

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Finance & General Purpose Committee Held at Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury At 6.00pm on Monday 13 January 2020

PRESENT

Councillors A Mosley (Chairman), Mrs G Burgess, Mrs H Fraser, I Jones, Mrs P Moseley, A Phillips & D Vasmer.

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Gary Farmer (Operations Manager), Andy Watkin (Responsible Financial Officer), Carol Pullen (Acting Committee Clerk), Mark Barrow (Shropshire Council Executive Director of Place & Enterprise).

APOLOGIES

Councillor P Adams & Ms J Mackenzie

54/19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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| Twin-Hatters | All twin-hatted Councillors declared a personal interest in all matters relating to Shropshire Council. |
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55/19 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 2 December 2019 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 2 December 2019 be approved and signed as a correct record.

56/19 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

57/19 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PLACE

The Chairman welcomed Mark Barrow, Executive Director of Place & Enterprise at Shropshire Council who gave an overview of high priority projects.

These included:

- Adult social care & children's care pressures which now accounted for 62% of Shropshire Council's budget.
- Public transport – review of Park & Ride service, overhaul of concessionary travel, re-investment into capital programme to develop modern transport systems whilst considering climate change.
- Climate change issues
- Housing – addressing social housing, temporary housing and homelessness. Looking at S106 money and acquiring more properties for use as temporary accommodation working towards better outcomes in terms of housing, health and social care.
- Switching to LED lighting for 18,000 street lights within Shropshire over the next 3-4 years.
- Highways issues – potholes being a major one. Additional capital resources had been allocated to fund most pressing issues. The Government had committed additional funding to Councils for potholes but amount is not yet known. There is commitment to emptying every gully by the end of March.
- River Severn – establishment of a River Severn Partnership involving the Environment Agency and all local authorities down to Gloucestershire on how the river could be better controlled.
- Schools – working with DfE on consolidation of the Grange & Sundorne Schools connecting infants and juniors whilst taking into account safe routes to school.

Mr Barrow then invited questions from members.

Councillor Mosley expressed concern that delays in responding to highways issues were getting worse.

Mr Barrow confirmed that a specialist Consultant had been engaged to work with the Council team and give an honest and dispassionate view. Currently work is programmed through WSP Consultants to Kier, the Council's Contractor. It is understood that there is currently a backlog of over 2,000 jobs. Mr Barrow is in receipt of daily reports from the Consultant with full results expected by the end of January. The Council are also working with a team from Cranfield University to develop best investment for money and are also a member of the Future Highways Research Club which enables the Council to benchmark against 54 other local authorities.

Councillor Jones expressed concern over the lack of litter picking and the amount of fly tipping. Six weeks after reporting a particular issue of fly tipping, still nothing had been done. Mr Barrow agreed to investigate this and any other specific issues members had.

Councillor Mosley asked if there was any update on plans the future of the Shirehall building. Mr Barrow confirmed there had been investment into digital transformation and

the encouragement of agile working, which could change the requirements for available office space, therefore a review was underway.

Councillor Mosley asked for an update on Shrewsbury shopping centres. Mr Barrow confirmed money had been allocated to carry out adjustments in the Pride Hill Centre. The Riverside Centre would be demolished towards the end of this year and Architects had been commissioned to undertake a more detailed report on future plans for the Riverside. This would be complete by end of February and Mr Barrow offered to come to a future meeting to give further details. There were plans for regeneration of the Darwin Centre with an announcement expected later this month. The toilet provision/upgrade in the Darwin Centre was due to be start imminently.

Members were keen to have an update on the Quarry Swimming Centre. Mr Barrow confirmed that a report from Sport England had now been received on strategic options of what facilities should remain in the town and what would be better served at Shrewsbury Sports Village and work was being undertaken to determine how to make the whole leisure service provision sustainable.

Members stressed their view that it was really important to offer swimming facilities in the town. Councillor Fraser, a regular swimmer herself, was aware that the current lane swimming was well used, due to accessibility and convenience of town centre facilities and whilst it was recognised that recreational swimming could be accommodated at Sundorne, it was vital that provision for those groups wishing to lane swim remained in the town.

The Town Clerk asked Mr Barrow how he saw his relationship with Town & Parish Councils particularly with regard to road safety issues. Mr Barrow stressed he was keen to continue to develop relationships with Parish Councils and was happy to have separate conversation regarding CIL investments, housing developments etc. He was aware that there is a growing need for Boundary Reviews that would affect Parish & Town Council boundaries.

