

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee  
Held in Council Chamber, Shirehall  
At 6.00pm on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

**PRESENT**

Councillors: A Mosley (Chair), R Dartnall, J Dean, N Green, P Moseley, A Phillips, R Wilson, M Davies and C Lemon

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Stuart Farmer (Acting Up as Operations Manager and Project Manager), Mike Cox (Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

**1/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**RESOLVED:**

**That apologies be accepted from Councillor Vasmer.**

**2/23 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 Green	Declared a prejudicial interest in Item 11/23 Markets Update

**3/23 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS**

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings held on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023 were submitted and circulated as read.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings held on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.**

**4/23 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

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

**Minute 118/22 E-Cargo Bikes** – the Shropshire Cycle Hub was currently sourcing bikes and the Deputy Town Clerk was in the process of drawing up an agreement.

**Minute 119/22 Tender for the Beaver Works** – Adam Clifford, from the Countryside Team, met with Severn Trent Water and the Shropshire Wildlife Trust. This resulted in the funding award being increased; the money allocated from the last meeting was to be kept as a contingency for worst case scenario.

**Minute 122/22 Hencote** – as agreed, a letter was sent to Shropshire Council to which a reply had been received by the Town Council, which had been circulated to all councillors.

**Minute 124/22 Visioning** – additional dates had been added to members' diaries.

Councillor Dartnell enquired when the E-Cargo bikes would be ready for use? The Deputy Town Clerk reassured that once the bikes were sourced for purchase the venture will be up and running soon after.

Councillor Lemon proposed that Shropshire Council's response to the letter on the development at Hencote be examined in detail at the next available meeting of the Planning Committee.

Councillor Mosley advised that he had circulated to members the notes made at the meeting between councillors on the matter of Greenfields.

## **5/23 PAYMENT SCHEDULES**

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April to 26<sup>th</sup> May 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 1<sup>st</sup> April and 26<sup>th</sup> May 2023 be approved.**

## **6/23 PREPARATION FOR THE END OF YEAR ACCOUNTS**

The RFO presented the Annual Report and Draft Accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, copies of which had been distributed prior to the meeting. The following documents were included:

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

The Annual Report pages 1-9 detailed the activity of the Council and provided a financial comparison for the year compared to the budget.

The RFO explained that overall the position was better than budgeted and better than expected, and that this had generated a surplus.

The RFO summarised as follows:

### **Budget Comparison**

- Income was skewed by grants and S106/CIL of £693k. There was still a positive variance of £335k due to favourable interest rates, markets and concessions.
- Expenses had increased quarterly as reported but there was some positive variance of budget due to strict monitoring and unreplaced staff.
- Overall there was a small surplus of £1,270, but in reality this was higher due to some budgets not used and amounts earmarked. Whilst anticipating a surplus, with interest rates rocketing, and some expenditure not being incurred, such as winter maintenance, it meant a higher surplus.

There were no changes to the Statement of Accounting Policies per pages 10-13.

The Annual Governance Statement on page 14-20 listed the 6 six core principles by which the Council operated and how compliance had been achieved. The 8 assertions in the Annual Return were also listed with detail on how the Council complied and how they were tied into the Annual Return. The Statement was to be signed as approved by the Mayor and the Town Clerk. The Statement of Responsibilities for the Accounts was to be signed by the RFO.

The RFO brought members' attention to the 3 items listed under Assertion 8 Significant Events on page 20. The significant events listed were:

- (i) Proceedings brought against Shropshire Council by Dr Day in relation to the dispute over the sale of land at Greenfields for which a resolution was still being sought.
- (ii) The impact on the Council of significant flooding of the River Severn.
- (iii) The retirement of Head of Operations for which existing staff were temporarily covering whilst a review of operational arrangements were being undertaken.

### **Income and Expenditure Account**

There was a deficit of £21,541 due to capital expenditure ie Livesey House which was treated as revenue, and S106/CIL treated as income. Most years this fluctuated between large surplus/(deficit) by items classed as non-revenue in normal accounting treatment.

### **Statement of Movement of reserves**

The movement of net reserves was self-explanatory; earmarked reserves were explored later; capital financing represented fixed asset movements.

## **Balance Sheet**

There was a slight decrease in working capital, ie net current assets, and an increase in fixed assets due to Livesey House.

Councillor Mosley reminded members that the Mayoral car had been sold and that an electric vehicle was now being leased.

## **Notes to the Accounts**

The RFO said that part of the Redfern Report recommended that he consider ringfencing the Greenfields' receipt. The RFO reported that he had considered this but has decided against it. As previously stated, receipts in Rule 19 could only be spent on capital projects, and the Council are committed to buying back the land.

