

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purpose Committee
Held Virtually on Microsoft Teams
At 6.00pm on Monday 5 October 2020**

PRESENT

Councillors A Mosley (Chairman), Mrs H Fraser, Ms G Burgess, Mrs P Moseley (Vice Chair), A Phillips & D Vasmer.

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Gary Farmer (Operations Manager), Andy Watkin (Responsible Financial Officer), Ruth Jones (Office Manager) and Carol Pullen (Committee Clerk).

The meeting was Chaired by the Vice Chair, Councillor Mrs P Moseley until the arrival of the Chair, Councillor A Mosley during item 10 of the Agenda.

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors P Adams & Ms J Mackenzie.

9/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Twin-Hatters	All twin-hatted Councillors declared a personal interest in all matters relating to Shropshire Council.
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10/20 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 15 June 2020 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 15 June 2020 be approved and signed as a correct record.

11/20 MATTERS ARISING

Councillor Phillips asked if there was any further update on timescale for undertaking the remedial works at Greenfields BMX track.

The Operations Manager assured him that this would be implemented as soon as staff resources allowed.

12/20 SHROPSHIRE PENSION FUND INVESTMENT

Full Council had mandated the Finance & General Purposes Committee to debate the two questions that had been presented to the June meeting of Council; these being:

Question 1

"Fossil fuel investments increasingly pose a financial risk to investors as a result of both Covid19 and the global transition to a more sustainable economic and environmental model. Renewables now consistently out-perform fossil fuels. Will Shrewsbury Town Council, as a contributing member of the Shropshire County Pension Fund, call on the Fund to swiftly divest from fossil fuels and re-invest to support a localised and green economy?"

Question 2

In 2019 Shrewsbury Town Council declared a climate emergency after recognising the need for robust and urgent action to stop the growing climate crisis. STC was one of the first town councils in the UK to take this step and I would like to applaud them for their action.

However, I note that the town council continues to support the Shropshire County Pension Fund which has millions of pounds invested in polluting fossil fuel companies like BP and Shell.

Does the town council agree that the ongoing financial support of companies whose business models are preparing for a 5C world (<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/bp-shell-oil-global-warming-5-degree-paris-climate-agreement-fossil-fuels-temperature-rise-a8022511.html>) is incompatible with the declaration of a climate emergency?

If so, would the town council be happy to propose a motion calling on SCPF to fully divest all its fossil fuel holdings over the next three years?

The town council would not be taking a leap into the dark on this issue. It would be following in the footsteps of many other UK institutions, including local authorities (eg. Swansea, Stroud, Reading and Derby); pensions funds (eg. the Environment Agency, Waltham Forest, South Yorkshire and Cardiff); half of all UK universities including Oxford University; churches; the British Medical Association; the Royal Colleges of GPs, Physicians and Emergency Medicine; the National Trust and Lloyds of London Insurance group.

Members were aware that since the Council meeting in June, Shropshire Council had received similar representations and their Pensions Committee had met and agreed to divest of fossil fuel investments within 3 years

RESOLVED:

That Shrewsbury Town Council supports the actions of the Pensions Committee in resolving to divest of fossil fuel investments within 3 years and a letter of support be sent to those charged with investing the Shropshire Pension Funds Assets.

13/20 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

(i) Quarter 1 Management Accounts

The RFO reported on the financial position of the Council for the first quarter of the 2020/21 financial year, and the year to date position. The Council had been operating under the cloud of Coronavirus for the entire period of this quarter which had impacted negatively overall. There was an overall positive variance of £245,118 compared to the budget partly due to receipt of grants and neighbourhood funding but if this was removed the reality is an £87,000 adverse income variance which is due to loss of income from many of the income streams.