In concluding, Mr Barrow stressed that he would be more than happy to attend future meetings to appraise members of any projects in more detail.

The Chairman thanked Mr Barrow, who then left the meeting.

58/19 BUDGET 2020/21

Details of the draft 2020/21 budget had been circulated to Group Leaders ahead of the meeting and they had met to consider this and make proposals. The RFO gave members an overview of the budget forecast.

In proposing the budget as presented the Chairman outlined the following:

That the precept be increased by 20% for the 2020/21 budget to be made up of:

- 10% for growth, inclusive of inflation (currently around 3%) and
- 10% ring-fenced for climate emergency mitigation initiatives.

The 10% increase for growth would be used for the following activities:

- to further enhance the network of footpaths

- to improve the standard of maintenance of green spaces
- to provide additional support for programmes of festivals and events throughout the town
- to implement any prioritised projects (either cross-town developments or individual ward-based projects; members had fed in priorities in their Wards, these would be reviewed and projects outlined.
- to facilitate the Knife Angel being displayed in the Town.

The 10% ring-fenced for climate emergency mitigation initiatives would be enhanced by additional funds from reserves to provide a dedicated budget of £250,000 to be drawn down, as and when, over the next three years. Officers would be asked to provide a more detailed action plan outlining the Council's response to the Climate Emergency to be submitted to the April 2020 meeting of the F&GP. This would likely include:

- purchasing land for tree planting
- solar panels
- purchase of electric tools & vehicles
- addressing the impact of Ash Die Back

As part of this Climate Emergency process, the Council would establish a Climate Emergency Standing Advisory Group, reporting to F&GP, comprising of Councillors, Officers, representatives of pressure groups, Young Shrewsbury and professionals which would meet on a quarterly basis.

In addition to these two key areas of work, it is important to move forward to provide a permanent base for Town Council headquarters staff. Hence, the Senior Management Team be asked to draw up a needs analysis and seek to identify appropriate premises for conversion to provide reception, office and meeting facilities in or near to the town centre.

Changes to the Council's Precept Levy would generate £258k equating to £60.25 for an average Band D property (less than the £71 average in the county). With 55% of properties being a Band A/B their increase would be no greater than £7.81 for the year; at £46.86 less than £1 a week.

Councillor Phillips presented a counter budget on behalf of the Conservative Group. Whilst content with the 10% increase in the precept to be allocated for climate emergency, they felt the fund should be spent in the next 12 months and not 3 years. They would not support any additional increases in the revenue budget.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) That Council sets a revenue budget of £3,726,281 to be funded against an income budget of £3,726,467.**
 - (a) That the forecast out-turn for the 2019/20 financial year be noted.**
 - (b) That the taxbase for Shrewsbury required to calculate the precept be noted.**
 - (c) That the proposed fees & charges for the 2020/21 financial year be adopted and incorporated into the budget.**

(d) That the sum of £101,000 be incorporated into the revenue budget and that allocation to projects be deferred to the next F & GP meeting.

(e) That the impact of the changes to the National Joint Council Pay Structure and the recent Job Evaluation process be noted and incorporated into the budget.

(ii) That the Council sets a precept levy of £1,517,035.

59/19 SHROPSHIRE PENSION FUND

The RFO appraised members on the results of the 2019 Shropshire County Pension fund Actuarial Valuation and the position for the Town Council and the employer's contribution rate applied in the accounts for 2020/21 onwards.

Every three years, the actuary undertakes a revaluation, revising assumptions and discount rates to ensure the scheme is fully funded taking into account any scheme changes, legislation and potentially revising the employer's rate and including deficit recovery amounts.

The fund overall position is 94% fully funded, with the Town Council element being 134% funded.

Due to the surplus in the scheme, at the last valuation the actuary agreed that the contribution rate could be kept at the current rate of 14.8%.

As the historic funding levels of the overall scheme show, these are subject to market valuations at 31 March and while the Council are currently in surplus, this could decrease at the next valuation

With the Council having an aging workforce, members agreed it was financially sensible to leave rates as currently, to retain surplus to cover any eventualities.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Shrewsbury Town Council employer rate remain at 14.8%.

60/19 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That Press & Public be excluded on the grounds that the consideration of the following items may involve the likely disclosure of confidential information (s1(2) Public Bodies (Admission of Meetings) Act 1960).

61/19 LEASED PROPERTY

Members considered a report by the Town Council regarding a commercial interest in the Hills Lane toilets and surrounding area.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) That the Town Council agrees to the principle of development;**
- (ii) That Officers continue discussions with all parties with regards to the most appropriate route forward**