

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
Held Virtually on Microsoft Teams**

At 6.00pm on Monday 6th June 2022

Please note this was an informal virtual meeting of the Committee convened to assist the Town Clerk with carrying out the delegated powers granted to her by Full Council on 22 March 2021 & Finance & General Purposes Committee on 12 April 2021.

PRESENT

Councillors: A Mosley (Chair), P Moseley (Vice-Chair), R Dartnall, J Dean, N Green, E Roberts, B Wall and R Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Gary Farmer (Head of Operations), Stuart Farmer (Project Manager), Ruth Jones (Office Manager) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

1/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor M Davies, Councillor A Phillips and Mike Cox (Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager)

2/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Shropshire Councillors	Those twin-hatted members declared a personal interest in any matters relating to the Town Council's relationship with Shropshire Council.
Councillor Nat Green	Declared a prejudicial interest in Item 11 Markets Update.

3/22 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 4th April 2022 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 4th April 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

4/22 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

5/22 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 1st April to 22nd May 2022. These have been agreed by two signatories before the RFO and Town Clerk. No comments or concerns were raised.

RECOMMENDED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 1st April to 22nd May 2022 be approved.

6/22 PREPARE END OF YEAR ACCOUNTS

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) presented the Annual Report and Draft Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2022, copies of which had been distributed prior to the meeting. This included the following documents:

- Annual Report
- Statement of Accounting Policies
- Annual Governance Statement
- Income & Expenditure Account
- Statement of Movement of Reserves
- Balance Sheet
- Annual Return

The annual report pages 1-9 detail the activity of the council and financial comparison for the year compared to the budget. The budget comparison for the end of this financial year shows a £2,504 surplus with a £14,062 upswing.

The RFO summarised that the result was better than budgeted and slightly better than expected and that this had generated a small surplus which had enabled more than budgeted to be added to the bus shelters and ash die back funds; this would help with budget pressures in 2022/23 caused by fuel, utilities increases and general inflation.

On the income side there was an overall positive variance of £811,595 which was the difference between actual and budgeted figures. The positive variance was due to receipts of £659,339 for CIL and S106 received in the year, and some smaller positive variance as the impact on the budget for Covid was less than expected.

The expenditure variance overall was a negative (£797,533) which was due to the new accounting treatment of earmarking unspent CIL, S106 and capital monies coupled with capital expenditure plus capital projects but classified as revenue. Income and expenditure were roughly on parr.

The accounting policies pages 10-13 remain unchanged.

The Annual Governance Statement on page 14-20 listed the 6 six core principles by which the council operated and how this had been complied with. The 8 assertions in the annual

return were also listed and detailed on how the council complied, which tied into the annual return. The Statement needed to be signed as approved by the Mayor and the Town Clerk. The Statement of Responsibilities for the Accounts would be signed by the RFO.

The Income and Expenditure Account showed a surplus of £614,227. This was due to other income ie S106 and Neighbourhood Fund money that needed to be recognised as income and then transferred into Earmarked Reserves. This led to a distorted figure which, if excluded, would lead to a small surplus.

The Statement of Movement of Reserves on page 23 was where the large surplus was redistributed between capital receipts and earmarked reserves, £20k from the sale of an easement represented the capital receipt, and £591,723 transferred to earmarked reserves (see below). Overall, there was a small surplus of £2,504.

The Balance sheet was healthy and current assets had increased slightly. Councillor Mosley enquired why there was such a large cash at bank. The RFO explained a bond had recently matured and were awaiting an increase in rates offered following recent interest rate increases before reinvesting.

The notes on pages 25-34 helped users understand the accounts and ticked the transparency requirements. The RFO brought members attention to item 16, the Earmarked Reserves, which was where the previously mentioned neighbourhood and S106 of net £432,762 was allocated leaving net £158,961 additions. Aside from the budgeted provisions which had been included, the following changes had been made at Year End. The RFO would report CIL movements to Shropshire Council of which these accounts formed a part.

