Agenda No

11

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
COMMUNITIES & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Date 14 October 2026

Officer: Helen Ball (Town Clerk)

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to consider the development of a Community Development functionality within Shrewsbury Town Council, working collaboratively with the Council's existing Marketing & Communications Team and Young Shrewsbury, to strengthen the Council's engagement with local communities and its ability to develop and support community-led initiatives.

The proposed approach would provide a more structured and proactive way for the Town Council to:

- engage with residents and communities across Shrewsbury;
- undertake meaningful consultation and engagement on Council projects and services;
- identify local needs, opportunities and emerging issues;
- support communities to develop local initiatives;
- improve the Council's understanding of the different communities and neighbourhoods within the town;
- connect community organisations, residents, young people and other partners with the Council;
- ensure that community engagement informs the Council's decision-making and service development; and
- provide a stronger mechanism for translating the Council's strategic priorities into locally delivered initiatives.

2. Background

At the time of Local Government Re-organisation in 2009, Shropshire Council retained all community development functionality, with Community Environment Officers, through a group of Local Joint Committees across the county. These posts were soon deleted during early budget cuts and the community engagement role reduced to support Place Planning.

Shrewsbury Town Council has progressively expanded its role in delivering services and supporting communities across the town. This has included the development of the Youth Service, countryside and public realm responsibilities, environmental initiatives, community safety work and a growing programme of partnership activity.

The Council's increasing role in local service delivery, together with the financial pressures facing principal authorities, means that there is an increasing expectation that Town and Parish Councils will play a more significant role in supporting resilient and connected communities.

The Council has also developed a number of strategic initiatives which require effective engagement with residents and community organisations. These include the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan, the Council's Vision, the Youth Service 2030 Vision, environmental and biodiversity work, the Food Resilience Strategy, public realm projects and the Council's wider approach to devolution and local service delivery.

At present, some community engagement and development activity takes place across a number of teams and projects. There is an opportunity to bring greater coordination, capacity and strategic focus to this work through the development of a dedicated Community Development function.

3. Aims of the Proposed Community Development Function

The proposed Community Development function would have a broad remit, but its principal purpose would be to build stronger relationships between the Town Council and the communities it serves and to support communities to identify and address local priorities.

This would also work closely with evolving place based initiatives including Shropshire Councils Local Youth Partnerships and their pilot Place Universal Offer.

The Team would operate on the principle of:

Listen – Connect – Support – Develop

Listen - To understand the views, needs and aspirations of residents and communities through structured engagement, consultation and outreach.

Connect - To connect residents, community organisations, voluntary groups, businesses, young people and public sector partners with each other and with the Town Council.

Support - To help communities develop ideas, access appropriate support and funding, establish partnerships and deliver local initiatives.

Develop - To work with communities and Council services to develop new initiatives which respond to identified local needs and contribute to the Council's strategic priorities.

4. Relationship with Existing Council Teams

The proposed Community Development function would not operate in isolation. Its effectiveness would depend upon close working with existing Council teams.

Marketing & Communications
The Marketing & Communications Team already provides the Council's principal outward-facing communications function. The Community Development Team would complement this role by providing the two-way engagement function – ensuring that communication is not simply about telling residents what the Council is doing, but also about listening to residents and feeding their views, ideas and concerns back into the organisation.

The two teams could therefore work together on:

- consultation campaigns;

- community engagement events;
- resident surveys;
- targeted communications;
- neighbourhood engagement;
- promotion of community initiatives;
- digital engagement;
- feedback and evaluation; and
- communicating the outcomes of consultation.

The distinction would be broadly:

Marketing & Communications – "We tell and inform."
Community Development – "We listen, engage and develop."

With both functions working together, the Council can move towards a more complete model of two-way communication and engagement.

Young Shrewsbury

Young Shrewsbury provides an established mechanism for engaging with children and young people and developing opportunities for youth participation.

The Community Development Team would work closely with Young Shrewsbury to ensure that young people are considered as an integral part of the Council's wider community development approach.

This would include:

- youth participation in community projects;
- intergenerational initiatives;
- consultation with young people on neighbourhood projects;
- linking youth groups with wider community organisations;
- supporting young people to develop community initiatives; and
- ensuring that the Youth Service Vision connects with the Council's wider community development objectives.

The proposed structure should therefore strengthen rather than duplicate the work of Young Shrewsbury.

5. Proposed Areas of Activity

The Community Development Team could initially focus on a number of key areas.

5.1 Community Engagement and Consultation

The Team would provide a consistent approach to community engagement across the Council.

This could include developing an annual programme of engagement and providing support to individual Council projects where consultation is required.

The Team could develop a range of engagement methods including:

- community meetings;
- resident workshops;
- pop-up engagement;
- online consultations;
- surveys;
- focus groups;
- neighbourhood events;
- community walks and audits;
- engagement with hard-to-reach groups; and
- participatory activities with children and young people.

The objective would be to move beyond consultation as a one-off exercise and develop ongoing relationships with communities.

5.2 Neighbourhood Development

A particular opportunity exists to develop a stronger neighbourhood-based approach.

Shrewsbury contains a diverse range of communities, each with different characteristics, opportunities and challenges.

The Team could develop a programme of neighbourhood engagement which identifies:

- local assets;
- community organisations;
- existing initiatives;
- local priorities;
- gaps in provision;
- potential partners;
- opportunities for volunteering; and
- opportunities for Council intervention or support.

This information could be brought together through a Community Development Plan for Shrewsbury, potentially supported by a community asset and organisation database.

5.3 Supporting Community-Led Initiatives

The Council receives approaches from community groups and residents seeking support for local projects.

