

SHROPSHIRE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS
DRAFT MINUTES OF THE 74th AGM
HELD VIRTUALLY AT 6 PM ON FRIDAY 3rd NOVEMBER 2023

AGM23/2001 PRESIDENT'S WELCOME

The President welcomed everyone to the 74th Annual General Meeting of the Association for which it had been decided to remain on Zoom for various reasons, one of these being that a number of Councils requested this option, due to travel time and costs. She gave a warm welcome to Darren Edwards, Motivational and Inspirational Guest Speaker. Decisions would be taken using Zoom Polls as in the previous year.

Darren, record-breaking disabled adventurer, author, and former Army Reservist gave an account of how drastically his life changed when, in 2016, a climbing accident in North Wales left him permanently paralysed from the chest down. He spoke in detail of how his best friend had saved his life and how he had spent 5 months on a journey of acceptance, adaptation and learning to focus not on what he had lost but on what he could control and might achieve in the future. With determination, grit, and positivity he went on to become a competent kayaker leading a team of five injured/wounded veterans kayaking 1400 kilometres from Land's End to John-O'-Groats in a record breaking 26 days. He had since become the first disabled person to complete the iconic World Marathon Challenge (seven marathons, seven days, in seven continents).

Having worked for a while in local government, his message to take away was:

- Conquer self-doubt, draw from past experience, build confidence with marginal gains, and avoid the curse of comparison,
- Accept, adapt, and take ownership, control what you can control,
- Put things into perspective and rewire to focus on the positives, not the negatives,
- Reassess your failures, recognise the power of social connection and find your role models,
- Focus as a team on a shared sense of purpose.

The President congratulated Darren on his recent marriage to TJ. She thanked him for a moving but truly inspirational account of his journey to conquer adversity and his thoughts on how his message can be transferred to councils working across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin by accepting the challenges they may face and focus on the positives and opportunities along the way.

AGM23/2002 APOLOGIES

List of apologies attached to the signed minutes.

AGM23/2003 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

AGM23/2004 ELECTION OF HONORARY OFFICERS

President

The Chairman took this item, and it was proposed by Cllr A Wilson that Katrina Baker MBE be re-elected President, seconded by Cllr R Wickson. There were no other nominations.

A vote took place and it was

RESOLVED: That Katrina Baker, MBE be re-elected President of the Shropshire Association of Local Councils.

The President thanked everyone for their continued support and for her re-election. She had been able to meet some Members at meetings and events this year and hoped there would be more opportunities in 2024.

Vice Presidents

The President reported that Rosemary Abbiss, Claire Cracket MBE DL, Chris Mellings and Roy Williams had all indicated their willingness to stand again, and she thanked them for their continued support which was much appreciated. However, it was with sadness that Madge Shineton had decided to stand down after what had been an outstanding and devoted service to SALC over many years. The President, in thanking Madge, on behalf of the Executive, Member Councillors and Clerks, said her help, support, guidance, knowledge and wealth of experience would be missed but she hoped Madge would keep in touch. Madge responded stating the Association had come a long way in the last 30 years in which she had been involved, training was on a professional footing and she wished everyone the very best for the future.

The President then nominated the four Vice Presidents listed above, which was seconded by Cllr R Wickson. Consideration would be given to the current vacancy in the months ahead.

RESOLVED: That Rosemary Abbiss, Claire Crackett MBE DL, Chris Mellings and Roy Williams be appointed Vice Presidents of the Shropshire Association of Local Councils.

AGM23/2005 MINUTES OF THE 2022 AGM

A copy of the minutes had been circulated.

Proposed by Cllr P Goulbourne, seconded by Cllr G Offland that the minutes be agreed.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the 2022 AGM held on 11th November 2022 be agreed and signed by the President as a correct record.

AGM23/2006 PRESENTATIONS

Long Standing Clerks

The President referred to the enormity of the Clerk's roles and responsibilities, regardless of the size of the Council (or Parish Meeting), and how, over the years the amount of correspondence, the range of topics to be considered and project investigation had increased.

This was much appreciated, and long standing awards were presented to the following Clerks who had been nominated by their councils:

- Astley Abbots PC Jayne Madeley 25 years
- Stottesdon & Sidbury PC Freda Morris 37 years
- Donnington & Muxton PC Ralph Morgan 21 years
- Montford PC Ian Hutchinson 25 years

The President congratulated the Clerks adding that badges were available for 20, 25, 30 and 40 years' service and arrangements for presenting the badges would be made.

