

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Civics Committee

Held at the Guildhall, Frankwell Quay, Shrewsbury

At 5.00pm on Monday 30 September 2019

PRESENT

Councillors P Gillam (Mayor), Ms G Burgess (Deputy Mayor), I Jones, P Nutting & K Roberts

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk) & Carol Pullen (Town Clerk & Mayor's Secretary)

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CODE OF CONDUCT

None received

01/19 UPDATE OF MAYORAL YEAR

The Mayor updated the Committee on his Mayoral year so far; this had included a variety of events from community events and festivals to more serious business such as visits to the Ark and going out with the Street Pastors. He had organised a Beatles Festival which had raised £5000 for his charity. He was thoroughly enjoying his year so far.

02/19 ROLE & FUNCTION OF THE MAYORALTY

Past Mayors discussed their experiences of being Mayor and the standing that the Mayor of Shrewsbury had in Civic life in the town and the county. His attendance was considered key in promoting Shrewsbury and Shropshire and with the highest civic profile and the busiest diary in the County, Councillors needed to be aware of the commitment. Members did however stress the role could be as complicated as a new Mayor wished to make it and working collaboratively with the Deputy Mayor was important in maintaining a good home /civic life balance.

Members discussed the reluctance of some Councillors to take on the role and the constitutional consequences in the event that Councillors were unable to elect a Mayor from amongst them. It was therefore important to work on how the Mayoral role could be adapted to make this civic office the honour and privilege it should be whilst not being too onerous on the incumbent.

Members did acknowledge that whilst the Town Council has only been in existence for 10 years, it is responsible for the continuity of the Mayoralty that commenced in 1638 and it would be unfortunate if there were ever to be a break.

Members discussed the Mayoral Role which it inherited from the Borough Council. Traditionally the Mayor would not accept any invitation from outside the Town Boundary, unless it was an invitation from the civic head. But the Town Mayor had over the years been expected to attend a number of traditional events in the Borough Council area which had been accommodated through a memorandum of understanding of neighbouring Parish Councils. Whilst members discussed whether it should be the Chairman of the Parish Council or the Chairman of Shropshire Council who should attend, it was acknowledged that the Mayor of Shrewsbury is seen as the civic head of Shrewsbury and its hinterland.

Members discussed the support for the Mayor in terms of:

- **Mayoral Allowance** – all agreed that the allowance did not cover the expenses of the office and whether there needed to be a review of what the Mayoral Allowance would pay for as opposed to the Town Council's Civic Budget
- **Town Clerk & Mayor's Secretary** – was key to providing the diary support and secretariat for the Mayor and whilst she provided secretarial services to both the Mayor and Town Clerk the majority of her workload was for the Mayor with the Town Clerk relying on other members of staff
- **Mayor's Officer** – all agreed that having a driver and officer, given the number of engagements was essential. The Mayor's Officer came with many years' experience of various events and he was able to guide the Mayor on the necessary Civic Etiquette. Members discussed the fact that the current incumbent had expressed his wish to retire at the conclusion of this Mayoral year therefore it was necessary to begin the discussions of replacement and early appointment to learn from the existing post holder.
- **Mayoral Car** - Members also discussed the need for the car. The Town Clerk advised that it was now the oldest vehicle in the Council fleet and whilst it was regularly serviced and currently did not incur any large maintenance bills, there will come a time when it needed to be replaced. Members discussed options including lease versus purchase, but concluded that given the length of service of the current vehicle, the latter was likely to prove the most economically efficient option.

Members also discussed the other key duty of the Mayor; this being to chair Council Meetings and with that came some key duties in ensuring the agenda and subsequent actions were lawful, that debate was equitable and the post holder used a sense of political impartiality in decision making. Councillor Jones commended the SALC Chairmanship Course in providing the necessary training for a Chairman. The Town Clerk would find out any dates for both the Chairmanship Course and the periodic Mayoralty Course, both run by SALC to offer to both the current Mayor & Deputy but also any Councillors contemplating the role.

Members expanded the discussions to cover promoting the Elections and trying to encourage more people to stand for Council. This might reduce the number of twin-hatted members. Members also discussed the need for an Electoral Review of both the external Parish

Boundary, given that urban Shrewsbury was now into many of the neighbouring parishes but also the internal wards where the electorate in some was very high due to recent development. It was reported that Shrewsbury Town Councillors had the highest member/electorate ratio of any Parish Council in the country.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) That Council continues to recognise the importance of the Mayoralty in terms of its profile and local/regional recognition and provides the necessary support to Councillors to take on the responsibility of the role;**
- (ii) That the Finance & General Purpose Committee look to reviewing the Mayoral Allowance alongside other internal civic budgets;**
- (iii) That the Personnel Committee look to recruitment of a new Mayor's Officer once the current incumbent formalises his intentions to retire;**
- (iv) That Officers explore options for a replacement Mayoral Vehicle;**
- (v) That the Town Clerk explore training courses for Councillors to understand the Mayor's role as a Civic Head as well as Chairman of Council;**
- (vi) That the Town Clerk look to ways in which the role of a Town Councillor can be promoted ahead of the 2021 elections to encourage more people to stand;**
- (vii) That the Council make formal representations to Shropshire Council regarding the need to undertake an Electoral Review for Shrewsbury.**