- (£4,262) Election cost - reduced provision as bill lower which had freed up reserves elsewhere.
- £16,233 Equipment and vehicle replacement - unspent capital budget, machinery ordered but not delivered hence earmarked.
- £20,823 Children's play areas – works budgeted for.
- £10,000 Recreation – per budget
- £5,000 Splash Park - per budget
- £75,000 Climate Change Fund – contribution to the electric van.
- (£5,000) Abbey Gardens Improvements - use of reserves leaving £15k, for drainage and surface in process of being arranged.
- £67,000 Bus Shelters and Ash Dieback. Budgeted to put in £34k each, increased by £33k as resources available to assist budget in 22/23 as pressures on tight budget from oil and insurance and other inflation pressures.
- £20,000 Quarry picnic area – use of play budget for improvements not completed before Year End.

- £20,000 Public safety – fund for public safety eg river safety.
- £8,000 community engagement – underspend on community project therefore earmark under this heading.
- 25,000 Ukraine Support Fund – commitment for grant fund.

Councillor Dean asked if the cancelled visionary exercise could now be revived due to the healthy state of these finances; it was confirmed that there were plans to reschedule this event.

Councillor Mosley said that the Community Grant budget could be raised but that some areas may need more than others. He also cautioned that some of the Capital Projects had not been completed so the earmarked reserves may not look quite so healthy once work commenced.

The Council must approve the Accounts, Annual Return and relevant schedules by the deadline of 30 June 2022 which must then be submitted to the external auditors, PKF Littlejohn, by Friday 1 July 2022.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) **That End of Year Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2022, incorporating the following be approved:**
- Annual Report**
 - Statement of Accounting Policies**
 - Annual Governance Statement**
 - Income & Expenditure Account**
 - Statement of Movement of Reserves**
 - Balance Sheet**
- (ii) **That the Annual Return for the Year Ended 31 March 2022 be approved and forwarded to the External Auditor for unqualified audit.**

7/22 INTERNAL AUDIT

The RFO reported that the Internal Auditor had completed the final audit and there had been no matters arising and was able to sign page 3 of the Annual Return (AGAR). The RFO was thanked and congratulated.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Internal Auditor’s final audit report for the financial year ending 31st March 2021 be accepted, and page 3 of the AGAR submitted to external auditor.

8/22 UPDATE ON COMMITTEE & WORKING GROUP ACTIVITY

8/1 Youth Working Group

The Youth Working Group's meeting on 19th May 2022 was cancelled. However, Councillor Moseley had met with the new Youth & Community Manager, Andy Hall, and updated members as follows:

- The Youth & Community Manager had accompanied councillors for a tour of their wards to get to know the communities.
- There were now 2 youth club sessions at Monkmoor due to its popularity.
- The football session at The Grange Centre had been cancelled due to low numbers.
- The football session at Monkmoor was thriving with 70-80 young people attending with some going on to the youth club.
- An application to the Holiday Action Fund had been submitted to Shropshire Council with a view to developing a programme of activities for the summer holidays.
- Mike Cox, Outdoor Recreation & Assets Manager, was liaising with Andy Hall re offering some other taster sessions.
- Tash Dews was in contact with schools regarding Alternative Curriculum following the news that providers are regulated.

It was noted that there was still a problem with engaging new youth staff but that a recruit has filled a vacancy at Monkmoor.

Detached Youth Teams would have a presence in The Quarry on one Friday and one Saturday per month and liaise with the security patrols in the park.

Councillor Mosley asked that the youth budget be submitted to a future meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the minutes of the Youth Working Group meeting held on 5th April 2022 be accepted.**
- (ii) That Councillor Moseley's update be noted.**

9/22 BUS SHELTER REPORT

A brief report on Bus Shelter Replacement was circulated prior to the meeting. The Projects Manager reported that originally 17 (out of around 107) bus shelters were identified as in most need of refurbishment but that a tender exercise resulted in a recommendation by contractors that the shelters be replaced as most were beyond reasonable repair. The report contained options together with estimated costings. There were various designs/accessories on offer.

The Projects Manager highlighted the 15-year warranty that would come with the stainless-steel option but that some parts could still be powder-coated if required. The Head of Operations said that cleaning the new shelters would be quicker and easier due to them being fitted with toughened glass - the current bus shelters had Perspex windows and the chemicals used to remove graffiti made the windows cloudy. Photos of shelter examples will be circulated.

The Town Clerk detailed a new approach which targeted the high usage arterial routes into the town centre first replacing all shelters on the route to ensure consistency. It would also be important to ensure the project considers the bus network routes and any proposed changes. Any shelters that were removed that had usable parts would be used in repairs to any existing bus shelters.

