

**SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Meeting of the Finance & General Purpose Committee  
Held Virtually on Microsoft Teams  
At 6.00pm on Monday 14 June 2021**

*Please note this was an informal virtual meeting of the Committee convened to assist the Town Clerk with carrying out the delegated powers granted to her by Full Council on 22 March 2021 & Finance & General Purposes Committee on 12 April 2021.*

**PRESENT**

Councillors: A Mosley (Chair), P Moseley (Vice-Chair), M Davies, R Dartnall, N Green, A Phillips, E Roberts, R Wilson & D Vasmer

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Helen Ball (Town Clerk), Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Gary Farmer (Operations Manager), Andy Watkin (Responsible Financial Officer), Stuart Farmer (Projects Officer), Mike Cox (Outdoor Recreation & Asset Manager), Adam Purnell (Youth & Community Manager), Ruth Jones (Office Manager) and Carol Pullen (Committee Clerk).

**1/21 APOLOGIES****RESOLVED:**

That apologies be accepted from Councillor Dean.

**2/21 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 N Green	Declared a prejudicial interest in Item 14 – Markets.

**3/21 CHAIRMAN & VICE-CHAIRMAN**

At its meeting of 17 May 2021 Council made the following Chairmanship appointments:

Chairman            Councillor Alan Mosley  
Vice-Chairman    Councillor Pam Moseley

**4/21 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Members were asked to note the Terms of Reference for this Committee that had been approved by Full Council on 17 May 2021 and were set out in the Town Clerk's report which had been circulated to members prior to the meeting.

## 5/21 OFFICER DELEGATION

By way of background and for the benefit of new members the Town Clerk appraised that meetings were held as set out in the 1972 Local Government Act which stressed the need for meetings in a place and physical attendance at those meetings by both Councillors and the public. The Pandemic stymied this process in March last year when the country entered into a period of Stay At Home Direction, so regulations were established to allow for virtual meetings, which on reflection virtually every authority in the land thought was a good step with greater member engagement, greater public engagement, greater press engagement. Those regulations could only stay in place during the lifetime of the Coronavirus Act which had a hard end date of 6 May. Despite representations from every tier of local government, Government refused to make parliamentary time to make these temporary measures permanent. The Local Government Minister wrote to leaders of councils to suggest putting measures in place to either hold physical meetings or put in place a scheme of delegation to allow virtual meetings to take place, but placed a reliance on senior officers to in effect make the decision and it was the latter that this Council had done. Council had held a Full Council meeting the previous week and members experienced the difficulties in holding a meaningful physical council meeting working to existing COVID regulations and the restrictions that placed on public attendance.

This meeting was in effect and informal meeting of the Committee whereby the Town Clerk as the person on whom delegated authority had been granted in this short-term period would make decisions based upon the recommendations of this Committee.

Members were asked to note that officers already had a vast scheme of delegation which allowed for decisions to be taken without the need to revert to Council for a decision.

## 6/21 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 12 April 2021 were submitted and circulated as read.

### **RESOLVED:**

**That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 12 April 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.**

## 7/21 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

## 8/21 RECOMMENDATION FROM RECREATION & LEISURE COMMITTEE

At its meeting of 31 March 2021 the Recreation & Leisure Committee had recommended asking this committee to agree to part fund expansion to the Geo-sensing Counters throughout the town. Proposals from Elephant Wi-fi had been circulated ahead of the meeting. The Town Clerk reported that the Big Town Plan Partnership had agreed to fund

£10,000 share of this project and there was a need to fund a shortfall of £7,600 for the installation with the Big Town Partnership expected to continue to fund the annual revenue costs.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Council agree to part fund the remaining £7,600 needed to expand geosensing counters within the town centre on the condition that:**

- (i) Shropshire Council and the Shrewsbury BID contribute equal shares**
- (ii) Shrewsbury Big Town Plan absorbs the annual revenue costs**

**9/21 PAYMENT SCHEDULES**

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 3 January-4 June 2021. No comments or concerns were raised.

