

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
26 SEPTEMBER 2022**

Members: Councillors Julian Dean and Chris Lemon

WARM ROOMS SCHEME

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To consider further a proposal from Councillors Dean and Lemon to establish a fund of £5,000 to help publicise and resource a Warm Rooms Scheme for the town.

ORIGINAL MOTION

Councillor Lemon made the following proposal to Full Council on 5 September 2022.

We know that many of our residents are facing a financial crisis this winter with the huge increase in fuel bills coupled with general inflation which hits those on low incomes hardest. Often these same residents will also struggle with social isolation. It is clear that the help being provided by the government is not enough to enable families on low incomes to keep their homes warm.

In recognition of this a number of Councils are setting up 'Warm Rooms'; a project pioneered in Bungay, Suffolk, which offers free, warm spaces in the town for people to spend time in, the project allows them to save money on their heating bills and also guard against loneliness. Other places are making the offer of warm rooms with activities including Mother and Toddler groups or games mornings. Pressure has also be mounting on government to provide funding for such initiatives.

Shrewsbury Town Council does not have any suitable sites of its own for such a project, but we would welcome a such an initiative in our town. We ask Town Council officers to take the initiative to set up discussions with local hospitality businesses, community and voluntary sector organisations and officers representing key Shropshire Council sites in the town (including the Library, the Museum and Shirehall) with a view to establishing a similar project and with the aim to offer a range of sites, activities and times across the week during the coming Winter. We agree to commit £5,000 to help publicise and resource such a project.

We further call on Shropshire Council to lead on and support initiatives to provide warm and welcome spaces for those struggling to keep their homes warm due to the price of energy during the coming winter across the county

DISCUSSION AT FULL COUNCIL ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2022

There was a lengthy discussion regarding the proposal at Full Council on 5 September 2022. Such a scheme was largely supported but the following comments were made:

- That this should be a scheme run by Shropshire Council, with support by the Town Council. Councillor Halliday had already contacted them to suggest that they consider setting up such a scheme.

- It was not understood what activities would take place in these 'warm rooms' as it did not seem useful to just provide a space with nothing to do in it.
- Paying the bills of those organisations that could provide warm rooms was discussed although this does not seem appropriate for the Town Council and could be a considerably expensive activity to fund.
- That any funds the Town Council makes available should just be to promote a scheme.

It was agreed that the motion come to Finance and General Purposes Committee for further consideration.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Since Full Council met on 5 September, Councillor Celia Motley, Shropshire Council's cabinet member for Culture, Leisure, Tourism and Transport confirmed that plans are in place to ensure there are 'publicly-accessible venues' where people can go to keep warm this winter.

Cllr Motley confirmed, a working group has been set up to extend this idea of 'warm banks' given the cost-of-living crisis.

The Shropshire Star reported on 8 September that she had said:

"We will certainly welcome those that need a safe, dry, warm space this winter to our publicly-accessible venues.

Individuals already access our buildings, especially libraries, to keep warm, keep dry and keep safe and we interact with them in a professional and caring way to see if any additional services can be provided or sign posted.

However, in response to the current cost-of-living crisis, a working group has been set up, which includes staff from Public Health and Culture, Leisure and Tourism to consider how best we can extend the 'warm banks' principles to other publicly-accessible venues during the colder months and help more people who are struggling.

This group will engage with other community organisations to ensure there are places for people to go across the county.

As a customer focused organisation we understand our role and the important part that our public buildings play to communities and the individuals who access them daily.

We will monitor and manage the situation to ensure that our buildings remain accessible, safe, and welcoming to those in need."

Shropshire Council have said that details will be added to the Cost of Living page on the council website: www.shropshire.gov.uk/cost-of-living-help/. However, as of 16 September, no details have yet been published.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (i) That the report be noted.
- (ii) That the Committee commit £5,000 to help publicise the Shropshire Council scheme to residents of the town.