

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**Additional meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
Held in Committee Room, Livesey House
At 6.00pm on Monday 6th January 2025**

PRESENT

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

IN ATTENDANCE

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Andy Watkin (Head of Resources), Stuart Farmer (Acting Operations Manager and Projects Manager), Danny Powell (Acting Operations Manager) and Heather Phillips (Committee Clerk)

69/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

That apologies be accepted from Councillor Green.

70/24 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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71/24 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETINGS

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 2nd December 2024 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 2nd December 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

72/24 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Re Min 60/24 – Capital Programme: Dana Footpath - Councillor Mosley asked about progress on the completion of the Listed Building Consent paperwork and financial contributions to Arrol & Snell to enable this project to move on. The Town Clerk had arranged a meeting with Shropshire Council's Estates Department to work through the property issues.

73/24 BUDGET 2025/26

- (i) **Budget preparation 2025/26 update:** The RFO reported that the draft budget for 2025/26 was in progress and assumed a 2% increase in costs. One significant increase in the budget was for National Insurance to cover the increased employer contributions. However, the wage agreement in the current year was less than budgeted so the positive variance would carry through from the forecast into the budget and will therefore help break even.

The budget was balancing but included a 2% increase in the Precept. It also took into account the loss of the Golf Course asset and the recent outcomes from the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Shropshire Council. More detail was to be provided at the next Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting later this month.

A budget was circulated to members prior to the meeting which included detail discussed at the SLA Working Group before the Christmas break ie the taking over of additional Environmental Maintenance activity over and above what Shropshire Council was setting as its baseline. It included the following:

- Bin/bench maintenance/cleansing
- New bins to cater for the need for recycling at source
- Footpath clearance
- Winter maintenance
- Graffiti removal
- Weed Control

- (ii) **Proposed additional works as recommended by the SLA Working Group:** An update on the proposed Town Team and additional works as recommended by the SLA Working Group was circulated prior to this meeting. Job descriptions for the new Town Team roles had been drawn up; roles would cover a wide range of cleaning and maintenance duties in the public realm, including those listed above. The Operations Managers would co-ordinate the work.

Electronic reporting of works using an app-based system was being investigated which would allow close monitoring of Town Council assets. This would provide the added benefit of allowing play area maintenance records to be kept digitally and would show trends as well as equipment that needed regular repair.

The Acting Operations Manager added that a stock system could also be developed so that if, for example, a piece of play area equipment broke regularly, stock would be in place to repair it more quickly.

Councillor Mosley said that from the outset the Town Council and members had been looking at how to support residents of Shrewsbury at a time when services by Shropshire Council were to be significantly reduced. As issues had begun to arise with the renewal of the SLA, the SLA Working Group was set up to discuss not only the SLA but provide additionality to revised service standards. The SLA was now almost settled with Shropshire Council at around £250K less than previously but would, regrettably, not include maintenance of the Golf Course.

Recent meetings of the SLA Working Group discussed areas where Shrewsbury Town Council could provide additional services to continue to improve the Town

environment and areas within the boundaries of its authority. The Town Council already had some expertise in the proposed services, ie bins, graffiti etc, and officers were asked to find other opportunities and proposals for costs associated with these works.

The Acting Operations Manager, Danny Powell, provided a map at the meeting showing the 17 wards grouped together to make 4 areas. 6 new roles were proposed in addition to the 2 wardens already in post and teams of 2 were to be allocated to each area. It was proposed that the Town Team tackle any larger undertakings together in any given area before being split into 4 teams of 2. Work would be distributed on a daily/weekly basis and would be more reactive and proactive rather than routine.

The Town Clerk drew attention to the costs on the budget of a management system from which the Council could extract information. This data would also help drive efficiency. Officers and members would be able to log in to see what is happening on any given patch. Fix My Street was currently not able to transfer any service requests relating to Town Council responsibility to the town centre; it was hoped this would be addressed.

Councillor Dean welcomed this initiative but asked if the Town Council App would be bespoke and/or developed locally. He was also keen that the 4 areas of wards made sense in terms of existing staff and their work so that they tied together. He also asked if the level of work to be done was to be determined by Shropshire Council.

The Town Clerk said that Shropshire Council had provided the baseline of what it intended to do so the Town Council was to have the autonomy to go above and beyond.

On the subject of integration raised by Councillor Dean above, the Town Clerk said the new staff resource would allow the Town Council to make a difference – it would be adding to what was being done already. Also the Town Council had held back on recruitment this year due to the SLA insecurity so the additional staff would remove some of that pressure on existing staff.

Councillor Wilson questioned whether 6 new plus 2 existing staff would be enough to make an impact but felt that it was a good start. After speaking with officers, he had confidence that this could be delivered. The Project Manager said that although it was very much an employees' market now, he believed the timing of these posts becoming available might be advantageous.

Councillor Dartnall enquired how the Roman Road project had come about. The Town Clerk explained that the work was done due to delays in committing to carry out works.

Councillor Mosley added that it would not just be a question of Shropshire Council delegating work to the Town Council; it would be voluntary and selective.

Councillor Mosley added that if the £500K was to be agreed for the Town Team, then more clarity was needed, preferably before Wednesday's meeting with Shropshire Council and the SLA Working Group meeting that follows. He asked for more detail on the actual work to be done, how the group was to be managed and a

copy of the job descriptions. He also asked about the possibility of hiring apprentices for some of these posts – the Town Clerk said that the timing for these was not quite right but that this would be taken into future consideration.

Councillor Wilson was concerned that the public consultation needed to get underway in order for a decision to be made in time for the 2025/26 budget to be set. This Additional Finance & General Purposes meeting had been convened due to the urgent need to make a decision to go ahead and for the consultation to begin. Councillor Phillips asked if it could be delayed until after the elections in May to prevent a possibly rushed decision.

The Town Clerk said that the £500K was not only for the Town Team but included commitments already made, for example funding for CCTV. Officers had been asked for proposals and costings for supplementing Shropshire Council's work and for a consultation questionnaire, and these had been provided at this meeting. The budget had to be set by the last Monday in January. A delayed decision would mean postponing this project until the next budget was set in 2026/27.

Councillor Dean said that a process had been gone through and needs identified that had led the Town Council to this commitment but conceded that perhaps more clarity was needed in places. He added that part of the proposal should include a communications strategy for explaining what the Council was doing as it evolved and to review the work in terms of progress. Councillor Dartnall said that additional detail was needed under the sub-headings in the Town Team Report.

Councillor Vasmer agreed that lots of work around the Visioning Exercise had been done and that there was a real opportunity here to carry out those visions. The Roman Road project had been impressive and other main routes to the town centre could be worked upon; as maintenance became easier, the Town Council could expand into different areas. More detail could be provided at the next meeting.

Councillor Mosley said that, although he supported this, members needed to ensure that the Council had public support before making a decision, especially as it included significant capital investment eg for vehicles, tools, etc. There was a need for clarity so that its success could be evaluated.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That Council supports the principle of stepping up with service delivery as outlined by officers.**
 - (ii) That proposals form the basis of public consultation.**
 - (iii) That details be considered at future SLA Working Group and Finance & General Purposes meetings.**
- (iii) Programme of public consultation:** A proposed public consultation questionnaire was circulated to members at the meeting and comments were invited. Members agreed to forward comments to the Town Clerk with a view to it being published as soon as possible.

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.