

A New Approach to Partnership with Town and Parish Councils

Shrewsbury Town Council welcomes your letter dated 3rd June 2025 and the commitment from Shropshire Council to build a more constructive and equal partnership with Town and Parish Councils. We commend the open tone and the willingness to listen, collaborate, and empower local communities.

We also believe that this drive for treating Parish & Town Councils as equals needs to extend to our ability to have a seat at the decision-making table, embracing true subsidiarity principles of making the decisions at the most local level.

We are pleased that your new approach reflects many of the ambitions behind our own “Stepping Up” initiative, through which we have already begun to take on greater responsibility for local services where it is right for our residents. Our approach has always been to step up in a pragmatic and community-focused way — ensuring services are delivered at the most appropriate level, which we can add value to and do better.

We recognise that your initiative is, in part, a response to ongoing financial pressures within Shropshire Council and the need to manage resources differently. While we are open to supporting solutions that improve efficiency and local delivery, it must also be recognised that transferring responsibilities to Town and Parish Councils can create capacity and resource pressures at our level and you must ensure that service transfer is not abandonment but empowerment for our sector and creates sustainability of any services we take on.

As such, we would welcome a conversation on how Shropshire Council might support us — not just through dialogue, but through access to technical expertise, funding mechanisms, or transformational support — so that any service delegation or devolution is sustainable, equitable, and in the long-term best interests of our mutual residents. We believe that recognising this mutual dependency is key to a successful and respectful partnership.

In addition, we are amenable to engage in discussions about opportunities for engaging with other partners including neighbouring parish councils in the Central Area to explore the potential for better working together. We believe that this could help to maintain economies of scale, avoid fragmentation, and ensure greater equity in service delivery across the county. However it does have to be recognised that we are the county town and must always remain focussed on representing our residents and providing services for them.

This area-based approach could serve as a practical pilot for wider partnership models across the county.

Key Operational Challenges

In recognising the above we do need to address some of the bureaucratic frustrations we have in dealing with in our engagement with Shropshire Council. This includes:

1. **Horticultural Service Level Agreement** – we have found the whole process of re-negotiating for a new agreement hugely frustrating. Our members were enthused by Cabinet's collective agreement that arrangements going forward should be based upon a delegation agreement with the decision making on specification being replaced by a more output based process. Unfortunately, this has not been interpreted as such by officers who have demanded an even greater detailed specification with an unrealistic costings matrix particularly given there is no client management arrangement in place. We are also now in the second quarter of the current financial year, and we are struggling to get the relevant Assistant Director to sign off our first quarter payment. This does cast a shadow on future client/contractor arrangements for doing more things and doing things differently.
2. **Kier & Idverde Contract** – we are regularly told that the environmental maintenance element of the Highways contract allows for flexibility so that if we would like to do something differently there are options. When we suggest options we receive the regular stock answer of it being part of a bigger contract. We also have to question the standard of environmental maintenance from the contract locally and whether value for money is being achieved.
3. **Estates & Legal** – transfer of assets and legal agreements has been hugely difficult. Despite there being a political will for asset transfer, we have regularly faced officer reluctance due to loss of personal assets portfolios, officer capacity or insistence on doing things a very traditional orthodox way.
4. **CCTV** – this year we agreed to take over the maintenance of CCTV at a cost of £40,000 and was assured that all maintenance was up to date and yet once it came under our management we found that 15 cameras weren't working (and hadn't been working for some time) and a major part of the control room function was out of operation. This is not the first time that reality has been far apart from what we were told.
5. **Place Plan** – a system of capturing infrastructure priorities for a community needs to be an enabler rather than what is often seen as a blocker and that this approach needs to have greater transparency and be more bottom up driven than top down. Our Councillors wearing both their hats struggle to understand how the arrangements work and there is little feedback once a request has been made
6. **CIL** – we do not understand the reluctance of officers to detail the level of CIL contributions from individual development sites and where the large development sites are concerned the phasing arrangements. This would greatly help to understand future funding available and aid in us setting priorities for future investment.

7. **Planning Consultations** – as a Statutory Consultee (and one of the largest with probably 25% of planning applications in the Shrewsbury Town Council area, the process by which we are now consulted causes a large amount of officer time in the preparation for our Planning Committee to consider applications. Previously our Webmaster created an algorithm that allowed us to extract the data from the Planning Portal in a meaningful way that reduced officer time; changes in the portal means this is no-longer possible.
8. **Youth Service** – there is a lack of active engagement with Young Shrewsbury. Officers choose to work independently of the Shrewsbury Town Council Youth Service and in the case of the upcoming Youth Strategy, not even seek the views of a youth service in the county that spends more on youth work than the county.