Jan Snell Award

The Jan Snell Award had been awarded to Shropshire & Telford & Wrekin Councils over the years in recognition of outstanding achievements and was set up in memory of the late Jan Snell who some might recall had supported the Association and Members for many years. The President had been keen to reintroduce the award for a final year as the Shield was now full. Award winners had demonstrated exceptional good practice and innovative ideas and this year was no exception. The Panel, Cllrs Wickson, Wilson and VP Abbiss) had found it very difficult to select a winner. It was clear that the final three were all outstanding applications and all had offered an enhanced service to their communities. After consideration, the Panel had agreed that all three were worthy of the Award and their Council names would be added to the Jan Snell Shield. The three Councils, in alphabetical order were Childs Ercall, in Shropshire; Rodington in Telford & Wrekin and Welshampton & Lyneal, also in Shropshire and representatives were invited to give a short account of their applications.

- Childs Ercall PC: Cllr Gary Barnes gave a brief outline of the Childs Ercall Village Play Park project which had taken 3 years to reach its conclusion and acted as a catalyst in bringing a whole community together with the resulting improvement in village life for young and old alike. It had been a collaborative project between the Council, the community, local authority officials and businesses. The facility not only attracted families from far and wide, it had acted as a springboard to the revitalisation of activities in the village hall and the green where there were 4 resident football teams (2 boys and 2 girls) and a pop-café service in the village hall.
- Rodington PC: The Clerk, Connor Furnival outlined the work of the Council-formed Climate and Nature Steering Group in setting up the Greener Rodington Parish publication. A key aim had been to develop a derelict space into a thriving Community Orchard managed by volunteers which had brought the community closer through this natural environment and love for it to thrive, with its bug gardens, bog garden, carbon friendly seating, bird boxes and interpretation board. The project was growing into a larger area of properly managed meadow and further fruit trees.
- Welshampton & Lyneal PC: Cllr Kathryn Holland described the Council's overarching aim to be a Council of quality, delivering services and supporting residents in all ways possible. For this, the Council retained its Quality Gold Level Award status building on its achievements, its professionalism, enthusiasm, and commitment to team working with a programme of self review. Of note was the setup of 'Swish' in partnership with Severn Hospice and described as a fancy clothes shop benefitting the Ellesmere Branch of the Hospice. The 'Big Green Day' was attended by 20 exhibitors representing growers of sustainable, renewable energy sources, reuse and repurpose of items in the home, education in respect of the Meres and Mosses, composting waste management, verge rewilding, meadow creation and much more. The aim was to inform and inspire.

The President thanked the presenters adding that these would be the last Councils to be added to the shield as it was now full. Replicas would be available for the three Councils to keep, but the main shield, would, after the presentations, return to the office for safe keeping. A new Award and criteria would be considered for next year and possibly an event to celebrate the amazing work of all Councils across the entire County. Award winners would be invited to take part in this event, along with other Councils to show the many outstanding projects that support communities across Shropshire.

AGM23/2007 APPOINTMENT OF AUDITOR FOR 2023/24

The President reported that Shropshire Council had kindly offered to continue their services as auditors. She placed on record her thanks and appreciation to Shropshire Council for conducting the audit once again.

It was proposed by Cllr P Goulbourne and seconded by Cllr H Unwin.

RESOLVED: That Shropshire Council continue as Auditors to the Association.

AGM23/2008 ANNUAL REPORT AND AUDITED ACCOUNTS

The Chairman, Cllr R Wickson presented the report, which had been circulated.

Proposed by Cllr R Wickson, seconded by Cllr G Fryer.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report and Audited Accounts for 2022-2023 be received and adopted.

AGM23/2009 ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FEE

The President commented on the sound support SALC received from Parish and Town Councils across the County which included Telford & Wrekin with membership remaining at 99%. She applauded the amount of information received from the Association and the excellent support available from the officers and the Executive members who she thanked on behalf of all the member Councillors and Clerks.

The President then invited the Chairman, Cllr Wickson, to present the Executive's recommendation for 2024/25. This was for an increase of 2.5p per elector up to 3500 and 1p over with no increase to the administration fee, which he proposed. This was seconded by Cllr P Goulbourne.

