

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Meeting of the Finance & General Purpose Committee Held Virtually on Microsoft Teams At 6.00pm on Monday 1 February 2021

PRESENT

Councillors A Mosley (Chairman), P Adams, Ms G Burgess, Ms J Mackenzie, Mrs P Moseley, A Phillips & D Vasmer.

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Gary Farmer (Operations Manager), Andy Watkin (Responsible Financial Officer), Stuart Farmer (Projects Officer), Adam Purnell (Youth & Community Manager), Ruth Jones (Office Manager) and Carol Pullen (Committee Clerk).

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Dean & Fraser.

48/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Twin-Hatters	All twin-hatted Councillors declared a personal interest in all matters relating to Shropshire Council.
Councillor A Phillips	As he is the Ward Member, Councillor Phillips declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 17 – Greenfields Recreation Ground.

49/20 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 11 January 2021 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 11 January 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

50/20 MATTERS ARISING

Minute 12/20 – Shropshire Pension Fund Investment – A chaser was sent to the fund administrator of the Shropshire Pension Fund and the reply received has been circulated to all Councillors.

Minute 43/20 – Combined Sewer Outflows – the MP was contacted about the Combine Sewer Outflows who, whilst supportive advised that the reading had been deferred. That

said the Floods Minister has announced that Government will work with Philip Dunne to see how the sentiments of his Bill can be incorporated into their current flooding work. Severn Trent Water have also been contacted about attending a public meeting.

51/20 GRANTS

This item was moved up the Agenda

51.1 Update on Community & Councillor Grant Funds

The RFO reported that due to COVID, the awarding of the Summer 2020 grants had been deferred and so the full Community Grant Fund of £10,000 remained available.

There had been some spending by Ward Members from their Councillor Grant Fund on a wide range of ward projects and the RFO was in regular correspondence with individual members regarding their wish lists.

51.2 Applications for Community Grants:

(a) Darwin Community Centre – requested funding to assist with the cost of maintaining this Grade 2 listed building, a Community Centre which can be hired by anyone in the community and is run by volunteers for the benefit of the communities of Frankwell, Copthorne and the town centre. There are plans for external maintenance, installation of new toilets and ladies toilet flooring, replacement of dishwasher, installation of new gents toilet facility and ongoing repairs and improvements in readiness for eventual re-opening.

This application received support from Councillor Julian Dean, the local Ward Member, who was unfortunately unable to attend this meeting. Darwin Community Centre had received previous grants from the Local Councillor grant fund in recent years so it was proposed they be awarded a grant of £1000 and the trustees be encouraged to seek further funding from Shropshire Council who had a supplementary fund available to community groups.

RESOLVED:

That £1000 be awarded to Darwin Community Centre.

(b) Old Shrewsbury Bowling Club – requested £3000 for the installation of an outside stairlift to enable members to access the main area. This is a Crown Green Bowling Club and they are keen to develop their club and create facilities that are more flood resilient.

RESOLVED:

That £1000 be awarded to Old Shrewsbury Bowling Club.

(c) Oxon Bowling Club – requested £1000 to help the club survive the pandemic. Ordinarily the club is self-funded through subscription fees and match fees. Last

year, due to the Pandemic, none of this revenue was available, but fortunately a one-off grant from the Community Emergency Fund, sponsored by Sports England was secured. This grant has been completely consumed, and the funding is sought for help in the coming season given the likelihood that the Crown Green Bowling Association will impose similar measures to last year.

It was proposed Oxon Bowling Club be awarded £500 and they were also encouraged to seek further funding from Shropshire Council's supplementary fund for community groups.

RESOLVED:

That £500 be awarded to Oxon Bowling Club.

- (d) Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust** – requested £2000 for the creation of interior display/information panels for Abbey Station. The proposed interior display panels will complement the recently installed external information panels and inform visitors of Shrewsbury railway heritage. A Community Centre and Railway Museum is located at Abbey Station for free use by community organization, schools and exhibitions, all for non-profit.

Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust had benefitted from several awards from the Community Grant fund in recent years so it was proposed that they be awarded £500 and encouraged to seek additional funding through Councillor Grant funding from their local Ward Member, Councillor Hannah Fraser.

RESOLVED:

That £500 be awarded to Old Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust.

- (e) Shropshire Cycle Hub** – requested £4000 for renovating bicycles to provide sustainable transport for Shrewsbury parishioners. The object of Shropshire Cycle Hub is to promote community participation in healthy recreation by providing and renovating bicycles for use by the those in financial hardship in Shropshire, and by educating the inhabitants of Shropshire as to how to repair bicycles and the benefits of cycling as sustainable transport. Shropshire Cycle Hub renovated and donated over 400 bicycles during 2020 and plans to renovate a further 1000 bicycles during 2021. The demand for bicycles is high and there is a climate and ecological and health emergency which is being responding to, aiming to help achieve a 5 fivefold increase in cycling by 2025, on the road to zero carbon Shropshire by 2030.

Members agreed that £3000 be awarded to Shropshire Cycle Hub with a proviso that they could provide a couple of bicycles for the Town Council's Youth Workers to enable them to travel sustainably whilst carrying out detached work in the town. This would also complement the Council's Climate Emergency Agenda.

RESOLVED:

That £3000 be awarded to Shropshire Cycle Hub.

52/20 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 1-22 January 2021. No comments or concerns were raised.

RECOMMENDED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 1-22 January 2021 be approved.

53/20 QUARTER 3 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) presented the Statement of Accounts for Quarter 3 of the 2020/21 financial year and the Balance Sheet as at 31 December 2020.

The RFO reported that compared to budget for the quarter there was an adverse variance of £34,000 after adjustment for capital expenditure and that is split positive on expenditure by £3,000. On the income side where effects of COVID were felt there was an adverse variance of £37,000. Looking at the year to date position excluding capital expenditure on the expenditure side and the CIL and grants which was income not budgeted for on the income the deficit is around £60,000. Expenditure was positive due to non-replacement of staff leavers but there was an adverse variance of £201,000 on income due to effects of COVID. Year to date position was £59,000 adverse although looking at the figures in the accounts, due to some capital and one off income this was not reflected.

The RFO reported that on the Balance Sheet overall there were no concerns with the cash forecasts of the Council and it continued to pay suppliers in a timely fashion.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Quarter 3 Management Accounts be accepted and approved.**
- (ii) That the recommendations in the Statement of Accounts reported be noted.**

54/20 TENDER WORK

The Projects Manager reported that over the last 18 months, Officers had developed a tendering process that could be used for whatever type of procurement, be it the tendering of a play area, a piece of kit, website development to ensure the same process be followed. This year different conditions had been added to the process with greater emphasis on climate emergency and the need to have a carbon friendly approach and the wish on the part of councillors to favour local contractors. 2020 has also seen an introduction of conditions to ensure a COVID-safe way of working.

The development of standardised forms has helped considerably in evaluating tender proposals. All tenders are opened in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations involving the Projects Manager, Responsible Financial Officer and other members of the

Senior Management Team depending on specialisms. The RFO undertakes the necessary financial due diligence ahead of evaluation of specific aspects of the tender. These are PASS/FAIL criteria.

Depending on the financial value, will depend on the decision making. The Town Clerk and Head of Operations have delegated authority to sign off tenders to certain values; otherwise tenders are approved by the Recreation & Leisure Committee on operational specifics and Finance & General Purpose Committee on budget. When tenders are area specific, for example in the case of development of play areas it is ensured that the local Councillor is involved in the decision making on design.

Current Live Tenders

Design and Installation of BMX Track at Upton Lane, Monkmoor

- Closing Date 05/02/21
- Currently 4 submissions of interest have been received.

