

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Finance & General Purpose Committee Held at Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury At 6.00pm on Monday 10 February 2020

PRESENT

Councillors A Mosley (Chairman), P Adams, Mrs G Burgess, Mrs H Fraser, Ms J Mackenzie, K Pardy (substituting for Mrs P Moseley) & 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) & 13 members of public

APOLOGIES

Councillors Mrs P Moseley & A Phillips

62/19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Twin-Hatters	All twin-hatted Councillors declared a personal interest in all matters relating to Shropshire Council.
Councillor Ms J Mackenzie	Declared a personal interest in item 65.19 (g) – Share Shrewsbury as she is a Trustee of the Charity.
Councillor P Adams	Declared a personal interest in item 65.19 (f) – Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust as he is involved in many rail users groups.

63/19 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 13 January 2020 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 13 January 2020 be approved and signed as a correct record.

64/19 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

65/19 GRANTS

65.1 Update on Community Grant Funds

The Responsible Finance Officer reported that the applications to be considered totalled £9,762, a little over the figure of £8,594 remaining in the community grant fund for 2019/20.

The current spend of Councillor Grant Funds to date is £4,801 out of a total budget of £12,750. The RFO would e-mail councillors to remind them of the deadlines for remaining funds to be spent.

65.2 Applications for Community Grants

(a) Meole Brace Peace Memorial Hall – requested £1000 towards their ‘Prepare to Refresh’ project, the first step in revitalising the Community Hall while continuing to embrace its status as a war memorial. The Hall was built in 1921 and is well used and in need of significant improvements. Consultation has taken place with current users’ with investment into a structural survey and professional detailed ‘baseline’ survey plans. Prepare to Refresh (Phase 1 of a major scheme) is a learning & consultation exercise taking a maximum of six months with commissioning of outline architectural designs with simple models & indicative costs for both refurbishment and rebuild options. There will then be consultation with the local community in order to select the most appropriate ‘needs assessment’ option.

RESOLVED:

That £750 and a further £250 (on top of their outstanding Councillor Grant application) from the Ward Member’s Councillor Grant Fund be awarded to Meole Brace Peace Memorial Hall.

(b) The Hive – requested £750 for the redecoration of their Sound-Studio to make it more welcoming for children and young people from the local community who use it regularly. It is also used by bands who hire it for rehearsals. It is planned to give the space a lift with new carpets and fresh paint on the walls. Additional funding through the National Lottery has been secured to pay for acoustic panels to help with the sound absorption in the space.

RESOLVED:

That £500 be awarded to The Hive.

(c) Hope House Hospice – requested £500 for new Healthweigh weighing scales, equipped with easy-to-access wide ramps for young people accessing hospice care, who have physical disabilities and use wheelchairs.

RESOLVED:

That £500 be awarded to Hope House Hospice

- (d) **Shropshire Supports Refugees** – requested £2000 to undertake a week long programme of activities for Refugee Week to raise awareness of the migration crisis, increase understanding, compassion and celebrate diversity. Refugee week takes place every year across the world in the week around World Refugee Day on 20 June. In the UK, Refugee Week is a nationwide programme of arts, cultural and educational events that celebrate the contribution of refugees to the UK and encourages a better understanding between communities.

RESOLVED:

That £1500 be awarded to Shropshire Supports Refugees.

- (e) **Shrewsbury Choral Society** – requested £3312 towards a Concert which will take place on 2 May in St Chad’s Church. The concert will include an orchestral work, a choral work and a piano concerto all composed by Beethoven. The choir will be accompanied by a professional orchestra drawn from players local to Shrewsbury and the Piano Concerto will be played by a young pianist from The Northern College of Music. The concert will give focus for singers to improve and enjoy the experience of singing both for health & well-being and audience members will have access to high quality performance of classical music.

RESOLVED:

That £1000 be awarded to Shrewsbury Choral Society.

- (f) **Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust** – requested £1000 for the design and installation of exterior signage and interpretation panels at Abbey Foregate Station building. The building has been restored but a need for signage had been identified by queries from residents and visitors who were keen to know more about the building and its heritage and purpose.

As Abbey Foregate is a major gateway into Shrewsbury, members were keen to ensure the design and content of the interpretation boards be in keeping with the area.

RESOLVED:

That based on consultation with the Town Council regarding the design of the Interpretation Boards that £500 Community Grant and a further £500 from the Ward Member’s Councillor Grant Fund be awarded to Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust for Interpretation Boards.

Councillor Ms Mackenzie left the room for consideration of this item

- (g) **Share Shrewsbury** – requested £1200 for a project to distribute awareness leaflets and posters to customers, stating the dangers of addiction and signposting them to local support. The project had been discussed with the national PR Director of Co-Op Supermarkets and they had agreed to support and promote this initiative. It had been agreed to deliver a pilot scheme in one store in Shrewsbury and then roll it out more widely.