RESOLVED: That the Affiliation Fee be approved as follows:

- Admin Fee £60 under 1000 electors, £70 over 1000 electors (no change)
- Per Elector up to 3500, be raised by 2.5p from 42.5p per elector to 45p
- Per Elector over 3500, to be raised by 1p from 1.5p per elector to 2.5p

NOTE: This does not include NALC fee of 7.94 pence per elector, with a cap of £2,037 for larger councils.

AGM23/2010 MOTIONS

The President reported that two motions had been received and invited Bitterley PC to present their motion.

Bitterley Parish Council presented by Cllr Jon Reardon-Smith

To improve the process for consulting, wording, setting, and monitoring conditions placed on renewable energy projects we put forward the following. That conditions be consulted on and agreed with Parish Councils and representatives of the local community prior to discharge and made legally binding. Conditions on mitigation, biodiversity and SuDs should be monitored yearly. Alongside this, a program of mandatory 5 year audits by an independent body should assess the progress of mitigation and biodiversity net gains on these sites. All these reports should be made widely available to the community and the wider general public.

(Note this would also apply to non-material amendments to plans and projects that have life extensions)

Cllr Reardon-Smith presented the following reasons for the motion:

Consultation: Consultation during all stages of the planning process can provide important local knowledge which leads to improvements in plans. These can then be formalised into conditions and plans within conditions (BEMP's, LEMP's, SuDS etc). This motion is presented to change council planning policy so that conditions and plans are brought back to the local PC and community for consultation before being discharged. This is to ensure that promised and agreed improvements are contained within those conditions and plans.

Example- recent planning for a solar farm included a wild-flower meadow as a main biodiversity enhancement- the meadow is not included in the plans passed, or the conditions attached to the planning application- it has gone missing.

Wording: Conditions and plans within the conditions should be written unambiguously, consistently and be legally binding.

Example- A condition would say mitigations should be maintained for 4 years, the plans say for the life of the project- which is correct, acceptable and enforceable?

(Note this would also apply to non-material amendments to plans and projects that have life extensions)

Monitoring: Currently conditions do not contain any mandatory reporting of the maintenance and mitigation action or what level of biodiversity net gain is being achieved at any point in the life of the project

This motion seeks to formalise plans (LEMP's, BEMP's SuDS etc) contained under the conditions to include a timetable of annual and independent mandatory 5 yearly maintenance schedules and inspections for the length of the project. Some to be done by independent experts in the field of ecology, landscape and biodiversity net gains. All the information gathered should be available to the public and filed on the planning portal. This would allow residents and the council to track changes in the condition of the land. If necessary, the council could issue enforcement notices based on this information.

Example- 6 years after a recent solar farm build, none of the conditions regarding grazing and grass maintenance has been carried out to the schedules in the plans under the conditions. It has also come to light that 1000's of saplings planted for mitigation have died and not been replaced. There has been no reporting of these issues, or the status of the mitigation plans to the council by the developer and no independent audit of the site. It is clear that the site is not meeting the requirements of the plan and little or no biodiversity gain will be had from this development if the present state is not changed.

(Note this would also apply to non-material amendments to plans and projects that have life extensions)

The motion was seeking the following:

- To work with the Council to change the current planning system to include consultation on conditions and plans and the use of the planning portal to assist in this process. This to include non-material amendments and applications for re-living renewable projects.
- To work with the Council and then consult the community on the wording that must be used to ensure legally binding conditions and plans.
- To work with the Council and community to draw up a policy for monitoring and reporting on mitigation and maintenance plans and a policy also to include the detail of independent 5 year audits, who and how and funding.
- To involve the community in drawing up these policies at a very early stage and make sure there is adequate across the board consultation prior to policy being published.

Cllr Colin Stevenson, seconding the motion on behalf of the South Shropshire Area Committee said the problem was with enforcement and no action was taken to ensure conditions were maintained. Other councillors speaking in support were Cllrs M Bennett, A Wilson, L Tennant, and D Harmer.

RESOLVED: That the motion as set out above be supported:

The Chairman responded that the motion as supported would be considered by the SALC Executive at its next meeting in terms of setting up a Task & Finish Group and consulting with MPs.

Wem Town Council presented by the Mayor, Cllr Geoff Soul.

That SALC be asked to request that Shropshire Council consider the creation of a joint communication charter between Shropshire Council and Town and Parish Councils in order to improve response times to emails, telephone messages and letters, as current response times are unacceptable.

