

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL  
FULL COUNCIL  
22 MARCH 2021**

**Officer:** Helen Ball – Town Clerk

**COVID UPDATE**

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**Purpose of Report**

To update Members on COVID related matters involving the Town Council.

**Areas of Work/Activity**

**1. Lockdown 2**

Lockdown 2 took place from 4 November – 2 December 2020. During this period, the Market Hall trade was restricted to essential stalls as was the Sunday Market with car boot sales being cancelled. All participatory sport was cancelled with golf, tennis, bowls and croquet completely shut. Parks & Open Space and play remained open.

**2. Lockdown 3**

Lockdown 3 has been operational since 5 January 2021. Restrictions starting to ease from 8th March when individuals have been allowed to leave home for recreation and exercise outdoors with their household or support bubble, or with one person from outside their household.

From 29<sup>th</sup> March outdoor sports facilities including golf & tennis will be allowed to reopen.

We continue to prepare for non-essential retail to open up on the 12<sup>th</sup> April.

**3. Staffing**

Staffing levels remains challenging with 1 member of staff on long-term sick leave, 2 currently on shielding.

Generally speaking morale amongst staff is reasonably good, although staff who come into contact with the public are struggling as there are difficulties with retaining good social distancing between them and the public. The Council, through the auspices of the Mayor have been running a “Be Kind to others” campaign.

Admin staff continue to work from home and the public do not see any difference in the service provided. There are however concerns about long-term mental health issues of working from home and being isolated from work colleagues. Managers are keeping in regular contact with those staff.

Senior Management staff are generally working from the Depot and Riggs Hall, apart with the Town Clerk & Deputy Town Clerk who are predominantly working from home but have been making visits to Riggs Hall and the Depot.

Both the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk have recently been incapacitated by physical injuries, but they have still been able to keep up to date with matters arising.

We currently have 2 vacancies for Grounds Maintenance Operative & Neighbourhood Warden.

#### **4. Finances**

The Head of Finance has briefed the Finance & General Purposes Committee on financial projections for the year end. It is envisaged at this stage that the overall deficit outturn shall be in the region of £90k, but this will be dependent on how long and severe the current lockdown continues for. It is envisaged that COVID will continue to effect the council finances well into the 2021/22 financial year, although the figures will be less and the impact due to lockdowns not as severe. The impact of COVID on the greater economy will effect commercial property rents and investment returns due to low or negative interest for the foreseeable future.

#### **5. Communications/Social Media**

Staff have continued to maintain a high presence communicating to the public. All notice boards have COVID Updates, there is a special section on the [Website for COVID](#) related matters and social media regularly posts updates regarding COVID matters, also picking up on Public Health Shropshire matters.

#### **6. Council Meetings**

All Council meetings continue to be virtual with attendance better than the previous year when a programme of physical meetings operated. All the Committees seem to be working well, the decision making has reverted back to Councillors rather than Officers.

The Regulations allowing for virtual meetings expire early May, however the national bodies are urging Government to extend these regulations. Further details are included in the Flexible Meeting Regulations report.

Provision for the Annual Town Meeting is currently being re-considered.

#### **7. Elections**

Pre-Election Period commenced on 15 March. As with all previous pre-election periods, all work undertaken will be assessed for urgency. Any general requests identified on the campaign doorsteps will not be considered until after the elections. Details for prospective candidates can be found on the [website](#).

#### **8. Markets**

The General Market remains operational for essential market traders only with footfall being reduced. Stall holders have again been offered reductions in rental during Lockdown 3 and traders are being encouraged to take their two weeks' holiday grace which is built into their contracts.

The Sunday Market is open for essential traders but income and footfall are dramatically down.

## **9. Parks & Open Spaces**

All Parks & Open Spaces remain open, unless they have had to be closed for flood reasons. The Quarry has been exceptionally busy as the public continue to use the facility for their daily exercise.

## **10. Play**

Under current Government Guidelines, all play areas have remained open. All have been COVID Risk Assessed and new signage has been in place. A number of complaints have been received from the general public questioning the Town Council's decision to keep them open particularly when schools were closed. The mental and physical benefits of keeping these facilities open far outweigh risk of transmission. The current message has been for parents to act more responsibly when using these facilities and ensure they and their children continue to follow the HANDS-FACE-SPACE rules.

Commissioning resumes on the Splash Park in preparation for re-opening in the summer months, the re-opening will be in conjunction with the Government COVID roadmap.

## **11. Sports Facilities**

Staff continue to maintain facilities to ensure that when these can open they can do so as quickly as possible.

There are increasing concerns about the impact on grounds operations going into the summer of 2021 when it is likely that grass will be growing at maximum capacity, summer sports will have begun, but winter sports will not yet have finished. It may be that the Council will need to put a finishing date on winter sports activity to be able to manage these potential conflicts.

## **12. Toilets**

Toilets have remained open albeit some facilities within the toilet blocks being closed to ensure social distancing can be maintained. These measures will be reviewed in conjunction with the Government COVID roadmap.

There remain infrastructure problems with the Top Quarry facilities as water pipes have been damaged and an emergency feed from the depot is susceptible to poor supply during freezing conditions.

Butcher Row Facilities are currently closed due to regular drug use issues.

## **13. Cemetery**

Cemetery staff continue to offer burial services and operate appropriately where there are COVID burials.

## **14. Tree Works**

The current tree work programme & shrub pruning is now complete. Any dangerous/diseased trees will be attended to in accordance with regulations. A new tree work programme will be devised for commencing from Autumn 2021.

**15. Grass Cutting**

The grass cutting season has now resumed with operatives out working on Town Council and Shropshire Council land.

**16. Fisheries**

Fisheries remain open but are restricted to Shrewsbury residents use only where they can justify the activity as part of their exercise. The river fishing season has now concluded and will start again on 16 June. All fisheries are regularly inspected by bailiffs which work with both Environment Agency Personnel and the Police.

**17. Allotments**

All allotment sites remain open and are working to guidelines issued by the National Association of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners.

**18. Youth**

Open Access sessions in Youth Clubs are suspended until after Easter and Youth Workers continue detached sessions. Alternative Curriculum work continues as does the food project funded through the Youth Endowment Fund. Young Shrewsbury will develop its programme of works in conjunction with the recent guidelines issued by the National Youth Association. The Youth & Community Manager continues to work with both Team Shrewsbury and Recovery Task Force Partners to help address youth related matters particularly around non-compliance of Government Rules.

**19. Civic**

Mayoral activity continues to be restricted during Lockdown 3 as it is deemed non-essential. The Mayor however is being used to spread out the messages of COVID related matters.

**20. Capital Works**

Where appropriate, Capital Works continue but at times this has been restricted due to contractors being furloughed or difficulty in receiving supplies.

**21. Shrewsbury Recovery Taskforce**

The Town Clerk and Head of Operations continue to attend the fortnightly Shrewsbury Recovery Taskforce meetings and have supported the work of the partnership throughout. All town centre road closures have been removed during Lockdown 3. From 12<sup>th</sup> April a new traffic management system will be in place to replicate the social distancing requirements. These will be under constant review in conjunction with the Government COVID roadmap.

**22. North Shrewsbury COVID Working Group**

The Town Clerk, and Youth & Community Manager have continued to feed into the North Shrewsbury COVID Working Group, a group set up to address increased virus numbers in the Harlescott, Battlefield & Sundorne areas of town.

The results of this have been positive in linking up multi-agencies to share information and in some cases resources to find solutions to problems. The detached youth team have been deployed to areas of concern about young people hanging around and have been able to share the information about individuals within this forum.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- (i) That the Report be noted.