

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Held in Council Chamber, Shirehall At 6.00pm on Monday 6th February 2023

PRESENT

Councillors: A Mosley (Chair), R Dartnall, M Davies, J Dean, P Moseley, A Phillips, D Vasmer and R Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Gary Farmer (Head of Operations), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Stuart Farmer (Project Manager), Mike Cox (Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

89/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

That apologies be accepted from Councillor Green.

90/22 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 Davies	Declared a personal interest in Item 93/22 ii Grants Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust which were seeking grant funding
Councillor Moseley	Declared a personal interest in Item 93/22 ii Grants as volunteer for the Food Bank which were seeking grant funding
Councillor Mosley	Declared a personal interest in Item 93/22 ii Grants as member of the Ramblers which were seeking grant funding

91/22 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 9th January 2023 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 9th January 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

92/22 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

The Town Clerk provided the following update on the minutes of the previous meeting as follows:

86/22 Local Government Boundary Commission Consultation – proposals had been put together and submitted to Shropshire Council and the Local Government Boundary Commission.

84/22 Mansel Williams Way – Signage was still awaited; since the last meeting the Town Clerk had again contacted Shropshire Council Highways for an update.

93/22 GRANTS

93.1 Update on Community Grants and Councillor Grants Funds

The RFO circulated the current list of Community Grants and Local Councillor Grants awarded to date. The Shropshire European Organisation's Community Grant Application for £1,250 in 2021/22 had been withdrawn. This, together with Councillor Wall's donation of £750 from her Local Councillor Grant Fund, brought the total budget for this round of Community Grants to £6,201.

93.2 Applications for Community Grants Funds

Representatives from the organisations that had applied for funding were present at the meeting and were welcomed by the Chair. Each were asked in turn to give a brief overview of the application and answer any questions from members.

- (a) **Belle Vue and Coleham Community Action Group** – requested £750 of funding to purchase food to support the community food bank at Barnabas Church. The recent rising costs of living had increased visitors to over 200 people each week. It was established that the Food Bank deliver parcels to outlying villages too.

Councillor Mosley asked if the Community Action Group was applying on behalf of the food bank at Barnabas Church and this was confirmed.

RESOLVED:

That the Food Bank be encouraged to either apply directly for a Community Grant in July 2023 or for a grant from the Local Councillor Grant Fund.

- (b) **Community @ In Good Hands** – requested £1,500 of funding to facilitate two new initiatives: *Singing for Fun and Wellbeing* and *In Good Hands Choir*. Community @ In Good Hands, located in Frankwell, had been running for 10 years and was a community interest company. The two singing groups (of up to 15 people) aimed to improve the wellbeing of participants and engender a strong sense of community. The *In Good Hands Choir* was aimed at adults living with Dementia.

Councillor Mosley asked about advertising. The groups were advertised on social media, but links had been established with carers that accompany individuals and with care homes. The premises were fully accessible.

Councillor Vasmer asked about the residency of participants. They were mostly Frankwell residents but some from the wider area also attended supported by carers. The aim was for people to be able to walk to the centre. The café remained open during the singing sessions.

RESOLVED:

That £900 be awarded to Community @ In Good Hands, but that funding would come from Councillor Dean's Local Councillor Fund offered at the meeting. This was due to it benefitting Frankwell residents in the main. The Town Clerk reported that this would be funded via the Town Council's General Power of Competence.

- (c) **Friends of Copthorne Park** – requested £750 of funding in order to create and install an information board at the Copthorne Park Countryside site. Ahead of this meeting, it was agreed that the Town Council would support this project but that it would be dealt with internally and funds allocated from the revenue budget. Friends of Copthorne Park had agreed to this arrangement and discussions have begun with the Countryside & Greenspace Manager to advance this project.

RESOLVED:

That the Friends of Copthorne Park's project be funded internally from the revenue budget.

