

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee Held in Committee Room, Livesey House At 6.00pm on Monday 8th December 2025

PRESENT

Councillors: R Wilson (Chair), R Dartnall, J Dean, A Fejfer, A Mosley and B Jephcott

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Clare Turner (Deputy Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk) and Max Ball (Communications Officer)

45/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

That apologies be accepted from Councillor David Vasmer.

46/25 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 Wagner	Item 52/25iii declared an interest in the Service Delivery Working Group

47/25 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 15th September 2025 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Policy & Resources Committee meeting held on 15th September 2025 be approved and signed as a correct record.

48/25 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Re Min 34/25 – Land Transfers – Interactions had taken place and were ongoing with Shropshire Council's Estates and Legal Teams.

Re Min 39/25 – Quarry Management Plan Tender – The tender for consultants was live with a closing date of 12th January 2026. Four organisations had expressed an interest so far.

49/25 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 6th September to 30th November 2025. These had been agreed by two signatories before the RFO and Town Clerk uploaded for payment. No comments or concerns were raised.

RESOLVED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 6th September to 30th November 2025 be approved.

50/25 QUARTER 2 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated a report to appraise members of the financial position of the Council for the second quarter of the 2025/26 financial year, and the half year to date position which, overall, was positive.

The accounts had been prepared using the same procedures and techniques as previous years. No provision was made for depreciation and Earmarked Reserves which were included in the final published accounts, which were non-cash items.

Income and Expenditure account for Q2 ended 30th September 2025 compared to budget (column A)

The RFO highlighted that there was an overall positive variance of £163,219 for the quarter compared with the budget but with caveats.

There was a positive variance for Q1 on expenditure of £12,494 which was driven by vacant posts, otherwise there would have been a deficit. Over the various expenditure headings there were small positives and negatives due to timing of expenditure and, taking all into account, were to come in around budget.

There was a positive variance on the income received of £150,775. This was due to Neighbourhood Fund receipts of £165,836, otherwise the figure would have been adverse (£15,061) due to a reduction in the SLA with Shropshire Council than budgeted and represented the value of the purchase order it was to issue, and was subject to change once agreement was finalised.

Other gains from events/fairs £30,527 had made the position better; some were temporary due to the timing such as other works £5,167 and interest received £7,327. Commercial gains were from estimates and these were included in accounts at year end.

The balance Sheet continued to be strong. Looking beyond Q2, Shropshire Council had paid Q3 SLA, although at the provisional rate until figures were agreed.

Year to Date (YTD) variances for income and expenditure compared to budget (Column C)

Overall, there was a positive variance of £207,483 which was due to the Q1 positive position, but boosted due to the large improvement for this quarter of £163,269, but misleading - see explanations below.

The positive expenditure variance increased for the explanations given in the quarter to £97,575. The positive wages variance of £113,473 was due to delay in town team recruiting and vacant posts. If discounted, the position would be adverse (£15,898). It was expected that the variances, with exception of salaries, were to unwind in the second half of the year as the work patterns shift and overspends not followed through to year end. The income variance was now positive, reversing Q1 deficit and driven by the unbudgeted Neighbourhood Fund of £165,836. If discounted, the position would be (£55,928) as per the quarter explanation. It was noted that the Neighbourhood Fund increase was not revenue for covering overspends but was for future projects or to match expenditure commitments.

RESOLVED:

That the Report be noted.

51/25 COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

(i) Shrewsbury Future Service Survey

Max Ball, Communications Officer, had been invited to the meeting to give an interim update to members on the result of the responses received so far to the Future Service Survey.

39,000 newsletters had been distributed by Royal Mail over 2 weeks from 17th November which included a link to the survey on the Town Council's website. 745 responses had been received so far. 776 responses were required to determine that a sufficient sample size of the population were tested. The cost of printing and delivery was £5,200 and paid socials was £94.87.

The Communications Officer summarised the responses received for each of the 24 questions. The vast majority of respondents lived in Shrewsbury and had done so for more than 10 years. Most were over 45 years old.