**RECOMMENDED:**

**That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 1 April-4 June 2021 be approved.**

**10/21 END OF YEAR ACCOUNTS**

The Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) presented the Annual Report and Draft Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2021, copies of which had been distributed prior to the meeting. This included the following documents:

- Annual Report
- Statement of Accounting Policies
- Annual Governance Statement
- Income & Expenditure Account
- Statement of Movement of Reserves
- Balance Sheet
- Annual Return

The annual report pages 1-9 detail the activity of the council and financial comparison for the year compared to the budget. Overall the position was £81,737 worse than budgeted. This small deficit due to coronavirus has been taken from reserves.

On the income side there was an overall positive variance of £250,278 which is the difference between actual and budgeted figures. The positive variance is due to receipts of £399,612 for CIL and S106 received in the year. If this is discounted there is a deficit of £149,334 affecting income streams during the entire financial year.

The negative variance of £123,259 on Markets was due to reduced operating days and capacity due to coronavirus restrictions and reduced commission from the Livestock Market.

In March 2020 the Bank of England base rate fell to a historical low of 0.1% which impacted returns in the current financial year.

No grants were budgeted for and £66,621 were received in the year.

Due to coronavirus incomes from sporting, commercial rents and horticultural works has been impacted due to restrictions but will rebound when lifted.

The expenditure variance overall is a £278,161 which was due to the new accounting treatment earmarking unspent CIL, S106 and capital monies coupled with capital expenditure plus capital projects but classified as revenue.

The Council has been operating under the cloud of coronavirus for the entire financial year, while there have been additional costs due to signage, cleaning products, there have been lower costs in some instances due to reduced service provision and some small positive variances. There have also been staff who have left and not immediately replaced resulting in underspending of budgets.

There has also been underspending on the grants schemes run by the Council and children's play areas, the latter due to closed play areas during the first lockdown.

The street lighting variance is due to completing the conversion of lights to LED which is funded from earmarked reserves.

The negative capital expenditure variance of £191,177 is due to the replacing of vehicles and equipment and land and property additions identified in a long term plan and covered by provisions.

There is a negative net variance on movement of earmarked reserves compared to the budget due to more receipts of CIL, S106 not spent and subsequently earmarked as reserves in the year.

The accounting policies pages 10-13 have not been changed from last year

The annual governance statement on page 14-20 list the 6 six core principles by which the council operates and how this has been complied with. The 8 assertions in the annual return are also listed and detailed how the council complies, which ties into the annual return. The significant events are updated with VAT and Sunday market concluded and updates on coronavirus, Dr Day and flooding.

The I+E on page 22 shows a surplus which is different to loss earlier reported but is due to not including movement in reserves page 23 of large unspent receipts which are moved to earmarked reserves.

The balance sheet page 24 is healthy and increase in net current assets due to receipts not spent from S106 and CIL and moved to earmarked reserves

The notes on pages 25-34 help users understand the accounts and tick the transparency requirements, the changes in earmarked reserves are listed on page 31 and show increases for elections and unspent capital and revenue from the current year due to coronavirus which were delayed to early in 21/22. The funds for climate change less agreed expenditure

and ash die back and bus shelters were included. Grant funds including coronavirus battle grant fund were underspent and rolled into a recovery fund.

The Annual Governance and Accountability Return – Part 3 (AGAR has been completed from the accounts and will be submitted to the external and internal auditor.

The RFO took questions from members:

Referring to members allowances, Councillor Phillips queried a pro-rata payment of £333 made to Nic Laurens, a former Councillor who had resigned in July 2019 and asked that the RFO clarify that this payment was correct. The RFO would check this.

Councillor Phillips asked if any analysis been done on potential costs for the Town Council should the Supreme Court reverse the Lower Court decisions in relation to the Greenfields proceedings. Councillor Mosley confirmed that at this time there had not been.

