

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee  
Held in Committee Room, Livesey House  
At 6.00pm on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

**PRESENT**

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

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Andy Hall (Youth & Community Manager), Stuart Farmer (Acting Operations Manager) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

**68/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

**RESOLVED:**

**That apologies be accepted from Councillors Dartnall and Green.**

**69/23 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.
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**70/23 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024 were submitted and circulated as read.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meetings held on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.**

**71/23 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

There were no matters arising.

**72/23 GRANTS**

**72.1 Update on Community Grants and Councillor Grants Funds**

The RFO circulated the current list of Community Grants and Local Councillor Grants awarded to date. Community Grant Applications this round totalled £9,720 with £6,650 funds available giving a shortfall of £3,070. However, prior to this meeting, a

number of councillors had agreed to contribute some of their Local Councillor grant funds to help cover this.

## **72.2 Applications for Community Grants Funds**

Representatives from organisations that had applied for funding were present at the meeting and were welcomed by the Chair; there were 11 attendees in total. Each were asked in turn to give a brief overview of their application and answer any questions from members.

- (a) **Shrewsbury & Oswestry Crucial Crew 2024 (presented by Maelor Owen & Geof Profitt)** – requested £1,000 of funding to help cover the costs of putting on the Crucial Crew event this year. The event had reached its 30<sup>th</sup> year and the organisation was in line for the Lord Lieutenant’s Voluntary Service Award.

There were no questions from members.

**RESOLVED:**

**That £1,000 be awarded to Shrewsbury & Oswestry Crucial Crew 2024.**

- (b) **Community Council of Shropshire operating as Community Resource (presented by Stacey Teece)** – requested £2,000 of funding to support the Dementia Care & Share and the Musketeers & Maidens groups which were both facing shortfalls in funding due to increases in costs (eg rents, volunteers and activities). The Musketeers & Maidens was a physical disability group that provided tailored sessions to foster community and improve wellbeing.

Councillor Davies asked where the group was based. Community Resource was based at Shrewsbury Business Park and the groups met at St Peter’s Church and The Grange Centre (for which they were given a charity hire rate from the Town Council).

Councillor Mosley asked how they would ensure they were sustainable for next year. Stacey Teece replied that funds were constantly being sought and that they always sought to keep costs as low as possible.

**RESOLVED:**

**That £2,000 be awarded to Community Resource.**

- (c) **MakeSpace Arts & Well-Being CIC Ltd (presented by Jancis and James Smith)** – requested £2,000 of funding to refurbish the pedestrian street entrance to the English Bridge Workshop (a place for art exhibitions and activities). MakeSpace had applied for a community asset transfer of the building which needs approximately £1M of work. In the meantime, they were applying for funds for small projects like the pedestrian entrance that needed to be made more accessible and inviting.

Councillor Wilson asked if they had applied for funds elsewhere. Jancis Smith explained that they couldn’t apply for major funding until the lease was theirs. Councillor Mosley asked if they had been given planning permission for the

entrance changes but, as the building was not listed, the changes would be permissible.

**RESOLVED:**

**That £2,000 be awarded to MakeSpace Arts & Well-Being CIC Ltd.**

- (d) The Shrewsbury Ark (presented by Emily Bell)** – requested £1,000 of funding to fund the transport required for the Make Sport Work activity. It had been a difficult year for the Ark, which had to close for a period of time due to anti-social behaviour issues. A new system was now in place and was currently only open for rough sleepers. Funding had been secured for clients to attend a Make Sport Work project (which promised to improve maths through exercise) but transport costs still needed to be covered.

Councillor Moseley asked how maths skills were improved through exercise. Emily Bell replied that the exercise improved the ability of neuro-diverse people to focus enabling them to concentrate better and therefore improve maths skills.

**RESOLVED:**

**That £1,000 be awarded to The Shrewsbury Ark.**

- (e) Shrewsbury Summer Season Ltd (presented by Katy Rink)** – requested £880 of funding to help fund an exhibition celebrating Martin Wood who was now in his 40<sup>th</sup> year as Town Crier. Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery were allowing the balcony to be used for the exhibition free of charge. Links had also been made with the Food Festival. A portrait of Martin Wood, the tallest and almost longest serving Town Crier in the World, was to be displayed amongst lots of other exhibits and the history of the Town Crier in Shrewsbury. It was hoped that the exhibition would gain national attention as well as entice visitors to Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery. Private sponsorship was also being sought and the more funding secured would mean more could be done, for example a dress-up corner for children.

**RESOLVED:**

**That £880 be awarded to Shrewsbury Summer Season Ltd.**

- (f) Shropshire Youth Association (presented by Claire Purcell & Kerry Williams)** – requested £1,290 of funding to rebuild the outside area (All Together Outdoor Space) at its new headquarters which was to be ready in May. The funds were for purchasing large vegetable trugs (accessibly for wheelchairs), compost, tools, seeds/bulbs, trees and gloves. The space was to be used by all the groups that used the Centre.

