

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
Held in Council Chamber, Shirehall
At 6.00pm on Monday 17th April 2023**

PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Gary Farmer (Head of Operations), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Stuart Farmer (Project Manager), Mike Cox (Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

109/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

That apologies be accepted from Councillor Wilson.

110/22 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 120/22 ii Markets Update

111/22 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings held on 6th February and 11th April 2023 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings held on 6th February and 11th April 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

112/22 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Town Clerk provided the following update on the minutes of the previous meeting as follows:

84/22 Mansel Williams Way – Signage had been installed and Councillors Mosley, Moseley, Gillam and Halliday attended the unveiling. Members of the public also attended.

103/22 Land Transfer from Shropshire Council – After discussions with the Head of Estates, it had been agreed that there will be two separate leases: one for all of the Countryside Land and another for Monkmoor Recreation Ground given the Council’s continued wish for this to be freehold transferred.

113/22 UPDATE ON COMMITTEE & WORKING GROUP ACTIVITY

The minutes of the last meetings of the Youth Services Working Group and the Civics Working Group were circulated prior to this meeting.

113/1 Youth Services Working Group

The Youth Services Working Group met on 23rd March 2022. Councillor Moseley reported that the meeting had not been quorate so no decisions were taken.

RESOLVED:

That the notes of the Youth Services Working Group meeting held on 23rd March 2022 be noted.

113/2 Civics Working Group

The Civics Working Group met on 2nd February 2023. There were no comments.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Civics Working Group meeting held on 2nd February 2023 be noted.

114/22 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 28th January to 31st March 2023. These had been agreed by two signatories before the RFO and Town Clerk. No comments or concerns were raised.

RECOMMENDED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 28th January to 31st March 2023 be approved.

115/22 PREPARATION FOR END OF YEAR ACCOUNTS

Prior to this meeting a report on End of Year Accounting was circulated by the RFO to appraise members on the process for the year end accounts and relevant submission dates.

The Council must approve the Accounts, Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and relevant schedules by 26th June 2023 which must then be submitted to the external auditors, PKF Littlejohn, at the beginning of July 2023. The Internal auditor would

complete the inspection of the 2022/23 accounts prior to submission of the Accounts to the external auditor. Sign-off of the Annual Return by the external auditors must be published by 30th September 2023.

RESOLVED:

That the Report and timetabled dates be noted.

116/22 INTERNAL AUDITOR

Prior to the meeting, the Internal Audit Report 2022/23: Interim Update was circulated to members. No issues were identified.

RESOLVED:

That the Internal Audit Report 2022/23: Interim Update be accepted.

117/22 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

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

- **Town Centre Headquarters** - the project to develop the Town Centre Headquarters was now complete.
- **War Memorial in the Quarry** – the Conservation Officer at Shropshire Council had been consulted and three quotes for the schedule of works were received. These ranged from £5800 to £8800 but assurance of confidence in this proposed work was of paramount importance given that the structure was grade listed. It was decided that the contractor with the highest quote be appointed as they had previously carried out work on this and other memorials.
- **Castlewalk Nature Trail** – the Town Clerk was meeting with Councillors Mosley and Vasmer to finalise the Nature Trail and tree works.
- **Kynaston Road Recreation Ground** – tenders for this project were either out for tender or being evaluated.
- **Upton Lane Play Area** – the location and specification was being finalised with Councillor Moseley.
- **Moston Road Wheeled Track** – the tender contact had been awarded and a start date was awaited.
- **Monkmoor Recreation Ground Floodlights** – the tender contract had been awarded and a start date was awaited.
- **Statues and Memorials** – discussions had begun on undertaking a regular structural inspection programme of the Town Council's statues and memorials. Many were listed.
- **Shorncliffe Recreation Ground** – the Town Clerk and Councillor Wilson were meeting with the contractor Redkite.
- **Beaver Project** - fencing tenders had been received. Councillor Roberts and Phillips were to be informed of the date for the board meeting on this project.
- **Castlewalk Recreation Ground** – discussions were taking place with Hannah Fraser regarding levelling the ground.

