

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
Held in Committee Room, Livesey House
At 7.00pm on Monday 4th December 2023**

PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Stuart Farmer (Acting Operations Manager), Danny Powell (Acting Operations Manager), Mike Cox (Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager), Andy Hall (Youth & Community Manager) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

45/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

That apologies be accepted from Councillors Green and Wilson.

46/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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| Shropshire Councillors | Those twin-hatted members declared a personal interest in any matters relating to the Town Council's relationship with Shropshire Council. |
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47/23 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings held on 11th September 2023 were submitted and circulated as read.

Councillor Dartnall referred to Min 41/23 to request an amendment to the final paragraph. The first sentence should have read that the lottery funding due to expire in 2024 was for SAND, not Pride. The second sentence should have read that it was Councillor Dartnall, not the Town Clerk, who had brought attention to the fact that, irrespective of whether funding is secured or not, the needs associated with the SAND campaign would still be important.

RESOLVED:

That upon the above amendment to Min 41/23, the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 11th September 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

48/23 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

There were no matters arising.

49/23 DITHERINGTON COMMUNITY CENTRE

The Director of Sport, Health & Community at The Marches Academy Trust, George Hounsell, was invited to the meeting to update members on Ditherington Community Centre; it had not recovered since the Covid pandemic and had been left largely unused and outdated in its facilities.

The site was now being managed by the 4 All Foundation which was part of The Marches Academy Trust. The 4 All Foundation's Annual Report 2022/23 was circulated prior to the meeting giving further information on the organisation, including its values and governance, and Mr Hounsell gave a presentation.

The Foundation was a charity and therefore able to apply for large grants to run funded programmes in community centres; similar programmes were being run in conjunction with other Town Councils. It aimed to offer activities at no cost to those attending and to work with the local community; members of the local community had already visited and had taken an interest in the Centre's re-establishment. Mr Hounsell also confirmed that funding had recently been secured for organising activities for the older generation eg creating a warm hub, bingo, etc.

Significant improvements had been made to the décor and structure of the Community Centre to get it ready for use. The outside space was also quite large and had a lot of useful potential. Mr Hounsell said he would welcome any ideas from councillors and invited them to look around the Centre.

Mr Hounsall added that a similar centre in Market Drayton was run by a community steering group and he envisaged that this could be the future for Ditherington. The 4 All Foundation were already working with local groups and with the Youth & Community Manager and team. Councillor Dartnall praised the activities already being run and asked about possible links with other locations. Mr Hounsall said that the charity had a separate Board of Trustees and that it was therefore free to work wherever there was a need. Councillor Bentick said that his ward, Meole Brace, had some pockets of deprivation and could benefit from some funded activities, particularly for youngsters, and that there were facilities available for this. One such facility, the Meet Place, was putting in a second bid for charity status. Councillor Bentick was to contact Mr Hounsall separately to discuss.

Councillor Mosley and the Deputy Town Clerk thanked Mr Hounsall for his presentation and praised the amount of work that had been done at Ditherington in such a short space of time. Having a public building being put to good use for the community in this part of the town was a great benefit. She added that Shrewsbury Town Council was supplying the cleaning for this building from its existing service.

50/23 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 5th September to 27th November 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 5th September to 27th November 2023 be approved.

51/23 QUARTER 2 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated a report to appraise members of the financial position of the Council for the second quarter of the 2023/24 financial year, and the half year to date position which, overall, was positive.

The RFO highlighted that there was an overall positive variance of £86,835 compared to the budget as shown on the detailed and consolidated Income & Expenditure account report (also circulated).

Expenditure had a negative variance for Quarter 2 of (£55,195) driven primarily by the provision of the pay award which was subsequently agreed and not included in Quarter 1. The pay agreement was £1,950 per employee regardless of grading and equated to a pay increase of between 3.88% to 9.4%.

There was a positive variance on the income received of £142,030. This was higher than budgeted due to unbudgeted income of £53k coupled with increasing returns of £52k.

The year to date position was an overall positive although expenditure was slightly over at (£19k) and income was £559k better; of this £428k was not revenue and primarily consisted of Neighbourhood Fund and Section 106.

