



**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
FULL COUNCIL
18 MAY 2020**

Agenda No

12

Responsible Officer: Helen Ball - Town Clerk

UPDATE ON COUNCIL WORK SINCE LOCKDOWN ON 23 MARCH 2020

Purpose of Report

To inform members on council work since lockdown

(i) Staffing & locations of workforce

Currently Riggs Hall is closed for daily use with staff periodically visiting to collect post. All admin staff are homeworking and still have normal access to phones, website and social media.

Senior Management Team has a Teams Meeting daily to catch up on matters affecting the staff and operations across the workforce.

Depot staff are following stringent guidelines regarding use of buildings, canteen, vehicles and have been provided with the necessary PPE.

Currently there are 4 members of staff who have been directed to shield for 12 weeks; this has required some staff redeployment to fill some of those posts which are more essential than others.

We have had a number of staff who have had either 7/14 days isolation dependent on whether they or members of their family have shown COVID-19 symptoms. Two members of staff have had the illness and have thankfully made a full recovery.

We are also supporting a few staff whose partners are significant key workers either in the NHS or Education and have had to be away from the workplace to look after pre-school children.

In total we have lost 211 working days (1,561 hours) since lockdown on 23rd March 2020.

It should be noted that morale is generally high and despite the fears that staff have for both the safety and welfare of themselves and their families, there has been an over-riding willingness to help support the community.

The Deputy Town Clerk has kept staff informed of the Council's position and regularly updates her Frequently Asked Questions.

(ii) Grounds Maintenance Functions

The majority of operational staff have remained in the workplace working from the various depots.



Below is a precis of the areas of operation:

The Quarry Park remains open, staff monitor litter bins and undertake visual checks daily. Amenity grass areas are currently topped with the tractor and rotary mowing deck to a slightly higher height of cut, which discourages team games.

The Dingle currently remains closed due to government social distancing requirements. This will be reviewed once the summer planting scheme is completed.

All play facilities are currently locked or secured and are not available to the public; this includes Play Areas, Multi-Use Games Areas, BMX Tracks and the Splashpark.

Allotments remain open with guidelines in place which are administered by each allotment association. Officers have supported the associations over ensuring guidelines are followed.

Town Centre flags have been installed for VE Day and promote the BID.

Pocket Parks remain open except for Mardol Quay Gardens.

All Town Centre Public Conveniences remain closed.

Bus Shelters in the Town Centre have been cleansed.

Service Level agreements with Shropshire Council and school contracts continue to be delivered, including highway verges, schools, Golf Course, Cemetery burials and maintenance, closed Churchyards, Sports Village and Rural assets. Burial Service staff have been exceptionally busy and other staff have supported their general cemetery duties when there have been large numbers of burials in a short space of time. It should be noted that there are set rules for dealing with COVID burials.

Meole Brace Golf Course is ready for use at short notices. Like many sporting facilities the Council has followed the maintenance guidelines of sporting governing bodies, ensuring that facilities have a level of maintenance that maintains a good grass sward yet renders the facility unplayable. All have been maintained so that the facility can become operational within 7-14 days.

Countryside Open spaces. Boundaries fences have been repaired to allow grazing, access paths strimmed. Additional site visits have been programmed to ensure areas are free from litter and dumped household waste.

Ash Die Back strategy and policy documents are currently being progressed.

Bowls and Tennis at Recreational facilities remain closed at Silks Meadow, All Saints Recreation Ground, St. Michaels Recreation Ground.

Monkmoor Recreation Ground is closed and locked up to avoid anti-social activities.



All grass sports areas are being maintained and can be upgraded to the required sporting specification at short notice subject to confirmation from the sport's governing body.

All though the Britain in Bloom Campaign is not taking place, summer bedding is still continuing. It has been a struggle for our plant contractor to provide the necessary specification of plants. The Amenity Greenspace Team Leader and Greenhouse Foreman have looked at re-designing all floral planting locations to meet the stock received and the plants that have been grown from seed/cuttings. It is not envisaged at this stage that hanging baskets will be offered to businesses due to reduced planting stock and operational logistics of watering.

Staff have continued to support NHS colleagues by transporting chemotherapy drugs to shielded patients around the county and making deliveries to the Registrar based at Shirehall. Operational staff have also facilitated the delivery of PPE to community groups co-ordinating volunteering.