Councillor Phillips expressed concern that the reserves had jumped from £4M to £6M and although he understood that of those reserves were earmarked for the future he believed there was a responsibility to the residents of Shrewsbury to either reduce the precept or spend those funds rather than continuing to build up reserves.

The RFO clarified that Shropshire Council give funds via the Neighbourhood Fund which is money that must be spent within a certain timeframe so in the short-term the funds were there but they would start going down. S106 developer funds were received up front for a 15-year period. Although some capital projects had been done, COVID had prevented some of the projects on the plan to be progressed but there were schemes in place so the reserves would start to go down.

Councillor Vasmer referred to the Aims of the Council and suggested that these may be somewhat outdated and should perhaps be reviewed before the publication of the 2021/2022 accounts. Councillor Mosley proposed that members consider this in the future.

Councillor Vasmer asked that members be provided with a list of Neighbourhood Fund monies that needed to be spent.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- (i) That End of Year Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2021, incorporating the following be approved:**
  - a. Annual Report**
  - b. Statement of Accounting Policies**
  - c. Annual Governance Statement**
  - d. Income & Expenditure Account**
  - e. Statement of Movement of Reserves**
  - f. Balance Sheet**
  
- (ii) That the Annual Return for the Year Ended 31 March 2021 be approved and forwarded to the External Auditor for unqualified audit.**

**11/21 INTERNAL AUDITOR**

The RFO reported that the Internal Auditor had completed the final audit and there had been no matters arising and was able to sign page 3 of the Annual Return (AGAR)

**RECOMMENDED:**

**That the Internal Auditor's and final audit reports be accepted, and page 3 of the AGAR submitted to external auditor**

**12/21 CAPITAL PROGRAMME**

Members had received the Town Clerk's update report and there were a couple of points of note:

**2020/21 Programme**

- Phase 2 of footpaths now complete and the tender for Phase3 has recently been awarded
- BMX tracks at Greenfields and Springfield have been resurfaced
- Drainage at Bowbrook Open Space has been sorted
- Meeting has taken place with the Beacon Cricket Club about the Pavilion to kickstart that project.

**2021/22 Programme**

- Mary Webb Play Area tender due to be awarded
- Discussions about Moston Road and Radbrook Rec changing facilities with interested parties have taken place
- Staff have met with ward members about Castle Walk Nature Trail.

The Councillor Wishlist including requests from the previous administration of members has been updated with Officer & Highway Comments and Officers had met with Group Leaders to look at which schemes should be progressed. At the Recreation & Leisure Committee meeting in May, members had asked that the list be circulated to all Councillors again, particularly the newly elected Councillors to determine whether previous projects were still required, whether they needed updating or whether there was anything to add to it.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

**13/21 TENDER WORK**

The Project Manager provided an update on current tendering works:

**Current Live Tenders:**

Supply of Small Electric Van for the Toilet Cleaning Round - Closing Date 18 June  
Old River Bed project for the installation of a Beaver Compound - Closing Date 6 August.

**Currently Under review:**

Mary Webb Road Play Area - Closed 27 May. 4 Submissions received. Tender evaluation had been extended to 25 June to ensure the desired specification had been met and that the contractors met the Council's requirements.

**Recently Awarded tenders:**

Tranche 3 of Footpath upgrades on Countryside sites - awarded to A.G.A Group with a proposed start date late June early July 2021

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

*Having declared a prejudicial interest, Councillor Green left the meeting for the consideration of this item*

**14/21 MARKETS**

The Outdoor Recreation & Assets Manager reported on the current situation within the Indoor and Outdoor Market. From the 17 May cafés had been allowed to accommodate seated customers, subject to guidelines.

To date subject to negotiation with a new trader, the Market would be operating at 100% occupancy.

The number of traders doing deliveries had dwindled, and it was expected to decline even more as the eateries opened, reason being that whilst the eateries were closed, deliveries could be organized on space usually utilised by the cafes, and with the cafes opening, the space was no longer available.

