

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
Held in Council Chamber, Shirehall
At 6.00pm on Monday 11th July 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors: A Mosley (Chair), P Moseley (Vice-Chair), N Green, A Phillips and D Vasmer

Also in attendance: Councillors M Davies, C Lemon and K Pardy

IN ATTENDANCE

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

20/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

That apologies be accepted from Councillors J Dean, R Dartnall and R Wilson.

21/22 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 Nat Green	Declared a prejudicial interest in Item 30/22 Markets and Item 24/22(c) Shropshire Army Cadet Force grants funding application

22/22 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 6th June 2022 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 6th June 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

23/22 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Minute 16/22 Draft Shropshire Council Housing Allocation Policy – As instructed by the Committee, the Town Clerk had submitted a draft response to the consultation to Full Council. It had not been agreed. Councillor Dean had consequently emailed all councillors asking for this to be supported. No comments were received. Therefore, the letter was not submitted.

24/22 GRANTS

24/1 Update on Community Grants and Councillor Grants Funds

The RFO circulated the current list of Community Grants and Local Councillor Grants awarded to date.

Councillor Moseley queried the £36 awarded to Shrewsbury & Oswestry Crucial Crew from the Community Grants fund because it had been agreed that the funding would be made up from a number of members' Local Councillor Grants funds. The RFO said he would double-check Councillor Moseley's share but thought she had insufficient funds (£214 left) so the fund paid the balance.

24/2 Applications for Community Grants Funds

(a) **Shrewsbury Men's Shed** – requested £1700 + VAT funding in order to purchase and install a composting toilet in a disability facility at Shrewsbury Men's Shed on the West Mids Showground. Shrewsbury Men's Shed had been operating for 12 months and gained charity status in November. They had a 6 year rolling lease on the old stable block on the Showground which members had been converting. £130K of work had been done so far and grants had been obtained from the Freemasons, Shropshire Council and the Foresters Trust, and a lottery bid will be submitted once the group has made a successful start. They also had sponsorship from the Smart Water Foundation of £400 per month. The group had 20 members made up of men from the town who experience loneliness but some of them were not in the best of health and the small stable block nearby had been chosen for conversion to an accessible toilet facility.

The area was liable to flooding and Councillor Vasmer asked whether this had been considered. It was noted that everything in the building below hip-height was made of galvanised steel and concrete with the electrics installed in the ceiling. There was plenty of space to install a gradual slope with space to manoeuvre.

Councillor Lemon asked if the group had visited the compost toilets at the allotments in the town. They had not but their compost toilet was different (Healthmatic) and could be obtained for a good price. The resulting compost would be used to grow fruit and vegetables. They had also spoken to the Head of Operations about the possibility of removing and re-utilising the green house at the top of the Quarry.

Councillor Phillips asked if large organisations had been approached eg Severn Trent Water. To do this the group would have to be a Severn Trent Water customer and they were not

Councillor Phillips supported the venture adding that the project would be a long-term investment in people and that it could also help to benefit the current environmental and mental health issues.

RESOLVED:

That £1700 be awarded to Shrewsbury Men's Shed but that the Town Council would purchase the unit direct from the supplier on their behalf.

- (b) **Shropshire Youth Theatre (SYT)** – requested £1000 funding in order to fund the promotion and production of *Animal Farm* at Theatre Severn. Since 1993 the Youth Theatre, based at The Hive and run by a student committee, had focussed on the production of classical texts. Amongst its members were young people with additional needs, some in the care system and a young person from Ukraine. The organisation had focussed on helping to build confidence, team working skills and those affected by Covid. *Animal Farm* was on the school curriculum so it was hoped that this production would enhance the learning of young people in Shropshire schools; a question and answer session, workshops and DVD will also be available.

Councillor Moseley enquired about the revenue from ticket sales. SYT explained that this was not guaranteed to cover the costs as much of it would go towards covering other costs including the annual expenses.

Councillor Pardy asked about the backgrounds of the young people. The Theatre recruited from the whole of Shropshire (plus Oswestry and Powys) and were a mix children from state and private schools but wanted to increase this diversity. It was hoped that some short-term projects could get underway for young people who were, for example, young carers and were unable to commit to a long-term project.