Councillor Wilson commented that, with the Mini-Holland proposals going ahead, the bus shelters were likely to get more use. Also works could be done in tandem with Shropshire Council's street refurbishment plans. Abbey Foregate was scheduled to be resurfaced shortly so it would make sense to replace those bus shelters. Councillor Dean agreed that replacing whole routes was a sensible approach but added that also replacing the shelters in the town centre would give a good impression for visitors to the town.

Councillor Moseley expressed concern about possible price rises. The Projects Manager advised that costs had been obtained in the last 7 days and would stand for 30 days. Councillor Moseley enquired if the shelters could be bought in bulk and stored in advance in case of future price rises but the Projects Manager said that the contractor would be installing them and given the ringfenced budget it was probably more worthwhile to tender for bulk installation.

There was a discussion regarding adding sedum roofs to the new shelters. An option to choose a shelter design that has a roof ready for sedum was available and the Head of Operations said that the Town Council could then install its own inhouse grown sedum for very little cost. The sedum roofs installed so far had been very successful and new ones would have more variety and colour. Councillor Mosley enquired whether the sedum roofs made much difference towards carbon reduction. The Town Clerk said that 5 kilos of carbon could be absorbed per square metre and that sedum roofs would indeed make a significant contribution to offsetting the Town Council's carbon footprint. There was general agreement to opt for sedum roofs amongst members.

Councillor Wall asked who owned the bus shelters behind Tesco in Harlescote as the bins were often overflowing. The Town Clerk said that the bins were the responsibility of Tesco. Ownership of the bus shelters would be clarified, but they did not belong to the Town Council.

RESOLVED

- (i) That the report be noted, and its recommendations be accepted as follows**

- **Budget be increased to allow for the replacement of shelters.**
 - **Officers to continue exploring other shelter providers.**
 - **Officers continue with a tender process for wholesale replacement.**
- (ii) **That the Town Council’s sedum roof initiative be continued.**
- (iii) **That stainless steel options for the bus shelters be pursued.**
- (iv) **That a strategy of replacing whole routes be implemented.**

10/22 UKRAINE SUPPORT GRANT FUND

A draft Ukraine Support Fund Application Form and Guidance Notes were drawn up by the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and RFO and circulated to members prior to the meeting. The focus was on ensuring that it would provide a good audit trail without an onerous application. Any grant award would come under the provisions of the General Power of Competence, which the Council must report on separately. It was emphasised that grants would go to organisations and not to individuals.

Once the process for applications had been approved, it would be uploaded to the Town Council website and organisations supporting individuals arriving in Shrewsbury would be contacted. It was proposed that applications be submitted to this Committee as and when they were received.

Councillor Wilson asked how the fund would be advertised to ensure that the fund was used. The Town Clerk replied that the organisations involved work closely together and already knew about the Fund, so the risk of it not being spent was minimal.

Councillor Mosley asked that the wording of the first sentence of the Guidance Notes be amended by substituting the word ‘effort’ for ‘people’ so it didn’t imply the Council was funding a war effort. This was agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (i) **That the format of the Ukraine Support Application Form be accepted.**
- (ii) **That the Guidance Notes be accepted with the amendment.**
- (iii) **That the Town Council promotes the Fund.**

Councillor Green left the meeting for consideration of the following item.

11/22 MARKETS UPDATE

The Markets Update was circulated prior to the meeting. The Town Clerk added that attendance at the Sunday Market fluctuated depending on the weather and other events taking place in Shrewsbury. The Market Manager had been experiencing a few security issues, with anti-social behaviour and travellers on site; he now had a body worn camera.

The Town Clerk summarised that both the Indoor Market and the Sunday Market were performing above budget and that there were no bad debts; they are going from strength to strength.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

Councillor Green re-joined the meeting.

12/22 TENDER WORK

A report on tendering activity, including an update on current works, was circulated to members prior to the meeting. The Projects Manager reminded members that progress was still at the mercy of production lines and contractors. The Committee would be informed when updates become available.

RESOLVED:

That the Tender Report be noted.

13/22 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

An update on the 2022/23 Capital Programme was circulated prior the meeting. In order to make the document clearer, the format has been changed so that projects are in the order of when they are being dealt with.