53% felt they were fairly or very well informed about the work of the Town Council and most accessed information via the website, the press or Facebook.

Over 40% of people were satisfied with the services provided but only 44% were confident that the Town Council represented their views and interests.

When asked if it was important that the Town Council was independent from Shropshire Council, 57% said that it was extremely, very or somewhat important.

The services most valued by residents were Parks & Open Spaces, Town Centre Maintenance, Public Safety, Local Footway Lighting, Sports Facilities and Floral Displays.

45% of respondents said they were very or fairly satisfied with the progress of work of the Stepping Up Team.

When asked how important it was to enhance specific services, the ones that were most strongly advocated were Floral Features & Public Planting, Graffiti & Fly tipping Removal, Paths & Verge Maintenance, and Street Cleaning & Litter Picking.

When asked which services respondents would like to see the Town Council undertake should Shropshire Council have to reduce or providing due to its financial pressures, the following list was in order of the amount of votes given (from most to least):

- Street sweeping & litter picking
- Litterbin collection
- Old Market Hall
- Libraries
- Leisure facilities
- The Square
- Museum
- Castle

The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “It’s important that key local services are protected even if it costs more.”

Question 17 asked if they thought more decisions about local services should be made in Shrewsbury rather than at county level. The majority replied yes. 55% supported the Town Council increasing its share of Council Tax if it took on more services from Shropshire Council and 23% took a neutral position.

The top 3 areas chosen by respondents to be prioritised if more funding was available were: clean and tidy streets, cultural establishments, and safety.

The Communications Officer had also summarised other comments or suggestions about local services or the future of Shrewsbury under a number of headings.

Councillor Dartnall asked how many responses there had been for the Stepping Up Team consultation. There had been 1080 in total.

Councillor Dean commented that it was interesting that there had been no mention from respondents on the congestion in the town nor immigration, which was surprising given that these issues arising frequently in the rest of the UK.

Councillor Dartnall said that there appeared to be a good understanding from Shrewsbury residents of the differences between Shropshire Council and the Town Council.

Councillor Wagner was pleased to see that the results so far showed a broadly positive view of what the Town Council does. The positive view of the Stepping Up Team was also noted.

Councillor Wilson asked the Communications Officer to issue an interim press piece to thank those who had already taken part in the Survey and to encourage others to do so by the deadline.

Councillor Mosley thought that some of the questions were difficult to answer in the negative but the Town Clerk and Councillor Wagner said that the questions were not leading ones. Councillor Mosley added that the results of the Survey should not be depended upon in order to decide on a high precept level.

Councillor Bentick commented that when the precept was agreed it might be seen as high on current levels but that Shrewsbury precept levels were historically low. Councillor

Mosley added that Bridgewater Town Council raised its precept from £91 to £411 much to the alarm of its residents.

(ii) Communications Strategy

The Communications Officer said that work on the Strategy was ongoing and that a draft would be tabled at this meeting in February.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the interim of the Future Service Strategy be noted.**
- (ii) That the draft Communications Strategy be tabled at February's Policy & Resources Committee meeting.**

52/25 BUDGET PROPOSALS

A report on Budget Proposals was circulated to members prior to the meeting. The RFO explained that every January the Council must set its budget for the following financial period (2026/27) along with the precept. The forecast for the current year (2025/26) was also prepared.

This process commenced following the September meeting of this committee to start compiling information from various sources and gathering thoughts and ideas on services ahead of future meetings, and other impacts to the budget and forecast.

(i) General Principles, implications and assumptions

In order to predict the outturn forecast, the current run rate was used along with experience and current market conditions to arrive at a forecast. The forecast lead to the production of the budget and assumptions applied increasing or decreasing revenue items. Factors to consider were:

a) Forecast Outturn of the 2025/26 budget

Apply current run rate and factor in seasonal variances and trends
Pay award agreed and applied flat rate 3.2%
Lower interest rates will lead to lower returns for balances held
Confirmation needed on value of SLA, Q3 paid on same basis as previous two

b) Impact of Spending Review and local budgetary pressures

From the recent spending review, the main implication was in relation to Non Domestic Rates (business rates) the multiplier was reduced to 43.2p from 49.9p. But, a revaluation had taken place with Rateable value increasing so anticipated increase in costs were to be £7,611.