Councillor Phillips asked if other platforms besides a DVD had been explored. The group had a YouTube channel and could provide a digital link to schools but a DVD would allow schools to access the project easily without a link.

Councillor Vasmer asked if the workshops were a way to recruit more members. SYT hoped that this would be the case but that they also planned to establish satellite models in some schools. Councillor Lemon asked about the current availability of drama in schools and the Theatre said that they hoped to fill that gap possibly with some after school activity.

Councillor Dean asked about where the project income monies from membership would go. SYT confirmed that this would go towards hiring The Hive, props etc.

RESOLVED:

That £750 be awarded to Shropshire Youth Theatre for the promotion and production of *Animal Farm*.

Councillor Green left the meeting.

- (c) **Shropshire Army Cadet Force (SACF)** – requested £600 funding in order to fund an adventure training course in Cyprus. (It was noted that the grant amount

requested on the front page of the form was changed from £500 to £600 as this had been an error.) A trip to Cyprus was planned for 24 young cadets (12 from Shrewsbury) for adventurous training activities and cultural visits, and was aimed at those in financial hardship. The trip will cost £33K and most of this would be for the flights which had increased dramatically in price due to the war in Ukraine.

Councillor Phillips was interested in how the candidates were recruited. SACF presentations were given to parents, particularly targeting the 12 from Shrewsbury who could not afford to attend.

RESOLVED:

That £600 be awarded to Shropshire Army Cadet Force to fund an adventure training course in Cyprus.

The 4 grant applicant representatives left the meeting. Councillor Green rejoined the meeting.

25/22 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 23rd May to 1st July 2022. No comments or concerns were raised.

RECOMMENDED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 23rd May to 1st July 2022 be approved.

26/22 QUARTER 1 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The RFO circulated a report on the Quarter 1 Management Accounts 2022/23 to members prior to the meeting, together with a balance sheet as at 30th June 2022.

There was an overall negative variance of (£63,147) compared to the budget. Expenditure had a negative variance of (£443,356) but the majority of the variance was due to the capital expenditure variance of (£429,126) from purchasing the property at 7 St Johns Hill.

Discounting the capital purchase the figure would be neutral but rising costs were masked by underspends which could exceed the budget, such as salary costs when the pay award was made.

There was a positive variance on staff costs due to the budgeted pay increase not yet awarded by the National Joint Council (NJC) and vacant posts yet to be filled. Other variances were as follows:

- (£8,687) Casual – Toilets, unused staff budget utilised for closing services
- (£23,281) Fuel & Oil - price paid nearly doubling during heaviest use period
- (£28,534) Other insurances, Increase in premiums and market conditions in sector
- (£6,861) Professional fees – Greenfields costs, review at Year End for allocation

There was a positive variance on the income received of £380,209. This was, however, misleading due to unbudgeted income of £330,214 in respect of Neighbourhood Fund; adjusting for this would result in a positive variance of £49,995.

In comparison to last year there was a negative variance (£500,899) in expenditure which was partly down to capital expenditure variance of (£417,842) to leave (£83,057). It was noted that overall inflation is impacting expenditure especially fuel costs, and was partly offset by some increases in income. Some variances, such as insurance, will affect Q1 only.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

27/22 MOTIONS FROM FULL COUNCIL

(i) Shrewsbury Town Council Residents' Survey and Visioning

In the absence of Councillor Wilson, Councillor Vasmer reported that Councillor Wilson was keen to ensure that the Town Council was in regular contact with residents and urged that Visioning should be done as soon as possible in order to obtain residents' feedback and to give the Council direction. The Visioning event planned earlier in the year was cancelled due to Covid.