Some staff and no doubt customers would still be wary of returning to the indoor market, however a number of traders were forgetting this issue and had started creeping out into the aisles which was creating difficulties in maintaining social distancing, this could give the perception of the facility being unsafe, especially for those who had been self-isolating. Reminders had been sent to all traders and the situation would continue to be monitored. Government Guidelines would continue to be followed and also advice from the National Association of British Markets Authorities and National Market Traders Federation to ensure appropriate actions and that any concerns are minimised.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the report be noted.**

*Councillor Green re-joined the meeting*

**15/21 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

The Town Clerk reported on issues raised at the Annual Town Meeting in relation particularly to the Quarry. Significant discussion had taken place relating to anti-social behaviour in the Quarry and how they then manifest outside the park. This began at the time of lifting of lockdown measures in April/May time and there had been a spike in antisocial behaviour, underage drinking and drugs usage and gangs of youths congregating. Litter had been a significant issue with teams disposing of as much as ten times the amount of waste as at similar times in previous years. The services of security personnel had been employed to help encourage people to tidy up after themselves, address any anti-social issues and liaise with the Police whom had been extremely supportive and had increased patrols throughout the day and the deployment of officers to assist with enforcement. Security personnel had now been increased from two to three at a cost of just over £2,000 per week.

Discussion had taken place about CCTV coverage in the Quarry and also the use of the Public Space Protection Order in relation to the use of alcohol. Since the meeting the Town Clerk had contacted the new Police Commander for Shropshire who would be happy to attend a future meeting of the Council to set out his new vision for Policing across Shropshire and particularly Shrewsbury. Members were asked to consider extending security until the end of the month and increasing numbers of officers and times of patrols to address some of these current issues and following the Prime Minister's announcement earlier today to defer the lifting of final lockdown restrictions until 19 July, whether it be prudent to continue this even further.

The Town Clerk reported that the height of the flood water in February 2020 had taken out all of the CCTV cameras along Victoria Avenue as the floodwater had got into the fixings of the cameras so these had been revisited and the fixings were now sited above the 1 in 100 year flood level and easily and quickly removeable should the need arise. The Dingle CCTV camera was now working and was connected to the town system and contractors were working with Town Council contractors to get the other two cameras up and running.

The Project Manager reported that there was a major redevelopment of the fibre cable throughout the town that is going on and the contractors were confident that this would be completed later in the week so all the Town Council cameras should then be back in operation.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) That the contents of the Annual Town Minutes of 1 June 2021 be noted.**
- (ii) That the Town Clerk be given authority in consultation with the Police, to continue the deployment of security personnel in the Quarry until such time as it be determined to be no longer necessary.**
- (iii) That the Police Commander for Shropshire be invited to attend a future meeting to appraise members on the vision for Local Policing.**
- (iv) That someone from CCTV control be invited to attend a future meeting to update on the future of CCTV in Shrewsbury Town Centre.**

**16/21 PROPOSAL TO SUPPORT THE PROVISION OF BOXING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Youth & Community Manager asked members to consider a proposal for the provision of boxing for the young people of Shrewsbury in conjunction with the Young Shrewsbury Youth Service.

Discussions had taken place with Shrewsbury School of Boxing about providing weekly boxing coaching to around 30 young people on behalf of Young Shrewsbury each week in order to enhance the current youth sessions already run. Shrewsbury School of Boxing currently offer two beginners sessions each week on a Wednesday evening from 7.00 – 8.00pm and 8.00 – 9.00pm and the plan would be for the Young Shrewsbury sponsored young people to join these existing classes.

The Shrewsbury School of Boxing will hopefully be relocating from the Grange to a vacant unit on Whitchurch Road. This is one of the areas of the highest need for youth support in the town, with the added benefit of being accessible by foot or public transport from the town centre. The Youth Team had been working with SCOB for around 18 months, after they approached the service looking for space to move to having outgrown the gym that they were in. With a high volume of juniors already, the club which is entirely voluntarily run by two coaches, is the only amateur boxing club in Shrewsbury and is growing in popularity.