Councillor Dean requested an update on Bus Shelters. The Town Clerk reported that the budget for installing Bus Shelters had now been spent and that no monies had been allocated as yet for further installations. Councillor Vasmer asked if there could be a review of the “indestructible” glass windows in the bus shelters following one that had been smashed recently. Councillor Mosley enquired whether they were made to British safety standards. The Project Manager replied that the glass was made to these standards and the supplier had demonstrated how difficult it was to break this glass. In the event that the glass is broken, it would all shatter safely to the ground and not break in dangerous shards. The Town Clerk added that glass panels were easier to maintain than Perspex. Councillor Moseley expressed her disappointment regarding this act of vandalism and asked about the cost of the replacement glass. The Project Manager said that it was about £400 per pane (similar to perspex replacements).

Councillors Vasmer and Dartnall requested that the Project Manager contact the manufacturer to inform it about the breakage and to see if anything can be done to strengthen the glass in the future. This had already been done as it had carried out one of the replacements (although a local contractor will be used next time). Councillor Moseley asked if the Town Council kept spare panels to which the Project Manager replied in the negative adding that these materials are easily available from the contractors.

Councillor Mosley said that the new bus shelters looked good and noted that the loggerhead motif had been added to the glass panels. He asked if the Town Council logo could also be retrofitted to the panels and added to bus shelters? The Project Manager confirmed that retrofitting was possible and that he would look into this proposal.

RESOLVED:

That the update of the Capital Programme be noted.

118/22SHROPSHIRE CYCLE HUB

Councillor Mosley reminded members that the Town Council agreed to fund two electric bikes as a contribution to an E-Cargo Cycle Scheme for Shrewsbury in December 2022. This was agreed with the condition that Shropshire Cycle Hub source the additional funds required for the scheme. The Town Clerk and the RFO had since had discussions with the originator of the proposal, Mark Fermor, to obtain more detail and had not been convinced of the security of the Business Plan.

An additional request had since been received via the Chairman of the Climate Change Committee to provide additional revenue funding on top of that given for the bikes. The request was for the Council to allocate £13,000 for the purchase of the 2 E-Cargo bikes (£10,000) and for staff costs (£3,000). Councillor Vasmer stressed the value of funding this revolutionary project in order to promote and demonstrate new ways of working to reduce the carbon footprint of companies and residents of the town. It was hoped that this experimental scheme would dramatically reduce the use of vehicles. Councillor Dartnall voiced her support. Councillor Dean added that a report had been issued from the Mayor of London showing that that this type of transport was much faster than vans, 7 times cheaper to run and 67 times better for the environment.

The Town Clerk reminded members that the funding initially allocated by this Committee had a condition that the applicant needed to show that the remainder of the funds had been sourced. Councillor Vasmer was asking for this condition to be withdrawn to get the scheme up and running by the summer.

A discussion took place regarding the ownership of the E-bikes as it had previously been agreed that the Town Council would own the bikes to lease to the Scheme. Whilst Councillor Vasmer did not believe ownership was important, the Deputy Town Clerk said that in recent discussions with Mark Fermor it was clear that ownership would remain with the Town Council. Ownership of the bikes was to include responsibility for insurance, repairs etc and this would be negotiated with E-Cargo Shrewsbury.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the existing condition of sourcing the remaining funds be withdrawn;**
- (ii) That £10,000 be awarded for the purchase of 2 E-Cargo bikes where Shrewsbury Town Council retains ownership;**
- (iii) That £3,000 be awarded for revenue costs for this project.**

119/22 TENDER WORK

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

The Project Manager confirmed that the scheduled bus shelter installations were complete and that the sedum roofs would be installed by the Town Council over the next few months. Councillor Mosley requested that a report on the next programme of installations.

The Project Manager confirmed that the building work at the new offices at Livesey House had been completed at the end of March and that staff had moved in.

Regarding the Beaver Project, the Project Manager reported that tenders had been received and that he had met with the Wildlife Trust together with the Town Clerk and Jim Goldsmith, Countryside Manager to discuss funding as there was currently a £7k shortfall. In consequence, the Town Council was requesting a further £20K be allocated to cover this shortfall and for any other contingencies that might arise. An example of such a contingency was flood alleviation. The tender had been awarded last year and since then contractor's costs had risen by 30% or more.

Members were reminded that the allocated budget for the Town Council had been £20K so this request would bring the total budget allocated to £40K. Councillor Dartnall asked if contributors such as Veolia could be approached again for more funding. The Town Clerk said that contributions had already increased a couple of times already and that there was an urgency to award the contract as soon as possible in order to release the beavers in September, but not withstanding representations were being made to funders.