Last year National Insurance employer contributions increased. Town and parish councils still did not benefit from rebate/exemptions afforded to Shropshire Council.

There appeared to be no substantial additional funding, therefore a real term reduction for the sector was to impact Shropshire Council and trickle down to Shrewsbury Town Council. More unitary councils were making comments that they were perilously close to issuing a Section 114 notice.

c) Inflationary pressures and impacts on the revenue budget

Inflation per ONS statistics after increasing last year were now decreasing and currently stood at 3.6% but considerably higher than the Bank of England target 2%. It was to remain sticky and expected to end 2026 at 2.7% before settling back around the target in 2027 Q3.

The Council's basket of goods was different, and comparison of prices over the past year was follows when compared to last year:

- Diesel/oil +5 %
- Petrol -3%
- Waste +12%
- Seeds/ferts 3.13% (average)
- Maintenance 1.78% (average)

Apply 3% for seeds/ferts, 2% increase in maintenance and repair costs and 0% change for fuel and 2% across the other costs unless an external provider had more accurate figures such as WME for gas 3.9% and electricity 12.4%.

The pay award was agreed nationally by the unions, and there was no indication given as only the current year was agreed but general estimate of 3% should be included.

d) Interest rates

The Bank of England base rate was falling although not as quickly as expected and stood at 4%. Rates were expected to be 3.25% by end of 2026 and falling to 3% by March 2027. The Bank of England had indicated that it will be gradual to make sure inflation stays closer to its target.

Bond yields were decreasing, and a lower rate should be expected and factored in and applied to investment returns.

e) Tax base calculations

The tax base for 26/27, if ratified by Shropshire Council cabinet on 11th December 2025, would increase from 27,453.97 to 27,713.12 a 0.95% increase, considerably less than the 3% typical increase. The current band D rate was £87.04 and was increased by 31% last year - a £20.62pa increase.

(ii) Revenue expenditure items from committees, members and officers for consideration

Ideas for changes, improvements and reductions to services were sought from members, committee chairs and officers' – the following suggestions received to date were:

- Members

- (i) Whilst no specific suggestions some members asked to see continuation of projects around footpaths and lighting
- (ii) Bunds to prevent illegal campers at Radbrook, land not owned by STC
- (iii) Street zoning to prevent overnight camping along Sydney Avenue in motorhomes, SC have insufficient budget estimate £5k
- (iv) Reinstall litterbins Castlewalk Rec

- Committee Chairs

- (v) Planning committee £5k pa for annual consultation local plan etc
- (vi) Communities & Environment £41k pa to contribute to Street Rangers (current budget £79k-£120k)
- (vii) Apprentice scheme
- (viii) Castlefields Community Centre
- (ix) Play area enhancements – 2 per year £120k

- Officers including SMT

- (x) Transformational Project Manager £56k – 2 year contract
- (xi) Increase in seasonal watering assistance £10k pa
- (xii) PT personnel officer £20k pa
- (xiii) Admin officer £32.5k pa
- (xiv) Senior officer to expand capacity £56k pa
- (xv) Increase in professional fees for new legislation audits £19k pa
- (xvi) Increase in building maintenance costs to meet new legislation £20k pa estimate also using EMR
- (xvii) Additional email access for staff £5k pa

Funding options

- A sum of £150k was allocated for future projects which met vision objectives annually which can be utilised for one off projects
- Earmarked funds could be utilised if one held
- Revenue budgets if relatively small and non-recurring
- Neighbourhood Fund if criteria met
- Precept, add to core costs

Members' suggestions (i) – (iv):

After the RFO's report, Councillor Mosley, referring to iii above, said that motorhome parking on Sydney Avenue needed to be stopped. A traffic regulation order was required. New litterbins were also required for the Castlefields area. Councillor Jephcott agreed saying that the litterbin network needed enhancing. The Town Clerk said that bunds and relandscaping could be explored to stop incursions, citing Mereside and Upton Lane as other vulnerable sites. Councillor Dartnall pointed out that the landscaping at Mereside was supposed to make it impossible for incursions but unfortunately travellers still managed to occupy the land. The RFO said that a budget for this was not included in the proposals but could use revenue or vision funds.