The Town Clerk updated members as follows:

- Upton Lane BMX tracks - both tracks have been installed but a few problems have arisen due to overuse, although activity is expected to calm down.
- Greenacres Play Area - work starts in July and the contractor is aware that work needs to be completed by the school holidays.
- Stanley Lane Rec –a construction lead time for the solar lights is still awaited.
- Abbey Gardens – contractor attendance on site to price up the drainage works is still awaited.
- Town Centre Office – this is progressing well with the architects; energy efficiency initiatives have been considered following a site visit by Green Energy.
- Quarry Working Group met recently and had a productive meeting to look at how to progress work in the park.
- Beaver Project – all paperwork was with DEFRA & Natural England; feedback is expected.

The Town Clerk regretted that lead times were still long, especially with regard to construction. Orders placed and works required that would usually take weeks were

now sometimes taking months, but there was little that could be done to relieve the situation.

Councillor Mosley asked about the mobility access to the front of the Town Centre Office. The Town Clerk confirmed that this formed part of the tender brief. Also consultation with the Fletcher Centre (behind the Office) had taken place regarding easement rights for emergency access/exit. The Centre was reluctant to expand the easement rights as existed, but were there ever a time that the Town Council required access to the first floor for an employee with mobility issues, they would review the situation.

Councillor Mosley extended a vote of thanks and congratulations to Matt Wilcoxon, Countryside & Greenspace Manager, for all his work done with the Council, including the Beaver Project. The Town Clerk expressed her disappointment that he was leaving but that his new role was a good career opportunity for him. Another member of the Countryside Team would be moving the Beaver Project forward.

RESOLVED:

That the update of the Capital Programme be noted.

14/22 BIG TOWN PLAN UPDATE

As the member representative, Councillor Mosley updated the Committee on the recent work of The Big Town Plan as follows:

- The Board was made up of an Officer and Decision Maker from each Organisation, was chaired by David Perry and supported by other officers from Shropshire Council.
- A contribution of £50k to the Big Town Plan (BTP) for each of the next 3 years had been agreed.
- Changes to the Partnership Agreement have been agreed.
- Discussions took place with the COVID Recovery Group re Weekend Pedestrian Trials.
- The Movement Strategy was ongoing and Phil Jones Associates had been working on pulling together various data sets. The consultation process had almost been finalised so members will be invited to separate workshops. There were a number of ANPR cameras; these monitor data on movement flow both in the Town Centre but also on the outlying Ring Road and streets leading into the town.
- The finalisation of the Masterplan Vision would wait until the Movement and Public Realm Strategy had been completed.
- The COVID Recovery Taskforce would be rebranded as the Big Town Plan Task Force and would deal with some of the operational delivery of the Big Town Plan. There was a £50k budget allocated.
- The Welcome Back Fund had been spent on bunting and banners, planting and a pop-up which would be positioned in the High Street.
- Officers were working on a Levelling Up2 Bid which needed to be submitted by 6th July.
- The Mini-Holland work was progressing alongside the Movement Strategy Work – this potential funding pot was being seen as the accelerator to that strategy. The bid for funding needed to be submitted by March 2023.

- Shropshire Council had received £120k of grant funding to prepare a design code. It would appear this was focussing on future developments at Frankwell, Riverside and West End. Members may wish to comment on whether this was really embracing the Shrewsbury Test concept that was in the original Shrewsbury Vision.
- It was suggested that Tim Pritchard attend a Full Council meeting to discuss the Riverside Smithfield Road Development Programme.

Councillor Dean enquired whether the ANPR cameras picked up the movement of pedestrians and cyclists or only vehicles. Councillor Dartnall said that the Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plan does not work on any specific data related to cyclists and pedestrians.

Councillor Dean also raised a concern that some projects, for example the 20mph speed limit for Copthorne/Porthill areas, were taking a long time due to inadequate consultations that then have had to be repeated. He sought reassurance that future schemes and consultations would be managed effectively. The Town Clerk said that this had been addressed at a recent Movement Strategy Delivery Group meeting so that members should have confidence with this issue going forward.

Councillor Wall asked that speeding cars in her Ward should be considered. The Town Clerk replied that road safety concerns were not part of the Movement Strategy project and needed to be directed to Highways.