Expenditure showed a positive variance of £62,315, due to underspend on utilities, staff costs where leavers had not been replaced and the delays in getting contractors on site. Some of this variance would be reported as savings to offset lost income at year end eg Fuel and oil £1,658, but others such as building £6,266 would be delayed until later in the year when contractors were available. Some wages savings were made by not replacing staff who had left the organisation of £38,480, although an element of wages savings were from a budgeted pay rise which had not yet been agreed nationally. It was expected that savings in labour and utilities would be carried forward to year end, which was approximately £35,000, significantly less than the variance reported.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) **That the Responsible Financial Officer's Report and the Statement of Accounts for period ending 30 June 2020 be noted;**
- (ii) **That as Coronavirus had impacted customers' ability to pay, payment plans and assistance be given to clear outstanding debts.**
- (iii) **That all expenditure and budgets continue to be scrutinised for cost savings which would not impact service delivery and payments be made promptly to suppliers.**
- (iv) **That cashflow forecasts be monitored to ensure sufficient liquidity in net current assets.**

(ii) Quarter 2 Management Accounts

The RFO reported on the financial position of the Council for the second quarter of the 2020/21 financial year, and the year to date position. There had been a gradual return of most of the income streams, with the exception of rents, interest & investment income.

There was an overall negative variance of £146,880 compared to the budget, which was not unexpected, due to the effects of coronavirus and capital expenditure. Expenditure was a negative variance of £84,405. However, if the capital expenditure variance of £133,102 was removed the figure was a positive £48,697 due to small

savings and reductions in spending. There was a negative variance on income of £62,455 due to lost or diminished income. Overall the impact from Covid was in the region of £30,000.

The RFO reiterated that although Covid had impacted on Quarters 1 & 2, it was impossible to predict the impact during Quarters 3 & 4.

Councillor Phillips thanked the RFO for his report but questioned whether it was fair to assume that income streams had returned as much as was possible and therefore the overall loss of income for the year could be much greater, in the region of £120,000. He asked that a forecast be given at the time of the budget setting.

The RFO stressed that the budget was reviewed constantly in light of ever changing restrictions. Most income streams were linear and input into the budget as such, an example being the Markets that during Quarter 2 had gone from not trading to trading fully. Many of the income streams were back to what was expected so it was anticipated that the loss of income would be less than what Councillor Phillips was suggesting.

Councillor Vasmer asked for further clarification on item 3.2 of the report for professional fees.

The RFO reported that this was due to a provision provided in the accounts in anticipation of a higher fee than the actual outcome, so the provision had been released but had produced a negative figure for the quarter going forward in professional fees.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) **That the Responsible Financial Officers Report and Statement of Accounts for the period ending 30 September 2020 be noted**

14/20 2021/22 BUDGET

The RFO set out the following timetable for the 2021/22 budget which must be set in draft by the Finance & General Purposes Committee and recommended for approval to Full Council by the end of January 2021. The precept request to Shropshire Council has the same deadlines.

- **5 October 2020 – F&GP**
Following the meeting the Head of Resources would email all Councillors to request any changes to current service delivery and ideas for inclusion in next year's budget.
- **wc 16 November – SMT**
Meeting to consider budget and operational factors to be considered in budget
- **7 December 2020 – F&GP**
Set budget principles and assumptions and look at forecasted outturn on 20/21 budget
 - Consider impact of Covid19 on future budget
 - Consider submissions from councillors

Set fees and charges

- **wc 14 December – SMT & Group leaders**
Meeting to consider draft budget to be submitted to F&GP
- **11 January 2021 – F&GP**
Review and recommend 2020/21 budget to Full Council
- **25 January 2021 – Full Council**
Approve the budget and submit precept request to Shropshire Council

RECOMMENDED:

That the report be noted and dates diarised.

15/20 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 8 September 2020 – 25 September 2020. No comments or concerns were raised.

RECOMMENDED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 8 September 2020 – 25 September 2020 be approved.

16/20 EXTERNAL AUDIT

The Responsible Finance Officer reported that the normal deadline for the External Auditor to sign off the accounts was 30 September, however due to Covid all deadlines had been pushed back by two months. Although the 2019/20 End of Year accounts had been completed and submitted within the usual final deadline these had not yet been received back from the External Auditor so it was expected that these would be received before 30 November and would be reported at the next F&GP meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the updated be noted.