- (d) **Friends of Darwin's Walk Pond** – requested £600 of funding in order to conduct surveys of pond wildlife, protein levels, small animals and bats. Ahead of this meeting, it was agreed that the Town Council would support this project but that it would be dealt with internally and funds allocated from the revenue budget. Friends of Darwin's Walk Pond had agreed to this arrangement and discussions have begun with the Head of Operations and the Countryside & Greenspace Manager to advance this project.

RESOLVED:

That the Friends of Darwin's Walk Pond project be funded internally from the revenue budget.

- (e) **Remap Shropshire** – requested £250 towards the design and manufacture of custom-made equipment for people with disabilities. Highly skilled engineers across the county respond to requests from individuals to make bespoke equipment. There was no charge, but some individuals gave a donation of 10% if they can.

Councillor Dean asked if Remap had other sources of funding. Remap originally received a donation from a family which had lasted a long time but that now it was reliant on the optional 10% charge and any grant funding secured.

RESOLVED:

That £250 be awarded to Remap Shropshire. The Town Clerk reported that this would be funded via the Town Council's General Power of Competence.

- (f) **Shrewsbury Amateur Swimming Club** – requested £1,000 to provide 5 tasters/introductory sessions of training and competitive swimming for 9–20-year-olds. After a decrease in numbers due to Covid, numbers were now increasing and these sessions would boost numbers. Further, swimming was an important skill. A grant from Energise had already been received.

Councillor Dartnall asked about fees; these were £16 per month for up to 7 sessions per week.

Councillor Moseley asked about para-swimming. The club did not currently advertise to parents with disabled children specifically, but could do this.

RESOLVED:

That £500 be awarded to Shrewsbury Amateur Swimming Club.

- (g) **The Shrewsbury Ark** – requested £2,000 to help fund necessary training and expenses for volunteers. The Shrewsbury Ark was a day centre and outreach service for the vulnerable, homeless or people in danger of becoming homeless in Shropshire. The recent move to a larger premises had doubled the running costs. 50-60 volunteers needed training and transport.

Councillor Mosley commented that their account looked healthy with a reserve of £50,000. It was revealed that the figures submitted with the application were out of date and that the latest projection was an expenditure of £411,000 for this year leaving a £40-50,000 deficit.

RESOLVED:

That £1,000 be awarded to The Shrewsbury Ark. The Town Clerk reported that this would be funded via the Town Council's General Power of Competence.

- (h) **Shrewsbury Arts Trail** – requested £2,000 to fund an accessible trail of 3 bronze sculptures supported by regional and local artists in exhibitions, workshops and events across the town. The Arts Trail was in its third year and aimed to promote the visual arts and provide opportunity for local artists to exhibit. Grants were sought to improve access to the arts for disadvantaged and minority groups bringing a positive benefit to people's mental health.

Councillor Phillips enquired about previous applications for the Darwin Shrewsbury Trail. The Town Clerk advised members that this had been part of the Big Town Plan discussions at a previous meeting.

Councillor Mosley asked about the £30,000 funding from the Arts Council. The Shrewsbury Arts Trail representative said that this was still pending and that it would only cover transportation, insurance etc of the Darwin sculptures.

RESOLVED:

That £1,000 be awarded to the Shrewsbury Arts Trail.

- (i) **Shrewsbury Cantata Choir** – requested £2,000 to fund a new initiative in bringing choirs in Shrewsbury together for a Shrewsbury Festival Chorus to perform *Elijah* at Abbey Church on 24 June 2023. The Cantata Choir was usually self-funded but concerts were always run at a loss due to the low price of tickets in order to be inclusive. The project was to be part of Shrewsbury Music Festival and would add to the calendar of events taking place in the town. The grant fund was to be used for the orchestral/chorus music scores and for semi-professional musicians.

Councillor Mosley asked how confident the Choir was that the festival would be a success. The Cantata Choir representative said that the four major choirs in Shrewsbury had total confidence that this would be sustainable and had formed a joint committee.

Councillor Wilson asked if there were any liabilities that meant the Choir had to maintain the £10,000 it had listed as savings. Their reply was that this reserve sustained the losses made from year to year.

RESOLVED:

That £500 be awarded to Shrewsbury Cantata Choir.