The Community Development Team could provide a structured point of contact for such initiatives and help groups to:

- develop their ideas;
- identify appropriate Council contacts;
- understand governance requirements;
- identify potential funding;
- develop partnerships;
- access training;
- establish sustainable delivery arrangements; and
- evaluate the impact of their work.

The Team would not necessarily deliver every initiative itself. Its role would often be to enable others to deliver.

5.4 Community Capacity Building

An important part of community development is strengthening the capacity of existing community organisations.

The Council could consider providing or facilitating:

- training;
- networking opportunities;
- information and guidance;
- funding advice;
- governance support;
- volunteering opportunities;
- partnership development; and
- access to Council facilities and resources.

This would help to create a stronger local community infrastructure and reduce the risk that the Council becomes the default provider of every community activity.

5.5 Linking Communities to Council Priorities

The Team would provide a mechanism for connecting community aspirations with the Council's strategic priorities.

For example:

Council Priority	Potential Community Development Role
Big Town Plan	Community engagement and local implementation
Youth Service Vision	Youth participation and community initiatives
Biodiversity / LNRS	Community nature projects and local environmental action
Food Resilience Strategy	Community food initiatives, growing and food networks
Climate Action	Community-led climate and resilience projects
Public Realm	Resident engagement and local stewardship
Community Safety	Partnership working and preventative initiatives
Devolution	Supporting communities and local councils to develop local capacity
Culture	Community participation and locally-led cultural activity
Health & Wellbeing	Connecting residents with local activities and support

5.6 Community Centre

The Council already owns two Community Centres and a Youth Centres and recent discussions within both Policy & Resources Committee and the Communities & Environment Committee has revolved around making more use of those buildings but also looking at developing other facilities elsewhere; Meole and Shrewsbury South Urban Extension are two areas recently discussed. This team would lead on feasibility work to develop a wider community building offer.

5.7 Participatory Budgeting

The Council in the past have considered more local engagement in the Council's decision making processes. This Team could facilitate this process.

5.8 Annual Town Meeting

The 2026 Annual Town Meeting showed the potential of greater community engagement

6. A More Proactive Model of Engagement

The development of a Community Development Team would represent a shift from a predominantly project-led consultation model towards a more proactive relationship-based model.

At present, engagement can sometimes occur because a particular project requires consultation.

The proposed model would mean that the Council maintains relationships with communities before a project is proposed, creating a better understanding of local priorities and enabling communities to participate in shaping proposals at an earlier stage.

This would allow the Council to ask **"What matters to this community?",** rather than simply **"What do you think about this proposal?"**

This distinction is important if the Town Council is seeking to strengthen local democracy and develop a greater sense of community ownership of local initiatives.

7. Potential Community Development Framework

It is proposed that the Team develops a simple framework for engagement based around four stages:

1. LISTEN - Understand local issues, priorities and aspirations.
↓

2. CONNECT - Bring residents, organisations and partners together.
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3. DEVELOP - Turn ideas into practical projects and initiatives.
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4. DELIVER & LEARN - Support delivery, evaluate outcomes and share learning.

This framework could become a consistent approach used across the Town Council.

8. Measuring Success

The success of the Community Development Team should not simply be measured by the number of meetings held or consultations undertaken.

Potential measures could include:

- number and diversity of residents engaged;
- number of community organisations supported;
- number of new community partnerships established;
- community-led projects developed;
- external funding secured by community organisations;
- volunteer opportunities created;
- participation by young people;
- resident satisfaction with engagement;
- evidence that consultation has influenced Council decisions;
- increased participation from under-represented communities; and
- longer-term outcomes from community initiatives.

The Team could develop an annual Community Development Impact Report to demonstrate its contribution.

9. Resource Implications

The establishment of a Community Development Team will have staffing and financial implications which will need to be considered as part of the Council's budget-setting and workforce planning processes.

It is proposed that the first stage should be to develop a detailed business case setting out:

- proposed staffing structure;
- roles and responsibilities;
- relationship with existing teams;
- estimated staffing costs;
- operational costs;
- potential external funding;

- opportunities for partnership working;
- anticipated benefits and outcomes; and
- implementation timetable.

The Council should also consider whether the function can initially be developed through a phased approach, building on existing capacity within the Marketing & Communications Team, Young Shrewsbury and other Council services before determining the final staffing structure.

10. Governance

The Community Development Team would operate within the overall governance framework of Shrewsbury Town Council. The business case would identify whether it sits as a standalone Team or comes part of an existing Team.

This would also help to support a number of actions within the Council's Visioning Plan and would help to shape:

- priority communities;
- key engagement activity;
- proposed community initiatives;
- resource requirements;
- partnership opportunities; and
- measures of success.

Regular reporting would then enable Members to understand the impact of the work and ensure that it remains aligned with the Council's strategic priorities.

11. Proposed Next Steps

Subject to Council approval, officers would develop a detailed proposal for the establishment of the Community Development Team.

This would include consultation with:

- Members;
- Marketing & Communications;
- Young Shrewsbury;
- relevant Council service areas;
- community organisations;
- voluntary sector partners;
- Shropshire Council;
- local public sector partners; and
- other relevant stakeholders.

A further report would then be brought to Council setting out the proposed operating model, staffing structure, financial implications and implementation programme.

RECOMMENDED:

1. **That the Report is noted;**
2. **That the Committee recognises the strategic value of developing a dedicated Community Development function within Shrewsbury Town Council.**
3. **That the Committee supports the principle of the development of a Community Development Team, working collaboratively with the Marketing & Communications Team and Young Shrewsbury.**
4. **That officers develop a detailed business case and operating model, including proposed staffing arrangements, resource requirements, governance arrangements, performance measures and an implementation timetable, that feeds into the 2027/28 budget setting process.**
5. **That a further report is brought back to the Committee setting out detailed proposals.**