17/20 COVID

The Town Clerk gave members a brief overview of the following reports, which had, prior to the meeting been circulated to members:

- (i) **COVID 19 Policy** – Shrewsbury Town Council was committed to ensuring the health, safety and welfare of all employees and this policy described the measures

that it must put in place to protect employees from the risks of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and the duties that fall upon it.

- (ii) **COVID Business Continuity Plan** – This had been submitted to Council in March and set out the way in which all matters would be dealt with dependent on the prevalence of the virus. The plan had been reviewed and it was felt that very little had changed since March but provision for both full lockdown and any future local lockdown had been added with Management Team members allocated to every action.
- (iii) **Coronavirus Risk Assessments** – As both an employer and a provider of services to the public, Shrewsbury Town Council must take reasonable steps during the current COVID-19 pandemic to protect people from coronavirus. As part of this responsibility a number of COVID-19 risk assessments had been undertaken. Risks were being assessed and documentation created by officers responsible for each area and the services of a Health and Safety Officer had been engaged to offer specialist HR, employment law and health and safety advice and to advise and sign off each individual risk assessment once completed. Risk assessments were subject to continual review as the situation regarding COVID-19 changed. Once each risk assessment was completed and approved it was published on the Shrewsbury Town Council website so that both members of staff and the public have easy access to this information.
- (iv) **Council Activity** – This report had been prepared to keep members informed of impact COVID on various activities of the Council in the following areas:

Financial Forecast Out-turn;
Events & Activities;
Use of Council Assets;
Council Meetings;

Officers continued to keep updated on the latest Government Guidelines and evaluate the impact on Town Council operations in discussions with colleagues in Public Health & Emergency Planning.

Previously the Town Clerk & RFO had reported on the forecast out-turn for the 2020/21 budget, in light of impact on both the income and expenditure of the Council. In June 2020 the 2020-2021 budget deficit was calculated at £100,000, based on various assumptions. It was anticipated that the previous assumption of £100,000 remained the worst case scenario.

The Indoor Market was trading over projection as were income from concessions and sport, but income from the schools contract was anticipated to be worse than projected. Christmas related activity (lights and switch on) were likely to be less than budget although alternative ways to celebrate Christmas virtually were being considered. COVID had seen rises to PPE Budgets and Signage , but also reductions in Training expenditure due to courses being cancelled, this budget was likely to be deferred to next year as training remained a Health & Safety requirement.

Members were asked to consider the impact of COVID into the 2021/22 budget year. It was anticipated that events income would not reach the pre-COVID levels. Income from both interest and commercial properties would also need to be reviewed due to near negative interest rates and the likely bounce back or otherwise of hospitality tenants. Officers should however be commended for scaling back on incurring unnecessary expenditure. Whilst this had been a support during this financial year, it was likely to see a backlog of resulting work in the new financial year.

The following activities remain affected by COVID

Events Programme in the Quarry had been cancelled and no bookings were being taken for the whole of 2020. The Rule of 6 precluded any organised gatherings.

Remembrance was likely to be very reduced with no parade or Church Service. Discussions were ongoing with the Emergency Planning Unit about an event similar to the recent Battle of Britain Service.

Christmas Lights Switch-on Event would not go ahead but plans were still progressing on installing Christmas Lights. Work was ongoing with the BID to identify activities that encouraged people to visit the town safely but did not cause gatherings. Carols in the Square would not go ahead but there were plans to hold a Doorstep Carol Service facilitated by BBC Radio Shropshire.

Council Meetings dates had been set for Full Council and the three Standing Committees for the remainder of the Municipal Year. A provisional date had been set for the Tuesday after elections in May 2021 for Annual Council.

Use of Council Assets:

Tennis, Bowling, Croquet – facilities had been open since mid-May and all users were working to the Government Guidelines, their national Governing Body Guidelines and their own COVID RA.