## **Earmarked reserves**

There was lots of movement to try and simplify all the funds as some were similar (eg snow equipment moved up to equipment). Last year some earmarking was brought forward to help this year's budget and this had subsequently increased the amount to earmark this year. During the year, nearly £1m was spent as seen by use of reserves. Other than the budgeted amounts, the RFO brought members' attention to the following figures:

- £150k – Bus shelter phase 2 (following on from success of phase 1 and requests for more)
- £168k – Visioning and future projects (some of this could be for Greenfields if required)
- £40k – Public safety including Quarry (to fund security when SSS4 runs out)

Regarding the current financial year, the precept had been increased, and the inflationary pressures faced were still valid, with costs increasing and unknowns such as salary increases. Whereby last year savings were made by not replacing some leavers, this would not be able to continue, and the Town Council was currently recruiting.

Regarding queries on improvements in wards, the Neighbourhood Fund could not be used for this expenditure but must come from existing resources. If it transpired that there was some free budget when looking at 24/25 in the autumn, then it could be used as a generic pot to be spent on improvements as a separate part of normal service provision.

Councillor Phillips thanked the RFO for all his work on preparing the accounts. Concerning Greenfields, he asked if the £614,000 from the sale of the land in 2016 included interest. The RFO replied that there was no provision of interest in this figure and that any interest accrued was credited to the general account.

Councillor Phillips also asked that, given the country's current financial situation, was the budget now more positive than it was a few months previous? The RFO said that the Town Council did have some other pressures (eg staffing) and that it was difficult to predict what the wage inflation might be, and this may result in an adverse variance, but overall the position should be better than budgeted.

Councillor Roberts remarked that it was outstanding that, after the last 12 months, the accounts had a positive variance. She welcomed the comments on the earmarked reserves. Councillor Dartnall also expressed her thanks for the accounts and the explanations.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- (i) That End of Year Accounts for the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, incorporating the following be approved:**
  - a. Annual Report**
  - b. Statement of Accounting Policies**
  - c. Annual Governance Statement**
  - d. Income & Expenditure Account**
  - e. Statement of Movement of Reserves**
  - f. Balance Sheet**
  
- (ii) That the Annual Return for the Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 be approved and forwarded to the External Auditor for unqualified audit.**

**7/23 INTERNAL AUDITOR**

It was noted that the Internal Auditor was not due to sign off the final audit of the 2022/23 accounts until mid-June. Consideration of the final audit report was to be deferred to Full Council on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2023.

The RFO reported that the Internal Auditor had completed the internal audit and that there was nothing to report. The report would be brought to Full Council as planned. The Internal Auditor had also completed the necessary page of AGAR.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the sign-off of the final audit of the 2022/23 accounts by the Internal Auditor in mid-June be noted.**
- (ii) That the final audit report would be deferred to Full Council on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2023.**

**8/23 UPDATE ON COMMITTEE & WORKING GROUP ACTIVITY**

It was noted that the Youth Working Group on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023 and 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023, and the Civics Working Group on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2023 were inquorate and did not take place so no minutes were tabled.

Councillor Mosley asked members to consider how relevant these working groups now were and proposed that both the Youth Working Group and the Civics Working Group be disbanded with reports on both made to the Finance & General Purposes Committee. Councillor Moseley, as Chair of the Youth Working Group, agreed with this suggestion.

Councillor Wilson also agreed that the working group and committee structure be reviewed adding that there were 114 committee places for only 17 councillors. He asked if anything would be missed by the Youth and Civics working groups reporting to this committee. The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk replied in the negative. Andy Hall, the Youth &

Community Manager, would be asked to submit a report on youth services to this committee in future.

Councillor Dartnall said that some of the working groups had a natural lifespan and suggested that the groups be reviewed on an annual basis. She agreed with the abandonment of the Youth and Civics working groups.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Youth Working Group and Civics Working Group be disbanded and reports on activities be submitted to the Finance & General Purposes Committee.**

## **9/23 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

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

- **Livesey House** - the project to develop the Town Centre headquarters was now complete except for a few snagging issues with the building and the IT in the Council Chamber (which was to be installed on Thursday).
- **The Cycle Map** – this was drawn up by City ID and was to go to print shortly. The Town Council had submitted its comments.
- **Memorial Repairs** – there had been an impasse between conservation officers and stonemasons on what was recommended but the situation had now been resolved and a contractor appointed.
- **Castlewalk Nature Trail** – the plans had been signed off and the Countryside Team were to start work.
- **Kynaston Wheeled Track** – the contract was awarded but there was no start date yet.
- **Kynaston Play Area** – tenders had been received and were under review.
- **Kynaston Drainage** – the project had a preferred tenderer.
- **Radbroke Rec Brick Building Upgrades** – staff had met with clubs and a schedule of works was being drawn up.
- **Monkmoor Rec Tennis Court Lighting** – a start date was still awaited.
- **Quarry Working Group** – the Group had recently met, and proposals were to be considered at the next Recreation & Leisure Committee Meeting. The Town Clerk added that she had had a discussion with LDA re undertaking some feasibility work, and that she would report back on this when the proposals were definitive.
- **Shorncliffe Rec** – discussions with Redkite had taken place re kickstarting feasibility work. A few surveys were required and these were being costed.
- **Beaver Project** – the contract had been awarded. A request for additional funds had been put forward to this Committee from the Project Manager. The Countryside Manager had met with Severn Trent Water to present the project; this was such a success that additional funding had been offered.
- **Dana Path** – a meeting took place on site with Shropshire Horticultural Society (SHS) and Shropshire Council. Shropshire Council were content for the Town Council to progress with the project management and they would obtain the legal aspects and necessary planning permissions. The SHS were to contribute to some planting to enhance the border adjacent to the wall.
- **Bus Shelters** – the first phase of the project had been completed using the funds available.