Recently Closed tenders

- Supply of Sand Bander for Sports pitches
- Supply of Elliptical Aerator

As a result of the UK leaving the EU on 1 January 2021 a change has been made to the tender process. All tenders have previously been posted on the STC website and the Government's Contracts Finder website. From 1 January there is a new requirement for the tenders to be posted on a further Government website 'Find a Tender' as well as the STC and .Gov websites. This applies to future tenders as the current live tender was posted before the transition date previous tender regulations are still relevant. Procurement thresholds remain the same.

An ongoing spreadsheet detailing tenders and final decisions will be brought to this committee on a regular basis.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

54/20 INTERNAL AUDITOR

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 require there to be an annual review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit. Therefore, the Responsible Financial Officer presented his report which looked at the key standard areas in terms of the expected standards and characteristics of effectiveness.

The RFO reported that there were no areas of concern with the current internal auditors who were well qualified and had capacity to carry out the work. Despite COVID it had still been possible to carry out very effective and thorough internal audits including review of any additional work.

RESOLVED:

That the report into the Effectiveness of the Internal Auditor be accepted.

55/20 RISK MANAGEMENT

Prior to the meeting members had received the Risk Management Strategy, the Risk Management Action Plan & the Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy.

The Town Clerk reported that each year the Council was required to undertake an assessment of risks to the Council. This was part of the Audit Process and was required as part of the Annual Return. It was broken down into two areas: general assessment of risk and assessment of potential financial fraud and/or corruption. The Town Clerk oversees the general risk assessment and the RFO undertakes the financial risk.

To assess the general risks a piece of software called the Local Council Risk Service is used, a piece of software bespoke to Parish & Town Councils. Every year the Council uploads its service delivery, the kind of risks faced in carrying out those services and the likelihood and severity of those risks if they were to happen. Control measures are added and the likelihood & severity risks are calculated again. The system then looks at whether additional action need to be taken and produces an action plan for the council to consider in more detail. The Town Clerk reported that COVID is by far and away the biggest risk on various fronts from transmission of virus, financial loss, impact on facilities, impact on staff. Various measures have been put in place to reduce the risk but the Council could not get away from the fact that the likely risk of transmission of the virus remains high and the severity continues to be high.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the Town Clerk's Report into the Management of Risk be noted;**
- (ii) That the existing Risk Management Strategy be re-affirmed;**
- (iii) That the existing Counter-Fraud & Corruption Strategy be re-affirmed;**
- (iv) That members note the updating of all Risk Assessments;**
- (v) That the Council approves the actions within the Risk Management Action Plan.**

56/20 INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Investment Strategy was circulated prior to the meeting.

The RFO reported that there was a requirement to review the Investment Strategy Annually in accordance with the Account & Audit Regulations. The Strategy continued to be in line with current requirements and there was no need to amend its content.

The Council currently has £7.99m of investments (including buildings investments and general bank balances) which were itemised in the report across three key areas; (i) Specified Investments (Bank accounts), (ii) Non-Specified (Property Funds) and (iii) Non-financial.

Last year it had been intended to look at the possibility diversifying with a view to higher levels of return but not sacrificing any of the liquidity or security of the investments but this had not been reviewed given the poor interest rates across the portfolio of investment areas the Council could invest in. Interest income was not keeping up with inflationary pressure.

Councillor Phillips suggested that as the interest rates were below inflation it may be prudent to consider running down the funds in investments and using it to support frontline activities. The RFO advised that many of the Council funds were held for specific purposes (eg CIL, Precept, S106) and it wasn't possible to run those down.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Investment Strategy for 2021/22 be approved

57/20 YOUTH

The Youth & Community Manager updated members on the current position regarding the activities undertaken by Young Shrewsbury. Up until Christmas engagement had continued. Open access youth club sessions were currently closed, delivery of the Alternative Curriculum offer to the most vulnerable young people had continued and detached sessions had been maintained throughout.