Councillor Wilson said that members should be mindful of the plans for the Riverside project because this formed a major part of the changes to the town and he asked for a presentation on this from Tim Pritchard, Shropshire Council.

RESOLVED:

- (i) **That the verbal report from Councillor Mosley in relation to the work of the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan be noted.**
- (ii) **That Tim Pritchard (Shrewsbury Programme Manager, Shropshire Council) be invited to give a presentation to Full Council.**

15/22 VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANT POLICY

A draft Vexatious Complaints Policy was circulated to members prior to the meeting. The Chairman recommended that this policy be deferred and be dealt with as part of a review of policies as suggested by Michael Redfern.

RECOMMENDED:

That a Working Group be established in the future to review Town Council policies.

16/22 DRAFT SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL HOUSING ALLOCATION POLICY

Prior to this meeting, the draft Shropshire Council Housing Allocation Policy was circulated together with a link to the Housing Allocations Policy webpage. The Town Clerk reported that it had recently been to Shropshire Council Cabinet with a view to going out to

consultation. Members were asked for any comments to be fed into the process; the deadline is 3 July 2022.

Councillor Dean said that in principle the Policy in general was introducing a local connection rule which would affect support offered by organisations like Shropshire Supports Refugees to refugees settling in the town. One rule that established a local connection was to be working 20 hours per week, however tax credits were given for 16 hours so therefore the local connection should be lowered. He also expressed concern that 16–17-year-olds were deemed to be children in need which implied that they could not apply. In other authorities, there was a process where they could apply if recommended by their carers. Councillor Dean said that, in general, the Policy was a bit lightweight in comparison with other local connection policies.

RECOMMENDED:

That a draft letter is submitted to Full Council for consideration.

17/22 OFFICER DELEGATION REVIEW

Councillor Mosley invited the Town Clerk to remind members of the rules around officer delegation adding that it might now be the time to remove the scheme of delegation introduced during the Covid pandemic.

The Town Clerk explained that the Scheme of Delegation was based upon the original Scheme of Delegation that was put in place in 2009 and reflects the fact that officers must discharge the functions of Council speedily, otherwise there would be the constant need for Council meetings. The Scheme of Delegation also included various statutory duties that both the Town Clerk and RFO had as principal officers. It also included various delegations that had been granted to the Town Clerk over the years.

In 2020, Council discharged the full running of the Town Council to the Town Clerk as the country went into lockdown and this had remained largely unchanged ever since as Members wished to continue with virtual meetings as the COVID regulations lifted. Officers have discussed how the Scheme of Delegation might be lifted and, post Full Council at the end of June, physical meetings would resume allowing various Committees to fulfil their Terms of Reference and the various delegations Full Council granted. Working Groups, however, would remain virtual. In conclusion, the Town Clerk will no longer need full delegated authority.

Councillor Mosley said that the Scheme of Delegation had been raised at Full Council due to funding being moved from one purpose to another without forewarning nor reverting to the Committee.

Venues had been booked, mostly at Shropshire Council as the technology was already set up there for the general public to dial into MS Teams to access the live meeting. Councillor Moseley commented that the Planning Committee had been working well as a virtual meeting. Councillor Wilson added that attendance at virtual meetings had been good and was beneficial to busy families. Councillor Green supported the return to face-to-face meetings as some elements were lost in the virtual world.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) That the temporary delegations granted to the Town Clerk during COVID be withdrawn.**
- (ii) That Full Council and all Standing Committee meetings revert to physical meetings.**

18/22 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

The Chairman thanked members of the public that had logged 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.

RESOLVED:

That in accordance with s1(2) Public Bodies (Admission of Meetings) Act 1960, members of the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following items being considered involve the disclosure of confidential information.

Live streaming of the meeting was ended.

19/22 INVESTMENT PROPERTIES

The RFO reported that the Council had been approached by the tenant of one of its rental properties to buy the property it rented. A discussion took place and it was concluded that selling the properties would not be in the Council's interest at this time. Members also discussed the fact that the Greenfields Independent Inquiry was to make recommendations on the future sale of Council assets.

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) That the report be noted.**
- (ii) That the offer be declined.**
- (iii) That the RFO seek the services of an agent to support the rent review process of rental properties the Town Council owned.**

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked Councillors and all staff involved in the meeting.