Football pitches – were being prepared for a mid-October start.

Community Centres - remained closed. Current COVID RA identified the risk of opening far greater than the benefit. The added guidelines on the Rule of 6 made operation at this time impractical.

Allotments – Had been open throughout. Management Committees had prepared their own COVID RA.

Parks & Open Space – Had been open throughout. All had signage promoting safe-distancing.

Play Areas – had been opened since early July. All had signage promoting safe use.

Councillor Moseley asked what provision had been made for youth activities and whether the Town Council had any reports on how COVID was impacting on the behaviour of young people.

The Town Clerk reported that alternative curriculum work had continued throughout lockdown with the Youth Team out and about engaging with young people as much as possible. Provision was now being made for youth facilities, which were exempt from the rule of 6 as they were deemed to be an educational function. Structured sessions were being organised and a letter had been sent to all parents. Any young people who wished to log on or come to any of the sessions must do so through Eventbrite to ensure a limited number.

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that Monkmoor was being used as an alternative space to deliver more structured sessions. The Youth Team continued to be out and about in areas where they knew groups of young people congregated to engage with them to get a feel for what they might like. The model for youth provision had needed to change radically during this period and the Team were doing a lot to rethink things and make things work the best way that they could.

Regarding the finances, Councillor Fraser asked what provision had been made should there be a deficit due to COVID at year end.

The Town Clerk clarified that members had discussed the potential of income deficit at the June F&GP and the view taken by the Committee at that time was that it would be better to take any deficit from general reserves rather than try and reduce budget lines significantly elsewhere. The Council had always advocated keeping a level of general reserves for any such occasion. She and the RFO had discussed this and were comfortable that any deficit could be met.

Councillor Vasmer welcomed the series of reports and thanked all staff for the excellent preparations that had been made and the arrangements that had been put in place for COVID and for the work they were doing during this very difficult time. He was pleased to see that the financial situation appeared to be better than expected. He sought re-assurance that appropriate arrangements were in place for those staff who continued to be working from home particularly around their physical and mental wellbeing.

The Town Clerk reported that the majority of the Admin Team continued to work from home. All staff had been given laptops and had access to the network remotely and they continued to provide a full telephone service to members of the public. In the workplace health & safety audits of all workstations were carried out and these were continuing in homes to ensure the provisions in the home environment were as good as possible. In relation to the mental health, Management Team were in regular contact with staff they directly line managed and further support mechanisms to keep people on track with their mental and physical wellbeing at this time were being investigated.

Councillor Fraser reiterated Councillor Vasmer's words, particularly as the Winter months progressed. She stressed it was important to keep staff engaged and offer them opportunities to talk about how they felt.

The Deputy Town Clerk clarified that the reason for working at home was that the office space was not suitable to allow for social distancing measures but a rota system had been put in place to enable staff to have the opportunity to work in

the office should it lend itself to the tasks they were doing. This was working well and also gave staff the opportunity to interact with colleagues.

Councillor Mosley joined and Chaired the meeting from this point onwards

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) **That the COVID 19 Policy be adopted.**
- (ii) **That the COVID Business Continuity Plan be reviewed in light of ongoing risk.**
- (iii) **That the report on Coronavirus Risk Assessments be noted.**
- (iv) **That the report on Council Activity be noted.**

18/20 MARKETS

The Deputy Town Clerk reported on the current position on Markets in light of COVID. Lockdown in March had resulted in the majority of markets activity being curtailed. The Livestock Market curtailed its operations as did the Sunday Market and only food traders continued to trade in the Market Hall. Non-food traders began to trade in June with café facilities opening up the following month. Sunday Market recommenced in July.

Market Hall Indoor Market – With only essential food stalls trading, income in April and May was 70% of budget. June and July trading income had recovered slightly and since beginning of August income was around 2.75% lower than this time last year. Footfall had remained relatively buoyant and in similar places around the town average spend was higher to reflect the changes in shopping habits of shoppers in light of COVID.