RESOLVED:

That £500 towards a pilot scheme be awarded to Share Shrewsbury.

Councillor Ms Mackenzie re-joined the meeting and 12 members of the public left the meeting

66/19 PAYMENTS

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 1 December 2019 – 31 January 2020. No comments were received.

RECOMMENDED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 1 December 2019 – 31 January 2020 be approved.

67/19 QUARTER 3 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) presented the Statement of Accounts for Quarter 3 of the 2019/20 financial year and the Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2019.

The RFO reported that overall there are no concerns with the finances of the Council and income and collection is in line with expectations.

The RFO explained that the negative variance of £311,703 is down to the capital programme and expenditure in the quarter, which is all to be financed via earmarked reserves or Section 106. This has impacted on bank balances.

The input VAT claimed on projects led to a repayment due from HMRC and a soft enquiry as the Council normally pays over VAT as opposed to claiming it back.

RECOMMENDED:

- i) That the Quarter 3 Management Accounts be accepted and approved.**
- ii) That the recommendations in the Statement of Accounts report be noted.**

68/19 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

68.1 Update on 2019/20 Capital Programme

The Town Clerk gave an update of ongoing projects within the 2019/20 Capital Programme:

BMX – Work at Shorncliffe was now complete and the upgraded facility had been really well received by the youngsters. Greenfields and Springfield due to be top

dressed and this would be done in-house. Work on Little Harlescott Lane was due to commence on 16 Feb. Mary Webb date to be confirmed.

Street Lights – Due for completion by end of Feb. There had only been 4 complaints, all due to brightness and the need for shields to counter light nuisance into properties.

Toilets – The Town Clerk & Deputy Town Clerk were due to attend a meeting with Shropshire Council Quarry Steering Group later in the week to further discuss toilet provision within the Quarry.

Footpaths/Cycleways – Live tender with a deadline of 13 March.

Countryside Sites – Awaiting printing of interpretation boards.

Springfield Recreation Ground – This forms part of the footpath tender. Deadline 13 March.

Monkmoor River Banks – Successful ERDF funding. Awaiting plan for mobilisation of funds from Shropshire Wildlife Trust (lead organisation). Potential delivery by Summer 2020.

Monkmoor Community Woods – Live tender, to be awarded by Recreation & Leisure Committee on 1 April.

County Ground – The Town Clerk had met with Beacon Cricket Club & ECB and were awaiting details of ECB funding streams scheduled for end of February. In the meantime working on a draft Lease and preparing plans to be contract ready.

Castlewalk Recreation Ground – In discussion with Shropshire Council regarding licence to deposit soil and now awaiting climatic conditions.

Quarry Solar Lights – Tender awarded, 12 week lead time for build.

Castlefields Community Centre Kitchen – Awaiting plans and costings from Castlefields Community Centre Management Committee.

Meet Place – Ringfenced £20k, awaiting action from Housing Plus/MECA.

Dana Footpath – Cllrs Mosley & Green met with Officers to discuss alternative route subject to SHS approval.

Abbey Gardens – The Operations Manager and Ward Member, Cllr Mrs Fraser had met on site to agree a plan of works and were now working on a questionnaire to establish the views of local residents.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

68.2 2020/21 Capital Programme

The Town Clerk presented a tabled report on the evolving capital programme for 2020/21, together with costs. Councillors had been e-mailed asking them to identify issues within their wards that they wished to be considered and the Group Leaders had subsequently met with Officers to draw up a plan.

Sums had been set aside for a number of cross town projects which included:

Bus Shelters - a programme of refurbishment of existing bus shelters and a review of the cleaning programme.

Vehicle Activated Signs - a review of community road safety schemes, investigating new locations for Vehicle Activated signs and determining locations for static/moving signs.

Solar Lighting - exploring options for solar lighting in other areas.

Ash Die Back Disease - risk assessing the tree provision and developing an action plan for the removal and restoration.

Monkmoor Recreation Ground – The Town Clerk reported on the need to procure a specialist mechanical brush for the site. A specific make had been recommended by the Contractor to ensure continuation of guarantees. The cost of the Mechanical Brush was beyond the £10k procurement limit, but given the specialist nature, the piece of equipment had been purchased.

Climate Emergency Fund - developing an action plan

A number of Ward Projects had been included in the plan. Members discussed the plan in more detail and agreed several changes/additions to the Capital Programme.

Councillor Mosley suggested that in the light of the changing climatic conditions it may be necessary to invest more revenue to cover the cost of employing more operatives to manage the open spaces and that a sum of £50k should be allocated towards improvements. Officers were asked to review improving green space and countryside sites and report back.

