

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Meeting of the Finance & General Purpose Committee Held Virtually on Microsoft Teams At 6.00pm on Monday 12 April 2021

At the start of the meeting Shrewsbury Town Council formally offered its condolences to Her Majesty the Queen and the Royal Family following the news of the sad passing of His Royal Highness, The Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Phillip on Friday 9 April and a minute silence was held.

PRESENT

Councillors A Mosley (Chairman), P Adams, Ms G Burgess, Ms H Fraser, Mrs P Moseley, A Phillips & D Vasmer.

IN ATTENDANCE

Amanda Spencer (Deputy Town Clerk), Gary Farmer (Operations Manager), Stuart Farmer (Projects Officer), Adam Purnell (Youth & Community Manager), Ruth Jones (Office Manager) and Carol Pullen (Committee Clerk).

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor MacKenzie, Helen Ball (Town Clerk) & Andy Watkin (Responsible Financial Officer).

64/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Twin-Hatters	All twin-hatted Councillors declared a personal interest in all matters relating to Shropshire Council.
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65/20 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 1 February 2021 were submitted and circulated as read.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 1 February 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

66/20 MATTERS ARISING

None.

67/20 PAYMENT SCHEDULES

Prior to the meeting, the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) circulated the Schedule of Payments for the period 23 January-2 April 2021. No comments or concerns were raised.

RECOMMENDED:

That the schedule of payments passed for payment for the period 23 January-2 April 2021 be approved.

68/20 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

In the absence the Head of Resources, the Deputy Town Clerk provided the RFO's report. The 31 March 2021 accounts were still being prepared and the purchase ledger was being kept open as long as possible to ensure all costs relating to 2020/21 were included. As there was not a definitive expenditure forecast at present the RFO had estimated the figure. The income was a little easier to estimate and more accurate but all the figures would be subject to year-end adjustments and provisions.

Income, ignoring CIL and Section 106 funding, was forecast to be in the region of £3.53m compared to the budget of £3.73m, meaning an adverse variance of £200,000. As reported previously the main areas that had been impacted by COVID were Market income, Quarry events, sports income, commercial rents and interest.

Expenditure, excluding capital, was forecast to be in the region of £3.22m, compared to budget of £3.32m, a positive variance of £100,000. Not replacing staff who left was the main driver for this along with other small savings across the year to help offset income losses.

Overall the impact would be adverse effect of circa £100k which will be taken from reserves at year end.

Capital projects had still progressed during the year using capital balances of earmarked funds.

RESOLVED:

That the update be noted.

69/20 TIME TABLE FOR CLOSURE OF THE 2021/22 ACCOUNTS

Members were asked to note the timetable for the closure of the 2021/22 accounts.

PKF Littlejohn are the appointed external auditors for Shropshire and they set the date when the accounts will need to be submitted to them. As in previous years the dates were chosen for the exercise of elector's rights.

The statutory deadline by which The Council must approve the Accounts, Annual Return and relevant schedules is 30 June 2021 and then these need to be sent to the external auditors by 2 July 2021.

The Internal auditor will complete the inspection of the 2020/21 accounts and sign page 3 of the Annual Return prior to submission to the external auditors.

The timetable below is subject to confirmation of dates from external and internal auditors:

- 26/04/21 – Close down 2020/21 accounts system after all invoices raised, purchase invoices posted and year-end adjustments made.
- 01/06/21 – Draft Accounts prepared for meeting with leader
- 14/06/21 – Draft accounts for F&GP to consider
- TBC – Internal audit visit/Remote final year end check
- 28/06/21 – Council meeting to agree Accounts and sign Annual Return
- 30/06/21 – Accounts, annual return and working papers file sent to PKF Littlejohn to meet their deadline.
- 30/06/21 – Notice of appointment of date for exercise of electors rights for the 20/21 accounts for a 6 week period commencing 1st July 2021.
- 30/09/21 – latest date for completion of Annual return by PKF Littlejohn
- 30/09/21 – Notice of conclusion of the audit and right to inspect the annual return published.

RESOLVED:

That the timetable of dates be noted.

70/20 INTERNAL AUDITOR

The Internal Auditor's report had been circulated ahead of the meeting. The Internal Auditor had commented in his report that, once again, 'Council records are maintained to a high standard, together with supporting documentation which was provided for the purposes of our review.