Since the government's increased lockdown restrictions imposed at the end of the year, the position had to be re-evaluated again and the decision taken to postpone face to face Alternative Curriculum sessions for the time being. Whilst the National Youth Agency had not said that face to face work with the most vulnerable needed to cease, it was advised that only be undertaken if deemed safe and with strict restrictions in place. Given the nature of the work done with young people, being hands on and informal it was particularly difficult to deliver sessions safely. Further to this, from local intelligence and the team's observations on detached it was known that many of young people who were enrolled on the AC were not social distancing, staying at home or taking any of the restrictions seriously. This made the situation even more difficult and it was decided that for now staff should not be put at risk working with this group.

Online support continues by way of the weekly You Tube workshops and meeting with young people who need support remotely. This will be reviewed in line with the next Government announcement.

Shropshire Council had recently recruited a Youth Work Manager with a full time Youth Worker in place for Shrewsbury and they intended to recruit two part time staff for Shropshire who would be doing some detached and some school work so it was hoped to link in with them and work more closely enabling more detached than was currently possible.

The Youth Endowment Funding project continued to deliver its online workshops via YouTube and was still well engaged with by those enrolled. There were 25 young people taking part each week and there had been some very positive feedback

The Youth & Community Development Manager had been working with residents in the Kynaston Road Area to look at ways of re-establishing the Community Centre which has been closed for a period of time. A new committee has now been formed and the former Treasurer of the existing Committee has offered to stay on as Treasurer and they were looking at constitution arrangements and discussions with Shropshire Council about the future of the building. The Town Clerk and Youth & Community Development Manager had been on a Zoom meeting with the committee and whilst there was no immediate support required at this stage, Council might need to consider the level of any ongoing support to this committee if their aspirations of opening the venue up is to be achieved

The Youth & Community Manager was exploring the purchase of video and editing material to enable staff and young people they work with to create their own videos. These facilities would be able to other Town Council departments to use.

The Youth & Community Manager had presented the work of Young Shrewsbury at the Big Town Plan Festival alongside Joe Barratt the Junior Fellow of the Institute of Place Management and a Board Member of the High Streets Task Force. This gave an opportunity to showcase the work of Young Shrewsbury and explore the potential of engaging with young people more in the delivery of a Masterplan which will have generational change.

Cllr Mackenzie referred to concerns made in the media of young people being more susceptible to abuse during lockdown and asked whether there had been any feedback along those lines with any of the young people and if Shropshire Council are aware of that kind of information whether there was any system where to feed the information onto the team so they could in with these families directly.

The Youth & Community Manager acknowledged there had been some safeguarding issues particularly with the AC young people. There was regular contact with these young people.

Councillor Mackenzie mentioned certain groups that were allowed to meet face to face during lockdown, providing they fitted the criteria and asked whether any face to face could be offered.

The Youth & Community Manager reiterated that although the NYA stated that face to face meetings could still take place particularly with the most vulnerable young people there were issues around having them into the centre. It was only possible to meeting face to face if Government Guidance could be maintained at all times; this was proving difficult.

Councillor Mackenzie asked if there was any online training people could do at the moment if they were interested in doing some youth work so they would be ready to go when restrictions eased. The Youth & Community Development Manager pointed her in the direction of the Shropshire Youth Association.

Cllr Vasmer asked if there were any thoughts had been given to revival once restrictions were lifted.

The Youth & Community Manager said he feared that unfortunately it would almost be a case of building up from scratch once more as a lot of the older members would now have left school and moved on. Thought would need to be given to reshaping youth clubs, trying different sessions and seeing what worked. There would be a focus on developing relationships and encouraging younger members.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

58/20 BIG TOWN PLAN

The Town Clerk updated members on the work of the Big Town Plan. The Big Town Plan Masterplan was launched on 20 January during the Big Town Plan Festival. A date was being set to hold a Special Meeting of Council to debate the Big Town in more detail.