Councillor Dean asked if there was a specific budget for improving benches and the Town Clerk replied that this needed exploring and asked members to inform her of the location of any that needed refurbishment/replacement. Councillor Mosley asked about the bench at English Bridge Gardens that had been removed about 4 years ago. The Town Clerk said that it was being refurbished and powder-coated. The Town Clerk added that if STC was to carry out bin collecting too then a budget could be set for a wholesale replacement with STC logos.

With reference to items (i) to (iv) above, the Chair asked that benches be included.

Committee chairs' suggestions (v) – (ix):

Councillor Dean commented that the £5K for the annual consultation was very generous but was keen to ensure that the location had a large enough capacity to accommodate public attendance. The Town Clerk said that conversations with those who led the Big Town Plan design codes would be sought as the general code could be replicated to a wider system.

In reference to the Street Rangers, Councillor Mosley asked that members see the terms of the contract in order to ascertain what was being undertaken for the money, especially if STC was to take on the management of the scheme.

With regard to the apprentice scheme, the Town Clerk was looking to appoint a member of staff to co-ordinate apprentices eg for youth placements. Funding for training was possible from the National Youth Association. Tax rebates on payroll were also a possibility.

Councillor Mosley said that estimates should be sought for different areas of improvement at Castlefields Community Centre eg floor, storeroom, solar panel installation. Since Covid the Centre was flourishing with lots of regular groups using the facility during the week with parties at weekends. The Town Clerk added that risk assessments and inspections were being carried for the community centres at Castlefields and Ditherington so more areas for improvement might be identified.

Councillor Wilson expressed his support for the enhancement of play areas and hoped that the projects would include accessible/inclusive equipment. He wondered, however, about the timescale in enhancing 40 play areas when only 2 would be done each year and how those would be prioritised.

The Town Clerk said she would look at how the General Reserves for play areas were being apportioned. The RFO said that £700k was the current reserve.

Councillor Bentick pointed out that the Quarry play area was not a local play area but accessed by the whole town. He also requested more accessible equipment and that it was disappointing that there had been such a long wait for this – local people had persistently complained. The Town Clerk said that inclusive equipment had been installed in many play areas and that they had referred to the national guidance.

Refurbishment/replacement of the Quarry play area would use up nearly all this fund. The Deputy Town Clerk had asked the play lead to assess the inclusivity and age range of all STC play sites.

The Town Clerk added that the Town Council had no responsibility for or control of play areas on sites of new development. Taking those into account, however, gaps were identified in the 15 minute walk rule for people accessing a play area.

Officers', including SMT, suggestions (x) – (xvii):

Recruitment was underway for a Transformational Project Manager to deliver the devolution of services, larger projects and change.

Seasonal watering assistance was required due to extra requirement for watering.

A part-time personnel officer was required to help with the review of documentation.

An admin officer was required to assist with the increased calls as additional services were taken on and changes in requirements in respect of Health & Safety.

The new senior officer was required to assist with the expanding capacity in some areas, deliver ideas and address legislative change.

The increase in professional fees was necessary for issues associated with Council buildings and their health & safety requirements was necessary.

There was an increase in the budget for building maintenance costs had increased in order to carry out audits of all Council buildings, risk assessments and fire risk assessments.

Additional email access for staff was required for training purposes.

Councillor Wilson said that the workload for the Council was increasing and that staff were under a lot of pressure. A tipping point had been reached. The list of new roles might be longer in January. The RFO said that if members accepted this wish list then its delivery would also depend on other factors eg the SLA with Shropshire Council. The Deputy Town Clerk added that the organisation had grown and staff had developed their skillset to accommodate the growth but more staff were needed irrespective of SLA increases. Legislation was also changing alongside record management and the use of technology.