Councillor Mosley commented that the Town Council's Nursery had access to many of the items requested and could buy these at a lower price and also offer advice. The Youth & Community Manager said that he had sourced items for the kitchen garden at The Grange Centre at a reduced cost. The Town Clerk said

that the Town Council could fulfil this request within its existing resources and that the Bloom Committee would also be able to help with the funding.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Town Council provide the items listed in the Shropshire Youth Association's application (including the large accessible trug planters, compost, seeds, apple trees and planters, tools and gloves). These would be provided using existing resources and the Bloom Committee instead of the Community Grants Fund.**

- (g) Cricket Shropshire Board (presented by Chris Childs)** – requested £550 of funding to help fund indoor cricket activities during the winter. Chris Childs was a volunteer for Shropshire Supports Refugees and regularly met up with refugees currently housed at The Lion Hotel and had been endeavouring to find activities for these men to improve not only their physical and mental wellbeing but to enable them to connect with the local community.

Councillor Mosley commented that an hour a week did not seem very much for this activity.

**RESOLVED:**

**That £550 be awarded to the Cricket Shropshire Board.**

- (h) Foodbank PLUS (Barnabas Community Projects) (presented by Karen Williams)** – requested £1,000 of funding to purchase and distribute air fryers and electric blankets to those in need. Karen Williams explained that air fryers were a much cheaper cooking appliance and that the electric blankets helped offset people's heating costs by heating the person as opposed to a whole house.

Councillor Mosley commented that he had not previously realised that the Foodbank's services went beyond supplying food for those in need.

**RESOLVED:**

**That £1,000 be awarded to Foodbank PLUS.**

The RFO said that there was a shortfall of £552 after removing the funding request from the Shropshire Youth Association as above. After some discussion, it was decided that this shortfall be covered using Local Councillor grant funds that some councillors had left over. Councillors Gillam and Lemon had already given permission to use some of their funds to cover a shortfall. The RFO added that Councillor Phillips had more than £750 left in his Local Councillor Grant Fund and that this would therefore be rolled over into the Community Grant Fund for next financial year.

Councillor Mosley thanked all the Community Grant representatives for their presentations and asked them to please recognise Shrewsbury Town Council in any publicity.

*All Community Grants Fund representatives left the meeting.*

## **73/23 YOUTH ACTIVITIES**

The Youth & Community Manager circulated a report on youth activities and club statistics prior to the meeting and said that all the youth sessions were back up and running since Christmas. One major change was that Sundorne Youth Club was to move to Ditherington Community Centre after February half-term. All those attending the club at Sundorne were happy to move to Ditherington which was also in a better catchment position. The club at Sundorne had been poorly attended. Also, resources could be combined with the Marches Trust and rent at Sundorne saved.

The Youth & Community Manager also reported the following:

- A bid for HAF had been submitted for the Easter (2 weeks) and Summer (4 weeks) school holidays; these activities were to take place at the Grange Centre and Monkmoor clubs.
- A meeting had taken place with Amanda Jones (Shropshire Supports Refugees) to plan how Young Shrewsbury might work with young refugees in helping with their integration into the local community and accessing free youth provision.
- There were currently 8 people accessing Alternative Curriculum.
- The Stay Safe Campaign was to take place on 18<sup>th</sup> May in The Quarry and it was hoped that this would be an annual event. Other agencies were keen to offer their support.

Councillor Vasmer asked if the issues with booking onto HAF had been resolved and the Youth & Community Manager confirmed that Shropshire Council had now allowed bookings via telephone and email.

Councillor Mosley asked how the youth team were working with Shropshire Council's team. The Youth & Community Manager said that they had been in close contact and had undertaken some training together recently, and that it was useful to share information on the young people they worked with.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

## **74/23 PAYMENT SCHEDULES**

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023 to 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024. 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 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023 to 29<sup>th</sup> January 2024 be approved.**

## **75/23 QUARTER 3 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS**

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated a report to appraise members of the financial position of the Council for the third quarter of the 2023/24 financial year. There was an overall positive variance of £6k.

Expenditure had a negative variance for Quarter 3 of (£110k) driven primarily by the additional capital expenditure of £43k although this was netted off to zero due to capital receipts. There was also The Quarry costs of £19k due to the issues with the electricity meter and £44k for Security.

There was a positive variance on income received of £115k. This was higher than budgeted due to unbudgeted income of £70k coupled with increasing interest returns of £29k. There was also an increase in Capital from the sale of some assets.

The year to date position was an overall positive although expenditure was over at (£128k) and income was £674k better; of this £428k was not revenue and primarily due to increased investment returns and CIL money received.