Health and Safety, risk assessments, PPE are reviewed and updated. Extra sanitisers and disinfectant is in constant use, face masks, face-shields, disposable and disposable gloves are regularly used.

(iii) Markets

The Market Hall is currently open for food only. Only eight traders are present. Footfall and Income is down by 75%. Members of the public are being reminded to observe social distancing guidance and stay two metres apart when using the markets and visitor numbers have been restricted to 45 at any one time. The facilities are being cleaned thoroughly on a regular basis.

The Sunday market at Battlefield is now closed.

Currently the Grounds Maintenance Team are covering the Markets due to staff absence. It is not envisages that this position will change for the next 5 weeks.

(iv) Youth

The Youth team have been exploring and trialling a variety of different activities aimed at maintaining contact with the young people they would normally work with. With the sudden announcement of lockdown there was no time for consultation with young people about the best ways to stay in touch so this has been very much a case of trial and error.

Initially regular youth club members were offered the opportunity to catch up with youth workers and other members via an online Zoom meetings. The take up on this was limited with a handful of young people from each of our clubs engaging in the sessions. Parental support was sought for these activities.



Those who have participated have enjoyed the sessions and continue to engage, with some of them inviting friends to join and so numbers are steadily building. Online activities have included scavengers, hunts, fancy dress competitions, a bake off and quizzes.

The funded music project has been able to continue successfully online via Zoom. Working closely with The Hive and their musicians, weekly support has been provided to the regular members via Zoom. Equipment has been lent to participants to ensure that they can continue to engage.

Weekly live cooking classes have also been provided via YouTube so that those young people who enjoy cooking regularly in youth clubs have been able to continue to develop those skills. This has been particularly popular with the young people who have been referred to the Alternative Curriculum programme. With support from The Food Hub these families have been provided with the ingredients and since doing so all of the young people have taken part.

Now rules have changed allowing two people from different houses to meet in public as long as social distancing is maintained, we are now exploring a new initiative where two youth workers will visit spaces we know young people are congregating. The purpose is to engage with these young people and explore ways that they would like us to stay in touch given the current situation. The police have sanctioned this initiative and seen it as a positive move.

(v) Finances

The finances function of the Council which incorporates the accounts, purchasing and income continues to operate remotely supporting the operational functions although due to the nature of information there are Riggs Hall visits for post, printing and then distribution of information.

The key points are as follows:

- Suppliers continuing to be paid as before lockdown, two payments runs a month per executive decisions summary including insurance premiums;
- Cashflow being monitored, no issues regards liquidity and paying suppliers and payroll, despite some reduction in income and cash received;
- Impact of coronavirus being calculated and depends on length of shutdown with main decreases from Markets, licences, events and interest received. There are some expenditure savings but these will not offset the lost income, sufficient reserves are held to meet any budget deficits;
- Year ended 31st March 2020 accounts currently being prepared for discussion at SMT level, minimal impact from Coronavirus;
- We are alert to issues facing customers and residents and not actively chasing debts and consideration to be given to future invoices and payment terms

**(vi) Lobbying for improved finances**

Current estimates show that income streams have been heavily hit by the current lockdown and will continue to be hit for quite some time with at best a £300k deficit which could increase to £500k depending on the severity and length of lockdown and the timescales for returning to normality.

There has been no announcement on directed support to Parish & Town Councils. The Town Clerk initially raised this with the MP who has written to the Secretary of State at MHCLG. This was followed by a call to the Leader & Deputy Leader of Shropshire Council; both were supportive of the difficulties the Town Council face but they weren't in a position to financially support as the funding measures paid over by Central Government did not cover their losses. The Leader offered to write to the Secretary of State as well as the Chairmen of the County Council's Network and the Local Government Association.

Locally Radio Shropshire has picked up the campaign, much in part on the back of the letter sent to the Secretary of State by Councillor Nutting and following discussions with the local reported, the Town Clerk was interviewed on the radio on 5th May. This was picked up by the Regional Political Editor of the BBC and mentioned in a question at the Downing Street Cabinet Briefing on the 7th May. Radio campaign continues with the Chairman of Shropshire Association of Local Councils being interviewed on the 7th and the Head of Policy at National Association of Local Councils being interviewed on the 8th.

