for approval.

The Town Clerk added that Risk Management was taken very seriously by the Town Council and there was no complacency. The Management Strategy was used as an active and proactive tool. Terrorism, where it might arise and how to mitigate it, was a new addition to the list of risks. Councillor Dartnall asked if there was any cyber security training, as Shropshire Council provided it for their councillors, and the RFO said he would look into this. The Town Clerk said that the Town Council liaised with the IT department at Shropshire Council on a regular basis in terms of hardware and software. Shropshire Council and the Town Council's IT systems were linked and it was thought that if the Shropshire Council's

server was attacked that it would leave the Town Council vulnerable also, so training to be explored.

Councillor Wilson asked if this item could appear earlier in the agenda next time. He also commented that climate change was not on the list of risk factors and was surprised, as it was a risk that we all increasingly faced.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the Town Clerk's Report into the Management of Risk be noted;**
- (ii) That the existing Risk Management Strategy be re-affirmed;**
- (iii) That the existing Counter-Fraud & Corruption Strategy be re-affirmed;**
- (iv) That the Council approves the actions within the Risk Management Action Plan.**

94/23 INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Town Council's Annual Investment Strategy 2025/26 was circulated to members prior to the meeting. The RFO drew members' attention to the priorities, in order of importance, security, liquidity and the return on investments which stood at around £9m. No changes had been made to the approach going forward. Appendix A showed the types of investments and amounts which stood at just over £8m.

Councillor Mosley said that Shropshire Council had a comparator to advise if rates were good value. The RFO said that he regularly checked reports and were comparable to Shropshire Council returns but that principal authorities may have to follow different rules. He said that he would explore going forward.

Councillor Wilson asked what length the larger bonds were held for and the RFO said that these were in Specified Investments and up to 1 year. Investments can be longer but there were similar peaks and troughs depending on interest rates up or down and tie-in period.

Councillor Dartnall asked if the investments in the Non-Specific property were accessible. The RFO advised investments were accessible, but this type of investment was more long-term.

RESOLVED:

That the Investment Strategy for the financial year 2025/26 be accepted.

95/24 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.