We have concluded that, on the basis of the programme of work we have undertaken to date, the Council has maintained adequate and effective internal control arrangements.'

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

71/20 TENDER WORK

The Projects Manager reported on tendering work.

Current Live Tenders:

Footpath improvements at Countryside sites Tranche 3 - closing Date 30/04/21 - currently 4 submissions of interest have been received.

Recently Awarded Tenders:

- Upton Lane BMX Track
- Supply of Sand Bander for Sports pitches – Charlies Ground Care
- Supply of Elliptical Aerator – Charlies Ground Care

Tenders had closed for the Upton Lane BMX Track project on 5 February 2021 and three tenders were received. These were reviewed by the Project Manager to ensure all tenderers had met the requirements and these were then discussed with Officers and the Ward Member. Whilst all had met the requirements there was one that was outstanding. The preferred tenderer has a vast amount of experience and had been selected to produce pump tracks and BMX tracks for the London 2012 Olympic Games.

A site meeting has been arranged with the Project Manager, Operations Manager and the preferred tenderer to develop the current plans to present to the Ward Member and local youth organisations.

Mary Webb Road Play Area Replacement Tender – currently in draft form with a mid-April publishing date.

Sealed bids are invited for the current log pile Shrewsbury Town Council have built up during the winter tree works, currently three expressions of interest - closing date 16/04/2021.

Sealed bids are being invited for the removal of the metal framed greenhouse currently located at the top of the Quarry, currently two expressions of interest - closing date 23/04/2021.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

72/20 YOUTH

The Youth & Community Manager presented his report on current position regarding the activities undertaken by Young Shrewsbury. His report provided an update as what had been happening in Young Shrewsbury since the last meeting. There had not been a great deal of change in this time, until 8 April 2021 when the NYA updated their recommendations for youth activity and announced that open access youth club sessions could start to reopen once again. This came with great relief for both staff and young people who have become increasingly frustrated and isolated during this lockdown, but after what seemed like the

longest winter ever light seems to be emerging at the end of the tunnel. One big change is that there will no longer be restriction on numbers that can attend sessions.

The Youth & Community Manager reported that it was a relief as a huge barrier has been removed, but now the challenge was to rebuild numbers of members who attend youth sessions. In many ways it felt like starting from scratch again, as lots of the young people who attended sessions have now got to the age that they are leaving school in May and will be moving on. Therefore, the plan is to focus on encouraging pupils in year 6, who are about to start secondary schools in September to attend the youth clubs.

Youth Endowment Funding - The Youth & Community Manager reported that this project continued to deliver online workshops via YouTube during the Easter holidays after securing some additional funding from Shropshire Council. Local businesses have become involved in the project as have local Independent restaurants. This has meant that many young people who may not be fortunate enough to have the chance to eat out in a nice restaurant, have had that experience delivered to their own homes. Furthermore, they have had a direct introduction to the chefs who run these restaurants, and it is hoped that this will be the start of working more closely with them on face to face projects as Coronavirus restrictions relax.

Detached work - Detached sessions have continued and the Team have started to work more closely with the new detached team provided by Shropshire Council and are excited to see a working relationship developed as they establish to provide young people with a more robust offer in the town.

Youth Voice – The Youth & Community Manager recently took part in a discussion with Friends of the Flaxmill to look at how young people can input into what happens when the site opens next Spring. This will become a focus for some of the alternative curriculum young people next term. The Deputy Town Clerk and the Youth & Community Manager will attend a workshop in May to look at how to involve young people more in local Council decision making and this area of work would be developed further as restrictions relax.

The Operations Manager expressed thanks on behalf of himself and colleagues who managed the greenspace to the Youth Manager and his Team for all their work behind the scenes, particularly during these difficult times, in managing and helping with the greenspace and engaging with young people through the detached work.

RESOLVED:

- (i) **That a vote of thanks be given to the Youth Manager and his Team for their assistance and support with managing greenspace areas and engagement with young people through the detached work.**
- (ii) **That the report be noted.**

73/20 WEBSITE

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that since the new Shrewsbury Town Council website went live on 5 March feedback from users had been very positive.

The new website offered users an opportunity for visitors to sign up to a mailing list to receive the Shrewsbury Town Council newsletter. This facility had also been advertised via social media.