Sunday Market – As the market did not trade in April and May, no income was received. June and July income were reduced in light of shopper confidence and no car boot sales and since August takings had been fractionally down 1.92% from last year. Footfall was picking up and trader confidence growing.

Livestock market – Officers reported to Full Council on recommended changes to the lease agreement in light of both COVID and BREXIT. Agreed changes to that lease were likely to see a reduction of £17k on planned budget

RECOMMENDED:

That the report be noted.

19/20 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Town Clerk gave members an update the Capital Programme.

Projects that had been completed since lockdown:

- Boiler work at Grange Youth Centre

- BMX upgrades at Meole & Harlescott
- Footpaths & cycleways Tranche 1 – Old River Bed, Monkmoor Community Woodland & Springfield Recreation Ground
- Resurfacing work at Mardol Quay
- Street lights LED replacement
- Installation of solar lights in the Quarry

Projects that were being progressed further

- Footpaths & cycleways Tranche 2 – Reabrook, Mousecroft, Hillside, Old Shrewsbury Canal
- Monkmoor River Bank – tender awarded.
- Ash die back – risk assessment of tree provision and development of an Action Plan for removal and restoration.
- Climate Emergency – A Climate Emergency Working Group were now meeting on a regular basis and developing an Action Plan.
- Completion of Sweetlake play area.
- A number of other projects were well on track to progress with tenders about to be awarded.
- Toilets – That the planned refurbishment of toilets should be reviewed in light of COVID and consideration be given to the provision of single access cubicles.

The Capital Programme had been presented to the Recreation & Leisure Committee. The Committee were in agreement that further discussions take place on those items in the Capital Programme flagged for review in light of COVID. Members of the Committee suggested that they and officers meet outside of the Committee Cycle to discuss ideas ahead of further consideration by the Committee formally. Since the R&L Meeting, the Town Clerk has been in contact with the Beacon Cricket Club, who were completely understanding of the situation. They were making representations to the ECB about their view on future use of Pavilions.

The R&L Committee also had extensive discussions about play areas and the prioritisation for refurbishment of existing facilities.

The Committee agreed on the following priority areas for play

- Upton Lane play area and BMX Track
- Mary Webb Road play area including the removal of the palisade security fence
- Kynaston Road Recreation Ground replacement Skateboard Ramp subject to consultation with Youth Services and the local users
- Kynaston Road Recreation Ground Infant play area including field drainage to prevent surface flooding
- Green Acres Recreation Ground, upgrade multi play unit and springy rockers.

Particular reference was made to the Upton Lane Recreation Ground and the need to refurbish the play area and improve and re-position the BMX track. These improvements had been flagged up to the Planning Authority as part of the offsite contribution from the Cornovii development at Crowmoor House. The £135,123 s106 contribution was subject to various occupational triggers which could delay the upgrades to these facilities. Both the Town Clerk & Deputy Town Clerk and Councillor Mrs Moseley had been involved in discussions with Cornovii. Members were therefore asked to agree the principle of front-

financing these upgrades ahead of the contributions being received and granting delegate authority to officers to continue discussions with both the Planning Authority and Cornovii in conjunction with the ward member.

Discussion took place around the likely costs and the Town Clerk confirmed these would be met by the developer.

The Operations Manager reported that he had spoken with Councillor Mrs Moseley about the potential to include some other footpaths and access onto the open space to enhance the area as part of the whole project.

Councillor Mrs Moseley added her praise for the Monkmoor Meadows scheme which she had visited and what a good job & how quickly it was being done. She had received positive comments from residents.

Councillor Mosley sought clarification on Mary Webb play area as he was aware there was already an allocation to replace the palisade security fence within the Capital Programme and asked if the play area upgrade was additional to this. He also queried the level of works at Kynaston Road Play Area.