- (j) **Shrewsbury Food Hub** – requested £2,000 to fund food distribution costs to support the community including volunteers' expenses, transport and surplus food purchasing from FoodShare. The Food Hub was a charity focussed on reducing food waste and worked with many community groups. There were 15 food shares per week for the public and everybody was welcome. There was no charge. Volunteers moved 175 tonnes of food around last year. The venture is good for the planet and the community.

In order to improve the variety of food and nutritious content, the Hub supplemented the food donated by buying food from FoodShare.

Councillor Dartnall asked if the food was surplus. The Hub confirmed that this was the case and that it was obtained from supermarkets, but that Covid and the subsequent rise in cost of living has meant that FoodShare were being used to help meet the demand.

Councillor Mosley clarified that this was an ongoing project and that the Hub were asking for assistance to continue the project.

Councillor Moseley asked if funds were needed to help with fuel costs and this was affirmed.

RESOLVED:

That £1,000 be awarded to the Shrewsbury Food Hub. The Town Clerk reported that this would be funded via the Town Council's General Power of Competence.

- (k) **Shrewsbury Musical Theatre Company** – requested £1,965.46 to support a one-off moveable exhibition of memorabilia and photographs from the past century which would form part of the Centenary celebration of the Company. The Company (formerly Shrewsbury & Atcham Operatic Society) was established in 1923 and put on 1 or 2 shows per year. They were self-sustaining through ticket sales and membership. Performances took place at Theatre Severn and were renowned for its high quality amateur productions. They had also applied for a heritage grant from the National Lottery.

RESOLVED:

That £500 be awarded to Shrewsbury Musical Theatre Company towards the display pods.

- (l) **Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust** – requested £2,000 to cover the insulation costs of its community meeting room. The former station opposite Abbey Church had been derelict but had now been restored. To maximise the use of the building, the community meeting room (capacity of 36) was made available to use for free to community groups. In summer there were 10-12 groups using the space regularly. The room was very cold in winter, however, preventing groups using it during that time; one wall needed insulating.

Councillor Mosley added that he had visited the old station and it was set up for meetings with furniture donated from Shropshire Council and a projector screen etc.

RESOLVED:

That £500 be awarded to Shrewsbury Railway Heritage Trust.

- (m) **Shrewsbury Ramblers** – requested £1,894.22 to write and publish a book of walks by Shrewsbury residents for the benefit of the local community and visitors to the area. The object of the Ramblers was to get people walking to benefit their physical, mental and general wellbeing. Their first book, *20 Walks in and Around Shrewsbury*, was published in 2010 and had sold 10,000 copies. This new book would be a companion to the first and its goals were thought to be consistent with that of the Big Town Plan. It would encourage and promote visitors to the town. The book would be produced by volunteers but the illustrations of maps and the printing would come at a cost; local businesses would be used to provide these services.

Councillor Mosley said that people were increasingly using online resources for walks. The Ramblers replied that what this book provided was simple, concise information about the area which was not readily available online.

Councillor Dartnall asked about the price of the book. This would depend on funding but would be in the region of £5.99 or so. They would look to cover costs ie break even.

RESOLVED:

That £200 be awarded to the Ramblers together with donations from the Local Councillor Grant Funds of Councillor Dartnall £200, Councillor Mosley £300 and Councillor Phillips £500 making a funding total of £1,200.

- (n) **Shrewsbury Repair Cafe** – requested £750 to facilitate residents in repairing and re-using items in order to prevent waste and recycling. This facility was set up nearly 6 years ago creating a community of like-minded individuals who repair items for free and pass on their knowledge to those who visit. It opens every third Saturday in the month with 30-40 items being brought in each time, most of which could be repaired. Numbers of residents using the facility were increasing and it was the only one of its kind in the town.

RESOLVED:

That £750 be awarded to Shrewsbury Repair Café. The Town Clerk reported that this would be funded via the Town Council's General Power of Competence.

Councillor Mosley thanked the representatives of the above organisations for their attendance and presentations, and for answering members' questions. He added that it had been good to hear about so much positive community engagement taking place in Shrewsbury.