Councillor Phillips agreed that further funding be awarded but that contributors should be approached again anyway especially considering the recent negative publicity surrounding Severn Trent and the sewage overflows into the Severn. Councillor Dartnall suggested that **up to** £20K of further funding be awarded.

RESOLVED

- (i) That a programme for another phase of replacement Shelters be drawn up;**
- (ii) That up to £20K further funding be awarded to progress the Beaver Project.**

Councillor Green left the meeting.

120/22 MARKETS UPDATE

The Markets Update was circulated prior to the meeting. The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager added that since the report some repairs have been carried out by Shropshire Council to improve the security of the site.

Councillor Mosley asked for further information on a car boot event that was being held at Shrewsbury Town Football Ground. The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager made assurances that there was sufficient demand for car boot sales, particularly at the moment due to the current cost of living crisis. Footfall was to be monitored but the Town Council's market should not suffer any detrimental effect as customers often travelled between markets on any given day.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

Councillor Green re-joined the meeting.

121/22 GREENFIELDS RECREATION GROUND

Councillor Mosley updated members that a solicitor was being appointed to advise and represent the Town Council on this matter which was to be followed by a meeting with the developer. Unfortunately, the solicitor was unable to attend this meeting due to a bereavement. The Deputy Town Clerk said that members were to be informed on progress.

A meeting with the Greenfields Community Group was also being held on 25 April with members and it was decided that the RFO would take notes of the proceedings.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the verbal update be noted;**
- (ii) That the RFO attends the meeting to make notes of the proceedings between councillors and the Greenfields Community Group on 25 April 2023.**

122/22 HENCOTE JUDICIAL REVIEW

Members considered the Town Clerk report on the Hencote Judicial Review; this was circulated to members prior to the meeting.

The Town Clerk summarised that she had contacted the Planning Adviser to the Society of Local Council Clerks and Kings Chambers. Both quickly turned around a review of papers and their respective opinions mirrored those already received; that there were no grounds to seek a Judicial Review.

A meeting of the Group Leaders was duly convened and there was unanimous agreement that the Council, having now received 5 sets of opinions, do not proceed and that any plans to seek Judicial Review should be stopped.

Councillor Dean added that it looked like the recovery process had to have been done at the appeal stage but that it was agreed to pursue Shropshire Council on how it deals with planning appeals. Members would carry out some research and report back to members.

Councillor Green confirmed that he had already drafted the complaint letter to Shropshire Council and that it had been forwarded to Councillor Dean and Phillips for their input. A criticism of Shropshire Council's procedure was quite serious so the letter must be carefully written to ensure that it was both pertinent and lawful.

Councillor Green added that an item was to be placed on the next Planning Committee Agenda to formally review the Committee's process in dealing with Planning Appeals.

Councillor Mosley suggested that all councillors should be asked to comment on the draft letter and proposed a meeting to collectively determine whether it should go forward after perhaps seeking expert and/or legal advice.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted;**
- (ii) That councillors meet to discuss the draft complaint letter to Shropshire Council and seek advice before issuing;**
- (iii) That an item be placed on the next Planning Committee Agenda to formally review the process in dealing with Planning Appeals.**

123/22ST JOHN'S HILL ACCOMMODATION UPDATE

The Town Clerk circulated a report on the progress at the new offices at St John's Hill to all members prior to the meeting. Councillor Mosley added that councillors had visited the premises.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the report be noted;**
- (ii) That officers be congratulated for the refurbishment work to the new offices at St John's Hill.**

124/22VISIONING WORK

A report on Visioning was circulated to members prior to the meeting and questions were invited.

Councillor Dartnall asked if more notice could be given for the next set of visioning sessions to improve attendance. Councillor Mosley added that it was important for councillors to take an active part and that there would be an action plan at the next meeting.

Councillor Dean said that he valued these sessions and expressed thanks for the organisation that had gone into them. He requested a report on this at the next Annual Council meeting to inform the public on activities. Consultation was to take place after Visioning was complete.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

125/22EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Councillor Mosley concluded the meeting by thanking Councillors, Town Council staff and any members of the public who had been listening to the proceedings. It was not necessary to Exclude the public for the following item as the solicitor was unable to attend.

RESOLVED

That Exclusion of the public was not required.

126/22GREENFIELDS RECREATION GROUND

No matters in relation to legal proceedings were discussed as explained in minute 121/22.