The Town Clerk reported Mary Wenn was exceptionally poor in play value and was the last of a few that needed upgrading. Costs were not expected to be as high as some other sites because this was an infant only play area. The ROSPA inspections for the site at Kynaston Road Recreation Ground had highlighted the need to replace some of the ramps which were beginning to rot and the old metal ramps. Some drainage work had been done but the infant play area suffered from poor drainage and was the last part to be done.

Councillor Vasmer asked if there was any progress on the Town Centre accommodation buildings survey. The Town Clerk confirmed the buildings survey was in relation to the structural integrity of Town Council buildings at the top of the Quarry including the greenhouse. The survey had been undertaken and the report was awaited.

The Operations Manager added that he had spoken to the Surveyor about the Barge Gutter regarding removal of some of the structure and making the safe the area and was expecting a draft report shortly.

With regards to budget setting for next year, Councillor Fraser enquired about CIL funds and any time limit on spending them. The RFO clarified that there was a need to spend the CIL Neighbourhood fund within a specific time and this was included in a note of the accounts. There were no funds that were at risk of payback. The funds were received annually in April and the RFO agreed to request information on the amount expected and report back at a future meeting.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) That the Capital Programme report be noted;**
- (ii) That work be undertaken on reviewing those projects potentially impacted by COVID and report back to a future meeting;**

(iii) That the priority play areas as recommended by the Recreation & Leisure Committee be included in the new Capital Programme;

(iv) That officers seek an up-to-date position on CIL Neighbourhood fund allocations

20/20 CLIMATE EMERGENCY

The Deputy Town Clerk appraised members of the work of the Climate Emergency Working Group. Following the declaration of a Climate Emergency Resolution by Shrewsbury Town Council on in March 2019 it had been agreed to establish a Climate Emergency Working Group. The overall purpose of this working group was to provide advice and support to the Finance and General Purposes Committee on how Shrewsbury Town Council might best proceed to reduce and measure any reduction in its (net) carbon footprint and on the development of an appropriate Climate Emergency Action Plan. The group had met for its inaugural meeting on 23 July 2020 with the next meeting due to take place in October and the main topic for discussion would be the action plan.

In addition to the actions under discussion within the working group, Shrewsbury Town Council had been carrying out a number of initiatives from the previously agreed capital plan which came under the remit of Climate Emergency. These included:

- Solar Lighting Project in the Quarry
- Wildflower verge planting
- LED Replacement
- Tree Planting
- Ash Die Back Proposals
- Battery Operated kit to replace petrol operated kit
- New energy efficient boiler at the Grange Youth Centre.

Additional initiatives that were being discussed included:

- The provision of electric pool vehicles for STC staff
- Installing electric vehicle charging points at the Weeping Cross Depot
- Seeded rooves for bus shelters.

Councillor Mosley felt it would be useful to have a matrix to track progress on the action plan highlighting what, when, how and at what cost. The Deputy Town Clerk agreed to do this.

Councillor Mosley reported that he and Councillor Vasmer had met with Councillor Nutting, Leader of Shropshire Council to discuss the potential of the Town Council becoming willing parties to the Weir Hydro Electric Scheme dependent on what impact the scheme would have.

Councillor Fraser was in support of the Climate Emergency Working Group but was keen to know what relationship that group had with Shropshire Climate Action Partnership. Whilst she appreciated that both groups were necessary, she felt there would be benefit to the group being involved with the wider Shropshire group to maximise its effectiveness particularly on projects that they may want to achieve within Shrewsbury Town Centre.

Councillor Mosley pointed out that the Town Council had set up its group to particularly monitor what the Town Council were actively doing and the functions for which they had any responsibility and accreditation for.

The Deputy Town Council reported that several members of the group did sit on the Climate Action Partnership also so although there was no formal link, they were aware of the discussions within that group and rather than duplicating were able to feed into what they were doing and using information for mutual benefit. The Town Clerk added to this that because of the number of Parish & Town Council's across Shropshire, it was not possible for each to be a member. However, Shropshire Association of Local Councils had been asked for representation and Allan Wilson, Vice Chairman of SALC was on the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted.