94/22 UPDATE ON COMMITTEE AND WORKING GROUP ACTIVITY

The minutes of the last meeting of the Youth Services Working Group were circulated prior to this meeting.

94/1 Youth Services Working Group

The Youth Services Working Group met on 17th November 2022. Councillor Moseley updated members as follows:

- The Youth Forum was progressing, with the first meeting set for March.
- Youth Club attendance was more or less stable.
- Cricket sessions were being progressed.
- 7 students were currently accessing the Alternative Curriculum and doing well.
- The postcode search exercise had been done. Councillor Mosley requested that these be brought to the next meeting.

RESOLVED:

- (i) **That the minutes of the Youth Services Working Group meeting held on 17th November 2022 be noted.**

- (ii) **That the results of the postcode exercise be brought to the next meeting.**

95/22 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 26 November 2022 to 27 January 2023. These had 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 26 November 2022 to 27 January 2023 be approved.

96/22 QUARTER 3 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

Prior to this meeting the Quarter 3 Management Account 2022/23 report was circulated to members together with the Detailed and Consolidated Income and Expenditure Account for the Quarter Ended 31 December 2022.

The RFO made the following observations:

- Overall, for the Quarter there was a positive variance of £7k.
- There was a negative variance for Q3 on expenditure of (£37k) driven primarily by inflation on costs, such as fuel and parts, and timing of spending maintenance budgets.
- Income was £43k higher than budgeted due to inflation which had increased index linked contracts and the interest received due to the recent increases as the rates were barely above 0% when the budget was set.
- The Year To Date picture was very similar, there were no issues from earlier periods once the exceptional income and capital expenditure were discounted.
- Looking forward and to the end of year accounts, the effect of inflation on costs would be mitigated by increases in income.

RESOLVED:

That the Quarter 3 Management Accounts Report be noted.

97/22 INTERNAL AUDITOR

Prior to the meeting, a report on the Effectiveness of Internal Audit was circulated to members.

The RFO added that there were no changes proposed following the visioning exercise and the current plan would continue.

RESOLVED:

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

98/22 TENDER WORK

A report on tendering activity and details on tender progress was circulated to members prior to the meeting.

Councillor Mosley enquired about the costings for projects at Kynaston Road. The Project Manager said that these could be more than expected but would know more after the survey was complete.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

99/22 MARKETS UPDATE

The Markets Update was circulated prior to the meeting together with the National Markets Survey 2022. The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager commented that the Town Council's markets were in a strong position when compared to national markets. It was hoped that better weather would improve the success of the Sunday Market.

The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager was also pleased to announce that Shrewsbury's Market Hall had been voted the winner in this year's Britain's Favourite Market competition. Councillor Vasmer congratulated and thanked officers for this achievement.

The only factor of concern was the state of the canopies which were badly stained despite attempts to clean them; these were in need of recovering or replacing. Councillor Wilson supported the purchase of replacement canopies. The Outdoor Recreation & Assets Manager would investigate costs and report back to a future meeting.

Councillor Mosley asked about the financial position of the Town Council markets and the RFO confirmed that they run at a surplus.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the update be noted.**
- (ii) That all staff and traders be congratulated in achieving the Britain's Favourite Market Award.**

100/22 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

An update on the Capital Programme was circulated prior the meeting and the Town Clerk updated members as follows:

- The upgrades to the new office at **7 St John's Hill** were progressing to plan, time and budget and were overseen by the Project Manager.
- The works for **Kynaston Road Recreation Ground** were just about ready to go out to tender.
- The tender for the multi-wheeled track etc at **Moston Road Recreation Ground** had been awarded and a start date was awaited.

- The upgrades to the building at **Radbrook Road Recreation Ground** for changing facilities hit a shortfall which was to be funded by Fisheries surplus. £20K had been allocated but £30-35K was required. The tender process was to start soon.
- **Monkmoor Tennis Courts Lights** – the invitation to tender was now closed.
- **Beaver Project** – all DEFRA Licences for building the compound and releasing the Beavers were in place as was all the construction funding. This was to go out to tender with a deadline set for March. Partnership working with the Wildlife Trust had been excellent and the Steering Group would be meeting soon.
- The **Bus Shelter** replacement programme had started with the Project Manager overseeing the works. Sedum roof installation was also being progressed.