Looking ahead, the current effect of decreasing inflation on costs was uncertain. The expenditure budget was on track and there was surplus on the income side due to investments and returns.

RESOLVED:

That the Quarter 2 Management Accounts report be noted and accepted.

52/23 BUDGET PROPOSALS

A report on Budget Proposals was circulated to members prior to the meeting. The RFO explained that the forecast outturn forms the basis of the budget.

- (i) **General Principles** - In January a draft budget would need to be produced and the Quarter 2 accounts would form part of this process.

The Chancellor's Autumn Statement had contained nothing of particular note for the Town Council. However, the RFO pointed out that any impact on Shropshire Council could impact the Town Council. Security coverage in The Quarry was coming to an end and would require a budget in 2024/25.

Inflationary pressures would be applied as a 5% increase for general costs and the pay award agreed nationally.

There was also a need to consider an increase in the precept going forward.

- (ii) **Fees & Charges** - The proposed fees & charges were circulated prior to the meeting for information.
- (iii) **Capital Programme** - Councillor Bentick raised the issue of the maintenance work at Church Road Recreation area at a cost of £19,750 that had previously been brought to the Recreation & Leisure Committee. Councillor Mosley said that this would be taken into account for 2024/25. The RFO added that this work would be on the Visioning list, the process of which was nearing completion. The Deputy Town Clerk said that a resolution on Greenfields needed to come before a detailed action plan for Visioning could be drawn up.

Councillor Mosley made members aware that the future of the Service Level Agreement with Shropshire Council was still uncertain.

The RFO was thanked for meeting with Councillors informally to explain the budgeting processes.

(iv) **Recommendations from Recreation & Leisure Committee**

(a) Quarry Feasibility Proposal - The Town Clerk said that the feasibility brief for The Quarry was to be circulated to members and then returned to the Finance & General Purposes Committee in January. She added that the Town Council would be working alongside Shropshire Council on works associated with The Big Town Plan and that meetings were taking place.

(b) White Lining Machine - Members had received a link to a website on the workings and benefits of an automated white lining machine for sports pitches. The Town Clerk said that its purchase, if approved, would come from earmarked reserves for the fleet budget.

The Town Council had 64 sports pitches and the machine would reduce staff time spent on marking white lines by 46% giving an opportunity for increased staff time on other tasks. The Acting Operations Manager, Danny Powell, added that the route for the robotic marker was plotted on a tablet and took only 24 minutes, as opposed to the current 3 hours, or 8 hours when marking out one of the 23 8-lane running tracks. It would store pitch layouts too allowing them to be accurately marked out again without further plotting. In addition, it could mark out other designs eg a poppy in The Quarry or spaces for car parking.

Councillor Vasmer asked to where the surplus staff time would be diverted. The Town Clerk referred members to the recent Recreation & Leisure Committee meeting where seasonal changes becoming more unpredictable were discussed and the impact this had on using staff time.

Councillor Dean remarked that the device sounded good but expressed his concern that it could be hacked.

Councillor Dean asked about the relationship between Visioning and The Big Town Plan/Riverside development. The Town Clerk said that the land outside the old medical practice fell under Town Council. Shropshire Council was seeking

discussions with the Town Council to transfer this land into a larger land holding owned by the unitary authority

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the general principles implications be noted and agreed;**
- (ii) That the Fees & Charges as recommended by the Recreation & Leisure and Finance & General Purpose Committees be approved;**
- (iii) That a feasibility brief for The Quarry be approved;**
- (iv) That the purchase out of the existing Fleet Reserve of an automated white lining machine for sports pitches is approved**

53/23 INTERNAL AUDITOR

The report of the Internal Auditor was circulated to members prior to the meeting and the RFO confirmed that no issues yet had been raised.

RESOLVED:

That the Internal Auditor's Interim Report for the 2023/24 financial year be noted.

54/23 TENDER WORK

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

The Project Manager updated members that the contractors had now left the site of the Old Riverbed Project and would return in the New Year; metal work for the gates etc was awaited but works should be completed by end January. The walkway around the site was now open and had been well received.