Councillor Mosley reported that together with Councillor Vasmer he had met with the Operations Manager and the Countryside & Green Space Team Leader to consider creating a wildlife trail in Castlefields and he would be keen to see this included in the Capital Programme.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) **That the update for the 2020/21 programme be noted.**
- (ii) **That the purchase of the Mechanical Brush outside routine procurement limits be authorised.**
- (iii) **That future Solar Lights be funded from the Climate Emergency budget.**

- (iv) The sum allocated to Abbey Pulpit be increased to £5k to cover landscaping.
- (v) That a sum of £5k be set aside for surfacing around Quantum Leap improvements to Mardol Quay.
- (vi) That a sum of £50k be allocated to improving green spaces and countryside sites and Officers review green and countryside sites and report back.
- (vii) The Capital Programme for 2020/21 be adopted.

69/19 CLIMATE EMERGENCY

69.1 Update on Climate Emergency Workshop

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that a Climate Emergency Workshop that had been held at the Guildhall on 6 February. This had been well attended by 16-18 delegates and some councillors. The attendees were a diverse range from different organisations who brought a collective wealth of knowledge and ideas. Following a presentation and questions and answers session the group had split for a brainstorming session. It was hoped to build on this in the future.

The Town Clerk reported that a number of staff had been taken part in the first of 5 Webinars on Climate Emergency run by the Centre for Sustainable Energy. The Webinars would be taking place between now and early May. The webinar had given lots of ideas and advice and they must now decide how to take this forward.

The Recreation & Leisure Committee had expressed an interest in seeing the presentation and the Town Clerk planned to convene a time for members to have the opportunity.

69.2 Terms of Reference and Membership of the Climate Emergency Advisory Group

Members were asked for their input into agreeing Terms of Reference and membership for a Climate Emergency Advisory Group who would meet quarterly to discuss and take actions forward. The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk reported on the interest in developing a Climate Emergency Think Tank for Shrewsbury and questioned whether a structured Advisory Group as suggested would prove the most beneficial.

RESOLVED:

That Officers work on Terms of Reference for the development of an Advisory Group to inform the Town Council on Climate Emergency matters.

70/19 INTERNAL AUDIT

70.1 Tendering Process

The Town Clerk presented the report reported that Auditing Solutions Ltd had been asked to carry out a review of the Council's tendering process. With a number of different Officers involved in the process of evaluating tenders, it was important to ensure that appropriate steps had been considered or taken so that the awarding of contracts was both fair and transparent and that the processes minimised the risk of the Council showing preferential selection.

The Town Clerk reported that the results showed the Council were transparent and there were no concern. The Deputy Town Clerk had process mapped a proforma to be used in all tendering processes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

70.2 Effectiveness of the Internal Auditor

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 require there to be an annual review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit. Therefore, the Responsible Financial Officer presented his report which looked at the key standard areas in terms of the expected standards and characteristics of effectiveness.

The RFO reported that there were no areas of concern with the current internal auditors who are well qualified and have capacity to carry out the work.

RESOLVED:

(i) That the report into the Effectiveness of the Internal Auditor be accepted.

(ii) That Auditing Solutions be retained for the 2020/21 financial year.

71/19 RISK MANAGEMENT

The Town Clerk reported that as not only part of the Accounts & Audit Regulations, but also Health & Safety At Work Legislation, the Town Council is required to maintain an effective programme of risk management and ensure that all policies and procedures in place are subject to regular review.

Over the last couple of years the Town Council has developed a comprehensive Risk Management Strategy outlining the processes taken to manage the various aspects of risk.

The generic Risk Assessment of the Town Council has been reviewed using the LCRS package as have all specific Risk Assessments relating to individual tasks/projects.

As part of the Audit process, members are required to consider all measures to ensure the prevention of fraud/corruption.

To support Officers in the discharge of its Health & Safety obligations, the Town Council contracts the services of Ellis Whittam, specialists in supporting Parish & Town Councils on Health & Safety Regime. The appointed adviser has been extremely helpful in assisting the Council in reviewing its policies, procedures and documentation. In a similar way to our Internal Audit function, the Health & Safety Adviser reviews specific services/areas of work on an annual basis.

The Risk Management Strategy and Counter Fraud and Corruption Strategy were circulated prior to the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- i) That the existing Risk Management Strategy be re-affirmed**
- ii) That the existing Counter-Fraud & Corruption Strategy be re-affirmed**
- iii) That members note the updating of all Risk Assessments**
- iv) That the Risk Assessment Action plan be approved and signed by the Chairman**

72/19 INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Investment Strategy was circulated prior to the meeting and is the guidelines followed by the Town Council when investing surplus funds held on behalf of the community. The Council currently has £7.15m of investments (including buildings investments and general bank balances) which were itemised in the report. The non-specified and non-financial investments are those that increase in value and whilst the RFO gets a better return than Shropshire Council.

In the future if large developer contributions are received, external advice may need to be sought to consider other investment options.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Investment Strategy for 2020/21 and 2020/21 be approved