



**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
FULL COUNCIL
29 MAY 2020**

Agenda No

14

Responsible Officer: Helen Ball - Town Clerk

UPDATE ON COUNCIL WORK SINCE 18 MAY 2020

Purpose of Report

To inform members on council work since the last Full Council meeting on 18 May 2020.

(i) Staffing & locations of workforce

Riggs Hall is now open with two members of staff being based there most of the time. Other members of staff are using the facility by following a rota to ensure that social distancing can be maintained. Two officers are currently basing themselves at the Depot. All other officers and administrative staff continue to homework maintaining normal opening hours access to phones, website and social media.

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

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

Currently there are three members of staff who have been directed to shield until the end of June, a fourth has just returned to work. This has required some staff redeployment to fill some of those posts which are more essential than others.

We are also continuing to support 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 314 working days (2,323 hours) since lockdown on 23rd March 2020.

Staff are being kept updated on council activities via their direct line managers and a number of other routes including weekly updates, a staff newsletter, virtual meetings and Frequently Asked Questions.

(ii) Grounds Maintenance Functions

Quarry and Dingle

Summer planting of the Dingle flower beds containing over 30,000 plants is almost complete. Social distancing measures and signage are being prepared ready for when the facility is opened to the public. The bandstand entrance is being considered as the safest option, barriers will be strategically positioned to ensure a one-way system through The Dingle. From early July the gardens will be open. Grass amenity areas are now being cut shorter in the Park.



Additional litter bins have been installed and extra wheel bins are available to cater for busier periods. Drinks and Ice Creams Concessions are available with social distancing measures in place. The Splash Park will remain closed.

Castle Grounds

Planting has been completed and a 'thank you' to the NHS design has been incorporated into the carpet flower bed. Officers are working with the BID to provide tables and chairs space in the Castle Grounds for use by the Castle Street Food & Beverage outlets.

Toilets

The lower Quarry DDA cubicle Toilet facility has been open since Monday 22nd June. This has been initially monitored by an attendant. The facility is being checked and sanitised approximately every half hour during opening hours and safety measures have been put in place to protect the operative and public wishing to use this facility. Work is ongoing to make the DDA cubicles at Quarry Upper and Abbey Foregate user friendly. Current social distancing measures restrict the ability to open up the Mens/Womens blocks. An Action Plan is being put in place to open up the Butcher Row Facility in readiness for the wider opening of facilities on the 4th July.

Play Areas

Recent announcements have allowed for opening of playgrounds from the 4th July. All play facilities have had ROSPA inspections and have been regularly visited by Neighbourhood Wardens throughout lockdown. With the exception of the Quarry (which is visited daily) all sites will continue to be inspected weekly; this includes general cleanliness work, bins emptying and strimming. All sites will have new "Lets Help Each Other to Keep Safe" branding and the messages to parents and carers is:

1. If the playground facility you visit has not yet officially been opened, please do not attempt to use, or access the equipment or area.
2. Do not remove any temporary barriers to the playground or plastic fencing or unravel any swing seats or cables that may have been secured to put them out of use – this must be done safely by the owner or operator of the facility.
3. Follow the current social distance guidelines when visiting and encourage your children to do the same.
4. If the playground is busy, consider coming back at a later time. Talk to your children about this possibility before visiting.
5. Wash your and your children's hands before and after visiting. Take hand sanitiser with you and consider taking a bottle of water for if your children's hands get covered in mud. Ensure your children are using hand sanitiser frequently.
6. Follow and adhere to all current government advice in addition to the above guidance.

The tender for the new play area at Sweetlake has been awarded.

**Bus Shelters**

The majority of town centre facilities have been deep cleansed. Quotations are being sought for the replacement of opaque bus stop panels.

Sports Facilities

- Meole Brace Golf Course is open and being well used, play has increased now from a two ball to four ball game. The quality of the course has received many favourable comments.
- Grass and Hard Surface Tennis Courts are open and the Key Holding Scheme has been offered freely and the take up is good
- Bowling Greens are all open and whilst the county competitions are cancelled clubs are organising inter-club competitions
- Croquet Lawn is open for use
- All football is cancelled until September
- The All-weather pitch at Monkmoor remains closed
- Cricket is starting low-level training

Countryside open spaces

- Open spaces continue to be well used by the public, the teams are focusing on areas that have been identified as litter hot spots.
- Tenders are in for the Monkmoor River Bed project; this project has received EU funding

Ash Die Back

Work has commenced on carrying out an Ash Die back survey to determine the next course of action.

Grass Cutting

- Amenity grass continues to grow after the recent wet spells.
- Increased household waste dumped on highway verges is on the increase.
- Areas set out as Wildlife Meadows during the winter are currently flourishing

Fishing

Both river and pond fishing are open and take up of licences is significantly up on this time last year.