21/20 SMARTWATER

The Town Clerk reported on Smartwater. Currently the Police & Crime Commissioner was offering 25% funding towards the purchase of Smartwater and free signage for an area on the basis that Town & Parish Councils picked up the remaining 75% and there was an 80% take-up on the initiative in the area in question. This had been used differently by Parish Councils with some who had targeted small hotspot crime areas whilst some places were offering the initiative across the whole of the parish council area. The Cost of the kits were £8.90 +VAT per household. The PCC funding would reduce that cost to £6.68+VAT.

Currently the Town Council had no budget for crime prevention initiatives like Smartwater. There was the Community Grant Scheme and the Councillor Grant Scheme but the likely costs of such initiatives were beyond both funding streams. Shrewsbury has 32,000 households.

This had been discussed by the Recreation & Leisure Committee during its report on the work of Team Shrewsbury. There had been a couple of requests for funding of Smartwater from the Radbrook & Sundorne Wards and those members were able to detail recent crime and anti-social behaviour issues in their wards.

Councillor Roberts, Ward member for Radbrook had reported that he had been pleased to see that the community had set up a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme which he was supportive of as it provided eyes and ears to the police. In terms of Smartwater, his view was that if it was provided for one resident in a ward there should be the expectation that every resident should have access. He gave examples of where it had worked well in the rural areas. He believed that the Town Council should expend any resource on setting up and retaining Neighbourhood Watch Schemes than on Smartwater.

Councillor Parry, Ward member for Sundorne had reported that the area had been badly affected by arson, theft and damage to cars during the summer. He had sought help from the Police and they had suggested a combination of Neighbourhood Watch and Smartwater.

General comments had included:

Neighbourhood Watch Scheme had been popular at one stage and the fact that signage had been installed had helped to reduce crime. They had been in decline of late. There didn't appear to be readily available information about setting up Neighbourhood Schemes.

There should be a strict rationale for any allocation of funding towards Smartwater so that only the worst hit properties were targeted. Members were aware of <https://wedontbuycrime.co.uk/contact/>

The consensus from the R&L Committee was that there was a reduction of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes within the County and also in the Town and they were of the opinion that any resources would be better directed towards resurrecting some of those rather than Smartwater alone. Details had been provided by the Police of crime in the Radbrook area but were still awaited for Sundorne.

Members agreed that if the Council were to offer Smartwater then it would need to do so for all households which would be very expensive and they considered that Neighbourhood Watch Schemes may be more effective. They were unsure how the Council could actively encourage the initiation of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes.

The Town Clerk reported that she had been tasked by the R&L Committee to find details of how communities could set up Neighbourhood Watch Schemes with a view to Ward members having conversations within their communities and within the Agenda papers members had received details of 'We don't buy any crime' and Starting a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme <https://www.ourwatch.org.uk/> which they could promote within their communities.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) **That the Town Council does not fund the provision of Smartwater.**
- (i) **That Ward members publicise and inform residents of the opportunity of setting up Neighbourhood Watch Schemes.**

Live streaming of the meeting was ended

22/20 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.

23/20 SPECIALIST SUPPORT IN RELATION TO VAT IN THE MARKET HALL

The RFO presented a report in relation to VAT in the Market Hall.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted.**
- (ii) That the provisions in the accounts be released and contingent liability note in the 2020/21 accounts be removed.**

24/20 UPDATE ON VARIOUS LEASES

The RFO presented a report in relation to the commercial properties which the Council leases.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Report be noted.**
- (ii) That the RFO and Town Clerk are able to continue to negotiate with tenants on leases while restrictions are put in place due to Covid19.**

25/20 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Councillor Mosley reported on the need to review policies and procedures.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That a working group of five members be set up to review the policies and procedures and the Group Leaders establish representation;**
- (ii) That the Deputy Town Clerk circulate a list of HR policies to include the JCC and Unions.**