Councillor Dartnall asked about the Senior officer role. The Deputy Town Clerk explained that this was an HR matter that couldn't be discussed at this meeting but that the role was to expand from what it was currently in order to comply with legislation.

Councillor Wilson proposed that the RFO's budget be accepted and prepared along these lines.

Councillor Wagner left the meeting.

(iii) Update from the Service Delivery Working Group

Councillor Wilson reported that communications with Shropshire Council had been ongoing but were not always straightforward. The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk were meeting with Shropshire Council, including legal, the following day and were focussed on obtaining clarity and a timeline at the earliest opportunity. This was needed before the next meeting of this Committee on 12th January 2026 and the following Full Council Committee meeting in order to set the Precept.

In the meantime, Operations Managers were investigating street cleaning services and associated costings should the Town Council decide to undertake this.

The Town Clerk reported that councillor attendance at the fortnightly meetings of the Services Delivery Working Group had been inconsistent; she urged a more collective response. Whether it be delegation or devolution remained to be seen but this needed ascertaining before proceeding. Councillor Wilson added that any agreement would have to be for 3 years. There was a lot of uncertainty so it was agreed to delay this week's meeting in order to allow the Town Clerk to get up to speed with any developments since returning from leave.

Councillor Dartnall was concerned that members were being rushed and that all parties should be ready before an agreement was entered into. Councillor Mosley also advised caution adding that a delay for a year had been raised at the previous meeting to ensure everything was in place. Rigorous business planning was needed to show added value in taking over. He asked again that the associated briefing document was sent to all members. He also revealed that Keir was preparing specifications for its next contract with Shropshire Council. It would be better to maintain principles and ensure absolute readiness.

The Town Clerk responded that from an operational point of view, there was a call to action by the public that the Council acts now, especially in relation to the state of the street scene.

Councillor Jephcott realised that this was an ambitious plan but that by progressing now the Council had a chance to improve service delivery but also maintain the continuity of services. If it was delayed by a year, these services would deteriorate considerably and possibly fall below the statutory minimums.

Councillor Dean said a risk assessment was needed to share with the public. Councillor Bentick said this was an opportunity not to be missed and that there would be additional risk in delaying, including the transfer of assets, which might not happen at all if there was delay. This was a unique opportunity to devolve these important services to STC and keep in perpetuity, thereby providing for all its residents an exemplary level of service.

It was agreed that the Group Leaders meeting set for the following day would be postponed.

Councillor Wagner re-joined the meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That General principles implications be noted and agreed and applied to forecast and budget.**
- (ii) That Revenue items proposed by committee chairs and members be discussed and confirmation of additions for 26/27 plan with funding stream.**
- (iii) That suggestions from officers and SMT be added to budget and financed by savings or increase in Precept.**

53/25 INTERNAL AUDITOR

The report of the Internal Auditor was circulated to members prior to the meeting. The report followed the first of three visits for 2025/26. In its conclusion, the auditor noted their satisfaction with the improvements made. Councillor Wilson congratulated all staff concerned in ensuring a favourable audit.

RESOLVED:

That the Internal Auditor's Interim Report for the 2025/26 financial year be noted.

54/25 FEES & CHARGES REVIEW

The RFO reported that a Working Group had been set up to carry out a full review of Fees & Charges in readiness for the 2026/27 budget. It had met and the list of the proposed updates were circulated prior to this meeting.

The RFO explained that there was generally a blanket 3% increase on all charges (with rounding applied to keep numbers whole). Market charges were increased by 2% with those traders trading on a Thursday increased by 3%. The changes to Market charges were an attempt to streamline income.

RECOMMENDED:

That the proposed Fees & Charges be approved.

55/25 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The Town Clerk had nothing to report other than details of Shrewsbury Town Council's request had been sent to Shropshire Council. Councillor Wilson reported that Shropshire Council had recently appointed a new panel so hopefully Shrewsbury Town Council's request could be considered in due course.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal report be noted.