Councillor Mosley requested that the Quarry Working Group see the report (above) before it went public in case another meeting was required or to make any approvals/amendments.

Councillor Mosley asked if there was a start date for the work on the Dana Path. The Project Manager said he was drawing up the tender schedule but that planning permission was also required. This would need approval before any works started.

Councillor Moseley asked for progress on the Upton Lane Play Area. This was being put out to tender and would be live shortly.

Councillor Wilson remarked that members would need to look at what funds were available to do the work at Shorncliffe.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the update of the Capital Programme be noted.**

## **10/23 TENDER WORK**

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

The Project Manager highlighted the following:

- **Kynaston Road drainage** – this tender had been awarded and a September start date was being discussed with the preferred tenderer.
- **Monkmoor tennis lighting** – contactors have been contacted again and a start date was awaited.
- **Upton Lane Play Area** – the tender documentation had been delayed as a tender for the play area at Kynaston Road was live at the time.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

*Councillor Green left the meeting.*

*Councillor Mosley left the meeting*

*Councillor Moseley took over as Chair*

## **11/23 MARKETS UPDATE**

The Markets Update was circulated prior to the meeting. The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager updated members on the car boot sale that was held at Shrewsbury Football Ground and how it had advertised that it was including fruit and vegetable stalls. Ultimately, the turnout of visitors was very poor, but staff would continue to monitor the situation.

The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager reported that one of the catering traders had expressed an interest to leave the Market Hall due to the business expanding. Councillor Moseley asked if it would need to be replaced by another caterer? Any applications from food outlets would be favourably looked upon but the vacancy would be filled either way.

Councillor Wilson asked for an update on the replacement canopies. The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager said that replacements were still planned.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

*Councillor Green re-joined the meeting.*

*Councillor Mosley re-joined the meeting*

*Councillor Moseley continued to Chair*

## **12/23 BUS SHELTERS**

A report updating members on Bus Shelters was circulated prior to the meeting. The Project Manager added that the display cases for bus timetables had been missed off the original bus shelter installations and that these now required to be retro installed. The locations of bus shelters for the phase 2 instalment would be based on user numbers.

Councillor Dartnall asked what the timescale was for the installation of the display cases for timetables as residents had been contacting her about them; their absence was discouraging for people wanting to use the bus services. The Project Manager said that the cases were in stock so would be fitted shortly but advised that the timetables themselves would be displayed by Shropshire Council. Councillor Wilson asked the Project Manager to write to Shropshire Council as soon as they were installed so that timetables could be distributed as soon as possible; the Project Manager agreed. Councillor Moseley enquired whether the cases would be lockable. The Project Manager said that they would be as standard ie that the timetables simply slide in.

Councillor Lemon thanked the Project Manager for his report and was pleased to see that shelters along Bank Farm Road were included in Phase 2. He asked about a concern raised previously that some routes were under risk (eg Radbrook) and that others might become 'on demand' services. The Project Manager said that existing bus shelters on these routes would be replaced if its bus service continued to run.

Councillor Dean asked how many of the bus shelters were suitable for sedum roofs? The Project Manager confirmed that the majority of the shelters would be able to accommodate them.

Councillor Dartnall asked whether the Shrewsbury Town Council name would be added to the second tranche of installations as this had been discussed at the last meeting. The Project Manager said that this was being considered and solutions being investigated.

Councillor Wilson asked if some of the bus shelters in the Town Centre did *not* belong to the Town Council? The Project Manager said that these would not yet be replaced in case the proposals were at odds with any changes to the Town Centre under The Big Town Plan.

Councillor Wilson also asked, considering recent vandalism of the glass in some new bus shelters, whether the Town Council was insured against this. The RFO responded that the Town Council self-insured bus shelters and would continue to pay for any repairs as they occurred.



Councillor Lemon enquired if the number of users for individual shelters was known? The Project Manager said that numbers were calculated from knowledge obtained unofficially. Councillor Mosley asked if a new shelter could only be installed where there was an existing shelter or if one could be installed where there was a bus stop that was used more heavily? The Project Manager replied that replacing a bus stop with a bus shelter would require planning permission and public consultation which was a long process that Highways would also have to approve.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the report be noted;**
- (ii) That £150k Budget be to allocated for Phase 2 replacement of shelters;**
- (iii) That £6,155.25 Budget be allocated to install display cases in existing shelters;**
- (iv) That officers continue to work with the existing supplier.**

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