With regard to works to the Play Areas at both the Kynaston Road Recreation Ground and Upton Lane Recreation Ground, the Project Manager reported that work by the play contractors had been hampered by the saturated ground after periods of heavy rainfall.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

55/23 MARKETS

The Markets Update was circulated prior to the meeting. The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager added that some new traders had joined the market and that they were very proactive with customers. With regard to the Sunday Market, business had been compromised by the snow.

Councillor Dean asked how the market was currently being managed. The Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk were having ongoing discussions with the Head of Estates at Shropshire Council.

The Deputy Town Clerk said that this was the last meeting that Mike Cox, the Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager, would be attending as he was retiring. Councillor Mosley congratulated him for his contribution to the work of Shrewsbury Town Council and Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council over the years and wished him well in his retirement.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

56/23 YOUTH ACTIVITIES

A report on the Youth Service and its recent activities was circulated prior to the meeting. The Youth & Community Manager drew attention to the following:

- Schools had been visited to promote the activities in the youth clubs over the Christmas period.
- Young Shrewsbury had teamed up with the detached team of Shropshire Youth to deliver mixed martial arts sessions at the Lantern. Unfortunately, poor behaviour meant that it was cancelled and that football sessions at the Sports Village were now being planned.
- Young Shrewsbury celebrated Youth Work Week in November.
- No HAF activities would be organised over the Christmas break due to lack of staff availability over the Christmas break.
- There were 9 young people on the Alternative Curriculum programme and it was hoped that there would soon be 4 more.
- The Stay Safe flyer had been distributed. Young Shrewsbury had been visiting schools and youth organisations to promote the youth offer and share the vital information on the Stay Safe campaign.
- Following the tragic death of the 4 boys from the Shrewsbury College, The Town Council's Youth Workers and Town Rangers teamed up with colleagues from the Shropshire Youth team to deploy detached teams onto the town's streets and College sites to offer support to young people and the wider community, offering advice and guidance.

The Youth & Community Manager asked members to display a poster (distributed) advertising the Girls' Friendly Society that was now accommodated at Castlefields Community Centre.

Councillor Moseley enquired about youth provision at Monkmoor following the closure of the SYA Building pending re-development. The Youth & Community Manager said that delivery had been expanded at Monkmoor Recreation and that a detached team had been deployed for Thursday evenings from 5-8pm while there was no accommodation available. He added that it was successful and that the local knowledge the youth team was gaining was invaluable; it was hoped that anti-social behaviour in the area might decrease.

Councillor Dean asked if there were any opportunities for making links with Shropshire Supports Refugees as Councillor Gillam had visited recently and found that they organised a lot of youth activities. He suggested that they could have representation on the Youth Council. The Youth & Community Manager said it would be advantageous to have links across the board and that this could be pursued.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

57/23 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

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

- **Beaver Project** – this was progressing (see the Tender Work report above).
- **Kynaston Road Rec drainage** – work had started but progress was slow due to saturated ground after unusually long and heavy rainfall.
- **Kynaston Play Area** – work was delayed until the ground dried out.
- **Quarry War Memorial** – this was to start after Remembrance.
- **County Grounds Pavilion** – a meeting had taken place with the Cricket Club.
- **Wakeman Sports Field** – the Shrewsbury Colleges Group was retaining this field as a College asset. Councillor Mosley said that it was unfortunate that the Town Council could not now purchase the land as an additional amenity space for residents.

RESOLVED:

That the update of the Capital Programme be noted.

58/23 CLIMATE FRESK SHREWSBURY GRANT PROPOSAL

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that a grant request had been submitted to the Climate Emergency & Nature Recovery Committee but had to be brought to the Finance & General Purposes Committee to consider, as there was no provision in the Committee to consider grant applications

Councillor Mosley asked that it be submitted as a Community Grant to be considered at the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting in February and so that it was considered alongside other community grant applications. He also declared an interest due to knowing the person who had submitted the grant.

RESOLVED:

That the Climate Fresk Shrewsbury Grant Proposal be referred to the Community Grant process.

59/23 CLOSING REMARKS

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