Key Operational Opportunities

In terms of areas for joint working, we would particularly like to explore:

1. **Public Realm and Environmental Services** - As you are aware, we already manage significant parts of the town's public space, be it our own public realm, managing your public assets as part of the Horticultural Service Level Agreement or Stepping Up initiatives. There needs to be a clearer framework and potential resourcing for shared or delegated delivery, enhance outcomes and efficiency. We are happy to discuss our concerns in more detail.

Our experiences since "Stepping Up" has seen a large demands for service on environmental maintenance matters that are still the responsibility of your contractor and there is a growing frustration that the Fix My Street site does not facilitate matters being addressed.

We would like to explore how we can take over all services provided by Idverde including bin collection, litter picking, pathway sweeping. We would be happy to consider wider grounds maintenance across the Central Area, pedestrian winter maintenance and emergency tree works.

2. **Management of the Square** - We would like to look to taking over the management of the Square for future events and where we put on events for the wider public interest we are not charged. We also see that there is a more detailed discussion on the strategic management of the Square and the effect of private Acts of Parliament that restrict usage.
3. **Active Involvement in Major Decision-Making in Shrewsbury** - We would like to see more opportunity for the Town Council's engagement in some of the major projects in the town, including the Riverside Development and future Local Transport Plan proposals, potentially through the Big Town Plan Partnership so that there is a collaborative approach to the delivery of the Movement Strategy.

4. **Local Plan** - We are aware of the current status of the Local Plan and the need to begin the process for a new 10 year plan. For previous plan reviews we have established an informal councillor group that has worked well in determining the direction of travel for future development, land allocation and development management policies. We would like to see this arrangement more formalised. We would also like to have a more formalised approach in the development of Masterplans for future development sites, particularly given the scale of development required in Shrewsbury so that there is a strategic decision on the allocation of open space and recreation across multiple sites with multiple owners.
5. **Planning Developer Contributions** - We would like to have a more formalised approach in the determination, and allocation of S106/CIL and a greater understanding of the level of allocations.
6. **Place Plan** - We would like to see a more efficient and transparent process of registering community infrastructure requirements.
7. **Youth and Community Services** - Our investment in youth provision and social wellbeing through our Youth Strategy is significant. We see an opportunity to align this with Shropshire Council's responsibilities and explore joint delivery or commissioning models and being more involvement in infrastructural support for the town.
8. **Highways and Local Infrastructure** - We would like to see a more localised response to small-scale infrastructure, such as verge repairs, footpath maintenance, and signage, supported by devolved budgets or shared delivery mechanisms, providing quicker, more tailored responses.
9. **Leisure & Recreation** - We are happy to have discussions around the future management of some of our key cultural assets including the Pool, Theatre, Sports Village which add greatly to town vitality. We do however need discussions about the development of a more hybrid approach to corporate landlord responsibilities of heritage assets like the Castle, Museum, Old Market Hall and Library. This also raises the question as to whether councils are the best placed mechanism to manage these assets or whether we should engage around the potential for other arrangements like Heritage Management Trusts or Community Land Trusts.
10. **Local Resilience & Public Health** - We work very closely with the Emergency Planning Team and whilst there is a strategic emergency plan, we do need to explore local resilience planning in the event of emergencies or abnormal episodes including weather and terrorism

We also see there is potential benefits in wider public health matters around volunteering, social-prescribing, safeguarding, waiting well and the Protect & Prepare duties.

Conclusion

We do not see this as a formal proposal more a discussion document and whilst the above is unlikely to be the exhaustive list. Any future formal transfer will inevitably result in TUPE transfer of staff to ensure those with specialities are still able to manage services. But we would welcome a discussion around the significant impact on our core service delivery that any future activity will have. We are keen to see that taking on services will ensure sustainability of those services going forward.

We are open to piloting new models of local service delivery, including innovative or co-funded roles, especially where they support prevention and local resilience.

Throughout this we want to create output drive approaches to managing services that support our communities

We look forward to contributing to the upcoming Call for Information and engaging both individually and through SALC. We welcome this moment of reset, and we are ready to work constructively with Shropshire Council to deliver improved outcomes for our communities.