Councillor Mosley asked for a report from officers about Commonplace and its role; he saw a confusion arising from the conflation between the services provided by Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury Town Council. Staff were raising questions about the Service Level Agreement 2025 already. Councillor Vasmer suggested that to ensure that all members of the community have access to the survey, other means of communication with the public, besides commenting on a website, must be considered. The Town Clerk reported that the primary focus of engagement with residents was via elected members. The Council however needed to communicate on several tiers, but that Commonplace is a clever tool and can effectively facilitate engagement with the public. There had been some suggestion of using £8000 from a ring-fenced budget. Engagement with 35,000 households would require a larger budget.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Visioning exercise as previously agreed by Council continue.**
- (ii) That the Town Clerk includes options for public engagement in a report scheduled for Council in September.**

(ii) Flag Flying

In the absence of Councillor Wagner, Councillor Vasmer presented the motion to fly the Union Flag and other alternative flags on specific days from the newly acquired offices on St John's Hill was discussed.

The Town Clerk reported that the expected practice in the sector of flying flags was to follow the Government Guidelines. This had been in place across different governments. This set out the type of flags to be flown and how.

Councillor Lemon presented revised wording to the proposal.

RESOLVED:

That the Council continues to respond positively to opportunities to support communities, local campaigns and nationalities with flag flying as and when appropriate. The Council asks Officers to advise on options vis-à-vis flag flyers from our new offices.

28/22 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The 2022/23 Capital Projects Action Plan was circulated prior to the meeting.

The Town Clerk updated members as follows:

- **Greenacres Play Area** – works started last week and the project should be completed by the school holidays
- **Upton Lane and Moston Road recreation grounds** – works were progressing well
- **Beaver Project** – Shropshire Wildlife Trust were submitting a Heritage Lottery bid and a partnership agreement was being pursued which would hopefully be ratified at Full Council. Natural England and DEFRA had all the information required to consider a licence.
- **Meet Place** – Councillor Bentick will be meeting with the community which will be reported back to this Committee
- **Shorncliffe Drive/Monkmoor Rec** – the Town Clerk was awaiting Heads of Terms for the transfer of land from Shropshire Council
- **Wakeman School Field** – Councillor Vasmer enquired on progress of liaising with the Shrewsbury Colleges Group over a licence for use of the school field. The Town Clerk advised she had not done anything as Councillors Mosley and Vasmer were pursuing the matter separately. Councillor Mosley agreed that this was the case and would look to pursuing this.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

29/22 TENDER WORK

Prior to this meeting, a report on Tender Works, together with information on Tender Progress, was circulated to members. The Project Manager updated members as follows:

- **Bus Shelters** – £150K was available and tender documents were being prepared
- **Stanley Lane Footpath and Solar** – columns were available and ground works were set to begin in the summer holidays (date to be confirmed)

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

Councillor Green left the meeting.

30/22 MARKETS

A Markets Update report was circulated prior this meeting and the Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager reported that the Market Hall was fully occupied and that the Car Boot Sale was getting busier due to economic climate.

The Sunday Market was still struggling due to the economic downturn and repercussions from COVID. There were still issues with ASB and fly-tipping. Councillor Mosley asked if the market was making any money and the Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager confirmed that money was being made despite it sometimes having to close due to bad weather (rain and strong winds). Councillor Phillips enquired why Covid was still an issue considering that the market was outside. The Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager said that many of the traders came from Stoke and Birmingham and that bad weather and the rising costs in travel result in them not coming. He added that in good weather, traders would often go to the coast for holiday trade.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

Councillor Green rejoined the meeting.

31/22 BIG TOWN PLAN

The Town Clerk reported that the Big Town Plan was progressing and that a Councillor meeting had been arranged. Meetings were also arranged for officers to discuss Mini-Holland with a view to submitting a bid to Government by October 2022. Strong competition was expected. The Group will report back to this meeting. The scheme aimed to create a culture of active living and sustainability.

32/22 POLLING STATION REVIEWS

Members considered Shropshire Council's four proposed changes to Polling Stations and documentation had been circulated ahead of this meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the proposed changes in relation to Shrewsbury Polling Stations be supported.

33/22 VISIONING EXERCISE

The Town Clerk reported that the Visioning Exercise had been timetabled and involved staff, councillors, stakeholders and the public. It was envisaged that it would be completed by New Year and taken forward.

RESOLVED:

That the Visioning Exercise be continued as timetabled.

34/22 CLOSING REMARKS

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked Councillors and all staff involved in this meeting. He thanked members of the public for logging 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.