Consultation would run for 6 weeks after which comments would be collated and evaluated and presented back to the Big Town Plan Board, Shropshire Council Cabinet, Shrewsbury Town Council and Shrewsbury Business Improvement District Board in the early summer. A number of Councillors and Officers had taken part in workshops to develop the Place Narrative story. A toolkit would be launched shortly and the Shrewsbury Ambassador Programme would be developed with its first meeting in early March.

The Big Town Plan Festival ran from 19-29 January and consisted of 7 different sessions:

1. Shrewsbury: Step into the Story
2. Introducing the Shrewsbury Masterplan
3. What's next for Town Centres?
4. Better Movement & Public Space
5. Celebrating Heritage & Public Space
6. Shrewsbury: The next generation
7. Living & Breathing the Big Town Plan

The feedback on the festival had been positive, over 500 different people had logged onto the 7 events and there were around 800-900 who logged on over the two-week period. All sessions had been recorded so if members had not had a chance to register details could be found on the festival website <https://festival.shrewsburybigtownplan.org/>

Councillor Vasmer enquired how any comments would be evaluated and incorporated into the Master Plan.

The Town Clerk confirmed that following the six-week consultation the comments would be collated and by liaison with Glen Howells who were producing the Master Plan they would be taken on board with a view to producing a Final Plan which would be adopted in the early Summer.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

59/20 WEBSITE

The Town Clerk reported that significant progress was being made on the design and the layout of the new website. Staff were feeding into their specialist areas on the content, several staff had received some initial training last week and other members of staff were having some training later this week. Details of a demo session on 26 February had been circulated to Councillors. The website was on track to go live from 1 March.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

60/20 CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Ahead of the meeting the Minutes of the Climate Emergency Action Group had been circulated to members.

Councillor Mosley said that he was very pleased to report that the Council was receiving significant plaudit for the Action Plan that had been put forward to the group and that they were delighted with the progress being made. They had supported some of the adjustments made to the Climate Emergency fund to take account of expenditure that incurred on LED lights replacement and equipment so far.

The Town Clerk reiterated Councillor Mosley's comments and added that there had been discussion about allocating some funds towards some of the climate focussed projects that had been done as outlined in the Deputy Town Clerk's Report to this Committee in December. There were a couple of updates since the meeting. Friends of the Earth had been in contact with the Youth & Community Manager about resources for Youth Workers to do structured sessions about Climate Emergency and feedback has been sent back to the Centre for Sustainable Energy about the Parish Council Carbon Footprint Tool so hopefully after a few tweaks it will be rolled out nationally.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) That the update be noted;**
- (ii) That £78,785 being the recommended sum as presented by the Committee in December 2020 be transferred from the Climate Emergency Fund to offset against expenditure already made.**

61/20 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS

Members had received the Town Clerk's report following Shropshire Council's resolution to consider undertaking Community Governance Reviews throughout Shropshire following the next Local Government Elections, currently scheduled to be held in May 2021. The Town Clerk sought guidance from members as to how they would like to proceed.

Councillor Vasmer felt that extending the boundary of the town was something that needed to be done to ensure that the urban area of Shrewsbury was fully contained within the Town Council's boundary and he thought there should be an internal review of boundaries because of the growth of development in some wards compared to others.

Councillor Mosley agreed with Councillor Vasmer particularly given current developments extending to the outer reaches of the town but he recollected that no boundary review was planned until after the 2025 elections.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) That the report be noted.**
- (ii) That the Council register its wish for a Community Governance Review in Shrewsbury.**

62/20 GREENFIELDS RECREATION GROUND

Councillor Mosley said he had hoped to bring the report to this meeting but unfortunately it was not yet ready and he would report at the next Full Council meeting in March.

Councillor Phillips asked if a timetable for the likely publication could be set out at the next Full Council meeting. Councillor Mosley reiterated he remained confident that the report would have been completed by then.

63/20 CLOSING REMARKS

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked Councillors for attending and taking part in this virtual Town Council meeting and also thanked the staff involved in this meeting. He thanked members of the public for logging 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.