Cllr Soul stated that currently the response time to emails from some departments at Shropshire Council was unacceptably slow and at times non-existent. Town and Parish Clerks were currently spending a significant amount of time each week recontacting Shropshire Council officers for responses to emails, letters, and phone messages. The time spent on this duplication of work amounted to a significant waste of taxpayers' money and must be addressed. One way to deal with this matter was the creation of a communication charter to ensure that responses were received in a timely manner.

:

The motion was seeking to raise this at a senior level at Shropshire Council to develop a communication charter.

In the absence of Whittington PC seconding the motion was Cllr M Bennett who was concerned about the impact of home working on response times. Councillors speaking in support were Cllrs J Reardon-Smith, A Edwards, S Dyke, L Tennant, H Unwin. Also speaking in support was the Chairman, Cllr R Wickson who said he would pass on these frustrations expressed to the Leader of Shropshire Council when he met with her the following week.

RESOLVED: That the motion as set out above be supported:

The motion as supported would go before the Executive Committee at its next meeting.

The President reported that a communication had been received from Bomere Heath Parish Council. As such, this could not be included on the agenda. She asked Cllr Dan Harmer, Chairman of the PC if he would like to raise it and bring it to the attention of the meeting.

Cllr Harman read out the following:

As Parish Council's we are now entering a new Era of Digital exposure, GDPR, IT and associated support, digital banking, emails, cloud storage and so much more.

As a group of willing Councillors trying to carry out the most local level of government works, it is staggering that each Parish Council seems to be autonomous in how it goes about selecting, procuring, and managing not only Websites/emails/banking but also IT hardware and individual employment contracts, taxes, payments and such. I would propose that SALC run a poll to the PC's to establish the range of costs and deals available and terms that PC's have agreed to.

The question I put to the AGM is; would SALC be in a position to offer a role that centralises some of this process?

In major UK business, this activity would be centralised and benefit from attracting an overall saving with the power numbers.

Website hosts could be selected and procured centrally with a partner offering greater support and the best price and all the PC has to do is log in and webpage ready and waiting along with support to personalise. This could be reviewed on a periodic basis to ensure best value for us ALL.

Similarly, emails and cloud storage could be provided by a single reputable supplier and the PC pays for the number of users etc. etc.

I feel that this could be funded by an agreed increase to the SALC fee OR a side fee for members willing to participate. This could also cover/possibly insurances, Payroll works, and IT software and hardware suppliers and support.

I don't feel that the community fully understands not only the work that a Parish Council does, but all the other activities that Parish Councils are required to do in the 2023 to be compliant and work within the UK Laws.

I feel that It is incumbent on support networks such as SALC, to release pressures on the PC's through membership fees to reduce the responsibilities that we face.

Never has a Parish Councillors role been more complex and the fear is that if this activity remains with the individual councils that fewer new members will be willing to step forward to join. Therefore adding pressure to remaining councillors.

If this can be considered, I would be interested to understand how fellow Parish Councils feel.

The President invited Cllr R Wickson to respond. Cllr Wickson reported that digitalisation was high on Shropshire Council's agenda and the Executive at its next meeting would consider the questions raised by Cllr Harman.

AGM23/2011 PRESIDENT'S CLOSING REMARKS

The President thanked everyone for attending adding that on behalf of all Member Councils she thanked Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council from whom she said SALC was fortunate to have the amazing support from both unitary councillors and officers. She also thanked the local MPs with whom SALC had a good relationship with them all across the County.

She thanked the officers of the National Association, who were always on hand to offer advice and guidance, and she thanked Members of the Executive Committee for their valued support and guidance. She paid tribute to all the Parish & Town Council Clerks and Staff who did an amazing job, and often in difficult circumstances, and all the local councillors who were the grassroots across the County. Their commitment and dedication to making their parishes and towns better places to live, work or visit, often went un-noticed but was very much appreciated.

Finally, she gave a heart-felt thank you to both SALC's Officers whose commitment to SALC was outstanding and very much appreciated.

In closing, she asked those present to take back to their communities, her very grateful thanks to all the voluntary groups and organisations in their local areas. There were many community support groups, friendship groups, food banks, cafes etc. etc – all offering support and friendship in these continuing difficult times.

She sincerely hoped that everyone would stay well and enjoy the festive season as it was creeping up very quickly, sending her very best wishes to everyone.

President: Date:

The AGM ended at 7.45 pm.

DRAFT