Councillor Vasmer asked for an update on works on Castlefields Walk Recreation Ground. The Town Clerk replied that the project was not yet ready to go out to tender because specialist external support was required to prove the Town Council would not need an EA licence.

Councillor Dean thanked officers for showing members around the new offices at 7 St John's Hill but queried as to why the first floor was not being insulated in the same way as for the second floor. He requested that a review is scheduled for a year's time to review energy usage.

Councillor Dean also suggested that the name *Livesey House* be given to the Town Council's new offices after the original occupiers. The name for the building was agreed with members and would be included in the application for its unique postcode.

RESOLVED:

- (i) **That the update of the Capital Programme be noted;**
- (ii) **That energy usage at 7 St John's Hill would be revisited in 2024;**
- (iii) **That the name *Livesey House* be given to the new Town Council offices at 7 St John's Hill.**

101/22 RISK MANAGEMENT

The following Town Council papers were circulated to members prior to the meeting:

- (i) Risk Management Strategy
- (ii) Risk Management Action Plan
- (iii) Counter Fraud & Corruption Strategy

The Town Clerk explained to members that every year an assessment of risks to the Council must be undertaken. This was part of the Audit Process which fed into the requirements of the Annual Return. It was broken down into two areas: general assessment of risk and an assessment of potential financial fraud and/or corruption. The Town Clerk was responsible for overseeing the general risk assessment and the RFO was responsible for undertaking the financial risk.

To assess the Council's general risks, a piece of software called the Local Council Risk Service was used; this software was bespoke to Parish and Town Councils. Every year the Council uploads its service delivery, the kind of risks faced in carrying out its services and the

likelihood and severity of those risks if they were to happen. Following this, control measures are uploaded, and the likelihood and severity of risks was run again. The system then looked at whether additional action needed to be taken and an action plan produced. It also produced various checklists that staff used to control risk.

The Town Clerk had circulated the Action Plan to all members of the Council. Big risks for the Town Council remained involving anti-social behaviour (ASB) and its potential risks to both the public and staff. She added that whilst measures were in place to control such risks the Council was subject to matters outside its control. Coronavirus also remained a risk albeit the severity reduced. Councillor Phillips questioned the inclusion of Covid and the Town Clerk explained that it was still a live risk, particularly in closed sites.

The Town Clerk commended the Town Council's approach to risk management to the Committee for approval.

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 the Council approves the actions within the Risk Management Action Plan.**

102/22 INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Town Council's Annual Investment Strategy 2023/24 was circulated to members prior to the meeting. The RFO drew members' attention to Appendix A of the document which listed the security, liquidity and the return on investments.

RESOLVED:

That the Investment Strategy for the financial year 2023/24 be accepted.

103/22 LAND TRANSFER FROM SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL

The Town Clerk reported that she had met with solicitors and had had follow-up meetings with the Head of Estates, Shropshire Council. The Town Clerk confirmed that she had submitted comments on the draft lease for review by the Head of Estates as he suggested, rather than toing and froing between solicitors. The Head of Estates intimated that he was amenable to ensuring that the lease would work well for the Town Council operationally.

Freehold for all the land was blocked by the Director of Place and therefore it will be a long-term lease without encumbrances. However, there were encumbrances, and these were being discussed.

Councillor Wilson asked if he and Councillor Vasmer could meet with the Director of Place to get this long running issue resolved because in the meantime areas like Shorncliffe Drive and Monkmoor recreation grounds were deteriorating. The Town Clerk said that there were difficulties with getting the lease together because places like Reabrook have about 20 different Land Registry titles.

RESOLVED:

That the update be accepted.

104/22CLOSING REMARKS

Councillor Mosley concluded the meeting by thanking Councillors, Town Council staff and any members of the public who had been listening to the proceedings.