Up until now the club had offered Young Shrewsbury free spaces for young people the service was working with, after the service were able to secure the club a much larger space for the gym within the old Grange school at no cost. The club agreed that they would offer up to 15 young people a free session a week as a result of being given free rent, and more space than they had meant that they were able to accommodate and wanted to encourage new junior members. The club had recently been given a Notice to Quit the old Grange school site by July, and so now have been looking at new venues.

The venue that they were hoping to move to on Whitchurch Road was in a prime location not only for lots of the young people the service worked but was likely to attract others who live in the area who have expressed an interest in attending but have not been able to travel out to Harlescott. The site was central enough that detached workers, Alternative curriculum and open access youth club staff would be able to divert young people from all over town to attend, as it is accessible from the centre on foot if necessary.

Despite receiving a substantial discount from the landlord rent of the building was still £12k per year which means that free places to Young Shrewsbury clients was not possible.

The Youth & Community Manager has discussed with the club an arrangement similar to the one at Flaxivity whereby the Boxing Club provide a number of weekly sessions and Youth Workers would attend to provide support and guidance. This Sport & Support Model had worked well at Flaxivity and a recent 5 –aside Football Session. It was intended to allocate the unused budget of £6000 from Flaxivity to this new project, thereby creating no great a strain on the Young Shrewsbury Budget than currently

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) **That the report be noted.**

- (ii) That the expenditure be approved.

## 17/21 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

### RESOLVED:

That in accordance with s1(2) Public Bodies (Admission of Meetings) Act 1960, members of the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following items being considered involve the disclosure of confidential information.

*Live streaming of the meeting was ended*

## 18/21 LAND ADOPTION

Members considered a report into various land adoption proposals including an agreement to adopt Public Open Space at Weir Hill, the formal adoption of Phases 1a,1b & 1c at Sweetlake and the formal adoption of Phase 1 at Bowbrook Meadow.

### RESOLVED:

- (i) That the Report be noted;
- (ii) That Council accept the adoption of the Weir Hill Phase 2 Public Open Space in principle as highlighted in the attached plan; but first seek to develop a plan for ongoing usage and associated costings.
- (iii) That the Town Clerk proceed with the necessary legals to guarantee land adoption of the Weir Hill Phase 2 Public Open Space at a time to be specified in the future;
- (iv) That the adoption of Sweetlake Phases 1a,1b & 1c be noted;
- (v) That the adoption of Bowbrook Meadow Phase 1 be noted.

## 19/21 LAND/PROPERTY DISPOSAL

Members were asked to consider a number of land disposal requests. These had been on hold awaiting the Redfern Report into the sale of Greenfields which was commissioned following the publication of a Public Interest Report into the disposal of council land. Officers had been awaiting policies from the Redfern Report which would set out procedures for disposal in line with the External Auditors recommendation in the PIR. There seemed to be no date for publication of this report. Therefore, members were now asked to consider these requests.

Councillor Phillips expressed his concern about proceeding with any further land disposals ahead of the Redfern Report being published. He understood Officer frustration in not being in a position to consider these requests and asked whether an interim report could be

requested of Mr Redfern to address the findings of the PIR in developing policy on asset disposal. This was seconded by Councillor Vasmer.

**RESOLVED:**

- (i) **That consideration of the requests for land disposal be deferred;**
- (ii) **That Mr Redfern be asked to issue interim guidance on addressing the recommendations of the PIR in relation to land disposal.**

**20/21 EASEMENT REQUEST**

Members were asked to approve a request for easement over land at Bowbrook Meadow to access sewer connections.

**RESOLVED:**

**That Council approves an easement in line with the recommendations within the report**

**21/21 CLOSING REMARKS**

In closing the meeting, the Chairman thanked Councillors for attending and taking part in this virtual Town Council meeting and also thanked the 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](http://www.shrewsburytowncouncil.gov.uk) and the minutes would appear in draft on the website within the next month.