The production of a newsletter was a new development following on from what previously were Admag/Shrewsbury Chronicle wraparounds. In the light of Lockdown and the lack of opportunities for a printed newsletter, the introduction of the e-newsletter was rolled out. The first edition of the newsletter was released in mid-December last year and had 11 pages of information and articles regarding the Town Council and items of national news (e.g. Census and local elections) with the second edition going out in mid-March, which had eighteen pages of information and articles. It was anticipated that the newsletter would be published every two months.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

74/20 REMOTE MEETINGS

The Deputy Town Clerk provided an update to the Committee since the last report on Future Council Meetings at the March meeting of Full Council and the Council's subsequent delegation of decision making to this Committee. At the meeting Council resolved to delegate the decision making to this Committee once the outcome of the High Court Decision and the Parliamentary Debate on extending the Coronavirus Act was known.

The Association of Democratic Service Officers, Lawyers in Local Government and Hertfordshire County Council (supported by the Local Government Association and the National Association of Local Councils) have sought permission to seek a declaration as to the currency of Schedule 12 Local Government Act 1972 with regards to holding virtual meetings.

The court application referenced in the Town Clerk's report will be heard on 21 April in the Administrative Court. Although the ruling will be made available as soon as possible after that date, Councils are advised to make any necessary arrangements for meetings from 7 May 2021. The Committee were asked to consider specifically the Proposals once the Meeting Regulations Expire on 7 May 2021 laid out.

RESOLVED:

- (i) The Town Clerk have delegated authority to submit planning responses to the Planning Authority for any applications received between those dealt with at the Planning Committee on the 20 April and the Elections.**
- (ii) As soon after the Elections as possible a private meeting of the Councillors (they take office from 10 May) be convened to update on the proposed arrangements for Council Meetings. This should also include details of arrangements for signing Declarations of Acceptance of Officer & Registers of Members' Interests.**

- (iii) Annual Meeting of Council be convened physically on 17 May at the Theatre (this is subject to Tier 2 of the Lockdown Roadmap being implemented) physically to formally approve the new governance of the Council, including the membership and chairmanship of Standing Committees. The meeting shall be broadcast on teams live so that (i) Councillors and Officers can take part where it is not safe for them to be present and (ii) the public can view proceedings.
- (iv) With effect from 7 May 2021 until it is safe to do so, the Town Clerk shall have delegated authority to make decisions on behalf of the Council where such decision cannot reasonably be deferred and must be made in order to comply with a commercial or statutory deadline. This will be carried out where possible by consultation with members by electronic means or telephone. The Town Clerk will further consult with and take note of the decisions of the Standing Committees of the Council which shall continue to meet virtually, the Mayor, Leader & Group Leaders for guidance as necessary. The delegation does not extend to matters expressly reserved to the Council in legislation or in its Standing Orders or Financial Regulations. Any decisions made under this delegation must be recorded in writing and must be published in accordance with the relevant regulations and ratified at the following Full Council Meetings, which shall also review such arrangements:
- 28 June
13 September
8 November
24 January
21 March
- (v) That Officers continue to look at alternative venues in line with the current Roadmap arrangements and the relevant COVID safe arrangements

75/20 CODE OF CONDUCT

Members were asked to consider the report from the Town Clerk on the publication of a new Member Code of Conduct.

Following a lengthy review of Standards in Public Life, the Local Government Association had issued a revised Code of Conduct, a copy of which had been circulated to members. The National Association of Local Council had given its backing to the Code and was recommending to its member Councils that the Code be adopted.

The current Code of Conduct was adopted in 2012/13 and at the time there was a collective agreement that all Parish & Town Councils in the county should adopt the Code adopted by Shropshire Council given that the Monitoring Officer at Shropshire Council was responsible for the monitoring of standards at Parish Council level.

Enquiries had been sought from the Monitoring Officer at Shropshire Council to determine whether this new Code will be adopted; the response was:

‘At the moment, the position is unclear. No decision will be made until after the election when the new Councillors can consider the code of conduct’.

RESOLVED:

- (i) That the New Code of Conduct be noted;
- (ii) That any decision on adoption be delayed until after the Election once the position of Shropshire Council's Code is known.

76/20 CONDOLENCES

Members joined Councillor Phillips in observing the passing of Baroness Shirley Williams who had had died today at the age of 90 and expressed condolences to her family. Baroness Williams had been considered a real trailblazing politician who had worked across the spectrum of political parties throughout a long career.

77/20 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 and the minutes would appear in draft on the website within the next month.