Both SALC & NALC have picked up the campaign and the Town Clerk has been involved in national briefings highlighting the sense of loss, particularly amongst the larger Councils. The Secretary of State has sent an open letter to Parish Councils thanking them for their support during this crisis and suggesting that they contact their principal councils to discuss funding as funds have been distributed for the lower tiers. At the time of writing no additional funds have been secured.

(vii) Communications & Social Media

Throughout the lockdown period, the Town Council has maintained good traction on all of its sites (Facebook, Twitter & Instagram) as have the Young Shrewsbury Sites. Metrix from all sites has been appended to this report.

Both the website and public noticeboards have been regularly updated with an announcement of which Town Council services are open along with any special rules that need to be followed.

Internal communication has been maintained via normal line management structures as well as a regularly updated series of FAQs made available to all staff.

**(viii) Civic Activity**

Since lockdown the Mayor's Civic engagements have been cancelled with the most prominent being the Mayor's Awards Ceremony. It is however hoped that this event can take place later on in the year ahead of any Mayoral changeover.

As reported elsewhere in this meeting discussions have taken place with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor regarding the potential of Cllr Gillam staying in office until November and Councillor Burgess taking over and running for 18 months through the first year of a new electoral term.

The Mayor has issued a number of open letters to the Public & Residents urging them to heed the national guidelines and stay safe. He has also issued messages to staff.

The Mayor took part in the Virtual VE Day commemorations when he read his reflections on VE Day Commemorations during these challenging times and was there to witness the Last Post being played by Buglers at the Castle.

The Mayor continues to have good presence on both Facebook & Twitter.

(ix) Recovery

Officers have begun conversations with colleagues at both the BID and Shropshire Council regarding developing a Recovery Plan to encourage visitors and shoppers to return safely. The Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk & Operations Manager are part of the Shrewsbury Recovery Task Force and actively involved in those discussions; this Task Force meets weekly

In the meantime plans are underway to open up a number of facilities that are run or maintained by the Town Council in light of the Prime Minister's address on the 10th May and the subsequent guidance issued on the 12th May; including:

Activity	Location	Date
Golf	Meole Golf Course	13.05.20
Tennis	Monkmoor	13.05.20
Bowling	Shelton	14.05.20
Croquet	Monkmoor	14.05.20
Bowling	Monkmoor	15.05.20
Bowling	Silks	15.05.20
Tennis	All Saints	18.05.20
Bowling	All Saints	18.05.20
Tennis	Silks Meadow	20.05.20
Bowling	St Michaels	29.05.20
Tennis	St Michaels	01.06.20



The Recreational Greenspace Team Leader has had to juggle the need to open facilities as quickly as possible against both staff shortages and also the impact on the grass swards of reducing cutting heights too soon. There is therefore a need to manage both public and user expectations as these facilities begin to open up.

Some benches in the Quarry have opened whilst some will remain closed due to social distancing. The Dingle will remain closed until bedding out, after which it shall be opened but seating will be barriered off to meet social distancing rules. Opening time will be later than summer opening to ensure maintenance can be undertaken safely in accordance with new rules and it is proposed in the first instance that opening be restricted to 10.00am – 4.00pm.

Monkmoor Recreation Ground will open up on the 13th and by the end of that week it is expected that tennis, bowling and croquet will be available. Grass heights will take a few weeks to get to a playable height. The facility will be open from 1.00-9.00pm in the short-term to facilitate quite a lot of work required on site.

All play facilities remain closed. At this stage it is unlikely that the Splashpark will open for the summer; discussions are taking place with the manufacturer about the potential for commissioning such a facility and opening safely in the current climate and in particular in light of the fact that this is an exceptionally facility.

The Fisheries are likely to stay closed until the start of the river fishing season on the 16th June. Only the pools can potentially open. Mousecroft Pool is closed for the final stage of the pond lining and improvements to the footpath network. Oxon Pool has yet to open for specialist carp fishing. Therefore any opening of pools would put an undue pressure on Radbrook Pool and may impact adversely on the residents' enjoyment of this area as a recreational facility.

Initial discussions have taken place regarding Riggs Hall and the potential for the Town Council to meet its statutory H&S duties to ensure social distancing. It seems sensible to keep administrative staff as home workers and allow those staff who need access to physical documents. It does continue to underline the inadequacies of Riggs Hall as a long-term base and the brief for new accommodation needs to be evaluated further to ensure staff and the public can be kept safe.