56/25 SHREWSBURY BIG TOWN PLAN

The Town Clerk reported on activity of the Big Town Plan Board:

- New streams of work to forward the Movement Strategy, this included the cycle pods
- Establishment of a Public Realm Management Group
- Development of a Risk Register
- A Working Group had been set up to discuss the future of Rowley's House
- Town of Culture – the Town Clerk was to write an expression of interest
- A presentation was to take place to explain the Big Town Plan. STC would also be contributing to add more detail in role of functions.

Councillor Wagner said that the partnership meetings were working well. He reported that plans were being developed for Rowley's House. It was noted that the mansion itself was not in such a bad state of repair as the rest of the building. It was suggested that the mansion could be used as accommodation for STC staff. The Deputy Town Clerk added that in excess of £10.5M was required to put the building right and that there were plans for it to become a multi-functional community space. Councillor Mosley added that it had been proposed that the warehouse section (the ground floor and courtyard) be a bar and the upper floor converted to Airbnb accommodation.

Councillor Dartnall asked if the Partnership had seen the report on the problems with the gyratory near the station. Councillor Mosley said that it highlighted the rifts between Shropshire Council staff and project leaders. A discussion was needed on the lessons that can be learned from this fiasco and the sheer anger that had been expressed from the public. He believed that the Movement Strategy was written in the light of the NW Relief Road being constructed. Councillor Wilson refuted this; his recollection was that the Movement Strategy could work either with or without the NW Relief Road.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal report be noted.

57/25 SPORTS HALL PROJECT

The Town Clerk reported that correspondence had been received from the Marches Academy Trust (MAT) following previous meetings with the Town Clerk regarding the request to help with the funding for a new Sports Hall to be constructed for Shrewsbury Academy. This proposal had been tabled at the last Communities & Environment Committee whose members proposed that it be explored further at the next Policy & Resources Committee meeting.

The Trust had secured £1.9m of the £2.23m total project cost, leaving a shortfall of £330k. The Town Clerk said that the Town Council funding could be justified as all other senior schools in the town had reasonable facilities and that STC could have use of it as a community facility.

Councillor Mosley pointed out that the Shrewsbury Academy had recently had a new library and STEM building – there had been plans for a sports hall too but no representation. He questioned whether funding this would take the Council's remit too far, as education was not its function, and also set a precedent. Whilst realising the necessity of the building, he believed it was unaffordable for the Council and detrimental to its budget and reputation. He also pointed out that the MAT accounts for 2023/24 showed a surplus of £1.44m and Reserves of £4.17m so its finances were healthy. He reminded members also that the MAT could gain an income from this by charging for usage (mostly evenings and holidays). He also pointed out that there were a range of other community facilities nearby - the Lantern, Kynaston Road Youth Centre and the Grange Centre.

Councillor Wagner said that although STC did not have a role in education, this school had raised a significant amount of money and that it was located in a somewhat deprived area of the town. He believed it would be worth hearing more about the project and the proposed collaboration with STC and its community uses for the youth service etc. Large educational trusts like the Marches had large capital.

Councillor Dean's opinion was that MATs were large institutions and therefore STC should be wary of giving money to one, although he thought that the benefits to the community might be worth exploring. He also said it should be borne in mind that the Academy were contributing less than a third of the total cost and so the building would have its strongest links with the community rather than the MAT.

Councillor Jephcott agreed with Councillor Dean and added that some larger parish councils had been involved with collaborative projects for facilities like this. A collaboration could benefit both the school and the community.

Councillor Bentick also urged caution. He was concerned that community usage would be agreed but then not followed through and so advised that this should be the primary focus of any discussions with the MAT. He added that the level of community participation must be made crystal clear, and be enforceable, before any funding is agreed.

Councillor Fejfer asked if the MAT had sought any other channels of funding.

It was agreed that further discussions with the MAT on this project would take place.

RESOLVED:

That the verbal report be noted and further discussions take place.

58/25 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.