Looking ahead, the effect of decreasing inflation on costs was uncertain although interest received was decreasing which would result in diminishing returns on bank balances. The budget was on track and there was a small surplus forecast at year end utilising gains on the income side to offset additional costs.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the Quarter 3 Management Accounts report be noted and accepted.**

## **76/23 INTERNAL AUDITOR**

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

The RFO said that the auditing practice was an expanding one which set its own work programmes and had an excellent national reputation. Once the Council's service provision was confirmed, a 5-year programme was to be set.

### **RESOLVED:**

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

## **77/23 TENDER WORK**

A report on tendering activity and details on tender progress were circulated to members prior to the meeting. The Acting Operation's Manager summarised as follows:

- Kynaston Road – This was now complete apart from a storage cabin that was to be removed by the contractors.
- Upton Lane Play Area – This was opened before Christmas but had since been subject to vandalism and so the facility was closed for a period. A site meeting with

the installer was arranged to find a way forward in preventing vandalism. Councillor Moseley added that a lot of the grass area had also been churned up. The Acting Operations Manager said that rectification of the damage was due to be carried out soon.

- Old Riverbed Project – A date for installation of the trash screen, that allowed water flow but stopped debris, was awaited. Councillor Moseley asked when the beavers were to be introduced to the site. The Acting Operations Manager said that the arrangements to introduce the beavers would begin when all works were complete.

Councillor Wilson asked about the site meeting that was to take place re Radbrook Recreation Ground Pavilion. Andy Jones from the Fisheries had been contacted and a meeting was to be set up shortly.

Councillor Mosley asked about interest in the Christmas Lights tender (for which applications were invited every 3 years). Five tender applications had been received and the award date would be sometime in March. Councillor Moseley and Wilson expressed an interest in being part of this working group when set up.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

## **78/23 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

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

- The **Cyle & Walking Map** had been finalised and would be part of the Shrewsbury Moves consultation.
- The upgrades to the **Quarry Memorial** were to take place once there was some dry weather.
- The drainage issues at **Kynaston Road** had been discussed under 77/23.
- The Acting Operations Manager was meeting with the Cricket Club to ascertain their vision for the **County Ground Pavilion**.
- The **Wakeman Playing Field** was to be discharged from the Capital Plan as Shrewsbury Colleges Group did not want to proceed with any arrangements for the site to be used for public enjoyment.
- The **Beaver Project** was discussed under 77/23.
- The **Upton Lane Play Area** was discussed under 77/23.

Councillor Wilson was disappointed that there was no progress regarding **Shorncliffe Drive**. Councillor Vasmer said that discussions had taken place with Shropshire Council regarding the lease for **Monkmoor Recreation Ground**; no changes could take place until this had been resolved. The Town Clerk said that she would provide reports on Shorncliffe Drive and Monkmoor Recreation Ground at the next meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) **That the update of the Capital Programme be noted;**
- (ii) **That the Town Clerk provide reports on the progress of Shorncliffe Drive and Monkmoor Recreation Ground at the next meeting.**

## 79/23 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 the Council was required to undertake an assessment of risks. This was part of the Audit Process which fed into the requirements of the Annual Return. It was broken down into two areas: the general assessment of risk and the assessment of potential financial fraud and/or corruption. The Town Clerk was responsible for overseeing the general risk assessment and the RFO 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 uploaded its service delivery, the kind of corporate risks faced in carrying out its services and the likelihood and severity of those risks if they were to happen. Following this, control measures were 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 Action Plan had been circulated to all members of the council. The most significant risks were those around anti-social behaviour and its potential risk to both the public and staff. Whilst measures were being taken to control such risks, the Council was subject to matters outside its control. Coronavirus also remained a risk, albeit at reduced severity.

Councillor Mosley asked if Martyn's Law was part of the Risk Management process. The Town Clerk confirmed that it was, and that councillors would be able to view it for comment.

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.**

## 80/23 INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Town Council's Annual Investment Strategy 2024/25 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 which stood at just under £9m. No changes had been made to the approach.

Councillor Moseley asked if the 3 non-investment properties were valued annually. The RFO replied in the negative.

Councillor Mosley asked if this was all reported to the Government. The RFO said that it wasn't but that best practise was followed.

Councillor Mosley asked if there was any bench-marking in terms of return. The RFO replied that the Town Council was getting similar returns to the unitary authority and benefitted from the fact that it could spread the investment load over a wider range of accounts. Some local councils had share portfolios but that diversified the risk.

Councillor Vasmer asked if any of the pooled Local Authorities Property Fund was invested in fossil fuels. The RFO replied that pooled funds were not invested in fossil fuels and that they were mostly hotels and office blocks. Councillor Vasmer also asked what would happen if there was a property crash. The RFO said that the Council only owned a small part but that also these properties had been picked for their capacity to retain or build value.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Investment Strategy for the financial year 2024/25 be accepted.**

**81/23 CLOSING REMARKS**

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked members of the public that had logged into listen as well as Councillors and staff involved in the meeting. All papers relating to this meeting could be found on the website [www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk) and the minutes would appear in draft on the website within the next month.