Team Shrewsbury

Continues to meet regularly and engagement with partners is on-going. Police are patrolling key hotspots for ASB and measures are in train for the opening of licenced premises on 4th July.

(iii) Markets

The Market Hall reopened for non-food trading on 15 June 2020 (food trading had continued throughout lockdown). Many non-food traders are returning to the market but had indicated that they would only be trading on a Friday and Saturday at the present time. All had been asked to complete a risk assessment of their stalls. Members of the public continue to be reminded to observe social distancing guidance and stay two metres apart when using the



markets and visitor numbers have been restricted to 60 at any one time. The facilities are being cleaned thoroughly on a regular basis.

Currently the Grounds Maintenance Team are covering the Markets due to staff absence. It is hoped that this position will change from the beginning of July but this is yet to be confirmed.

The Sunday market at Battlefield is reopen for food and non-food items. The car boot sales will commence in early July

(iv) Youth

The Youth team continue to explore and trial a variety of different activities aimed at maintaining contact with the young people they would normally work with.

The take up of regular youth clubs via Zoom has been limited so the youth workers are now visiting spaces we know young people are congregating. This work is going really well and allows an open dialogue with young people to take place.

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.

Support such as weekly cooking classes continues and this programme remains 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.

As we move towards the Summer we will continue to review the services on offer. Ordinarily some services would stop during the summer holidays but we are keen to continue whatever is feasible to support the young people of the town during this unprecedented time.

(v) Finances

The finances of the Council are still being run from a mixture of remotely and Riggs Hall, which while not as efficient and causing a slight delay in processing is not at the detriment of service users internally or externally for suppliers who are continuing to be paid promptly.

Purchase ledger activity is similar to previous years, Sales ledger activity in terms of both volume and value are significantly down. Any fixed rate bonds to rollover on maturity are at lower rate due to the record low BOE base rate.

As reported to Finance and General Purposes Committee, estimated income lost from Covid19 stands at £250k. There are reductions in expenditure and savings which can be achieved of £150k to leave a underspend of £100k



The internal auditor has completed the final audit report and signed off the relevant section of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) 2019/20 Part 3.

The Accounts for the Year ended 31st March 2020 and AGAR form part of the Council agenda and if agreed can be submitted to PKF Littlejohn the external auditor.

Quarter 1 accounts for the 3 months ended 30th June 2020 will be prepared shortly which will highlight adverse variances and further update of forecasting to the potential loss.

(vi) Lobbying for improved finances

The Town Clerk has continued to raise the plight of no funding support from the Parish & Town Council sector. Details were given to the Finance & General Purpose Committee. More recently she wrote a letter to the Secretary of State on behalf of the 6 largest affected Town Councils to of State highpoint the difficult financial position of some local councils and seeking a meeting with the Secretary of State to help unlock some of the regulations and red-tape which is stymieing Local Councils being able to ride this funding crisis.

(vii) Communications & Social Media

The Town Council are continuing to maintain good traction on all of its sites (Facebook, Twitter & Instagram) as have the Young Shrewsbury Sites. Analytics from the sites have been appended to this report.

The website and public noticeboards are regularly updated with announcements regarding Council services along with any special rules that have to be adhered to.

(viii) Civic Activity

The Mayor's Civic Diary remains empty, but he continues to make statements of support to both the residential and business community about the COVID crisis.

The Mayor is due to disburse his Mayoral Charity money to his nominated Charity the Shrewsbury branch of the Samaritans.

The Mayor is discussing how a virtual Mayors Awards Ceremony might take place.

(ix) Recovery

The Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, & Operations Manager have been active participants in the Shrewsbury Recovery Task Force alongside Officers from the Business Improvement District and Shropshire Council Highways, Economic Growth and Public Health developing a collective COVID Action Plan to bring about recovery.



Work has involved:

- Implementing Highway Works to allow for temporary road closures to improve public space
- Installing Flags/Banners/Bunting
- Developing a Bounce Back Brand
- Creating Open Space for us by Food & Beverage Establishments in conjunction with Public Protection
- Using Planters and Safeguarding barriers
- Floor Stickers
- Animation Activities to encourage footfall

This work has been on top of the continued Big Town Plan work on creating a Masterplan and Movement Strategy and a Place Narrative and Town Marketing Strategy.

The Recovery Task Force meets weekly as does the Town Council's own Recovery Working Group (Cllr Mosley, Moseley, Burgess, Phillips, Dean & Green); notes are circulated to all Councillors for information. The Town Clerk & Deputy Town Clerk meet weekly with the BID Manager to look at those animation activities.

It cannot be emphasised enough the strain this is placing on senior officers who continue to do the day job whilst taking on additional COVID Recovery responsibilities.