

**STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE  
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Held on Monday, 30 May 2022**

**At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney**

**Present:**

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	V Gwatkin
	L Ashbourne	A Prosser
	L Duncan	R Smith
	H Eaglestone	

Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk

Others: No members of the public.

**SC247 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

All members were present at the meeting.

**SC248 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

**SC249 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee.

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Luci Ashbourne be elected. There being no other nominations it was:

**Resolved:**

That, Councillor Luci Ashbourne be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2022/2023 municipal year.

**SC250 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 21 March 2022 were received.

**SC131 – Happy to Chat Benches**

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that no reply had been received from the group who originally requested this project in 2020. It was agreed that if no response was received by 10 June, that the Council progresses the project.

**Resolved:**

That, the minutes of the Stronger Committee held on 21 March 2022 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

**SC251 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

**SC252 COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The committee considered whether any changes were needed to the current Terms of Reference.

**Resolved:**

1. That, 'in town council ownership' be inserted into point (b) concerning maintaining infrastructure and;
2. That, point (g) be omitted as it duplicated point (a)

**SC253 OPEN SPACES STRATEGY, COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES AND WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O concerning the Open Spaces Strategy (OSS) and programme of works for the year.

Members were advised that most of the OSS actions were underway, most were time sensitive and crossed over with other committees' priorities. Some of these capital projects may be later than planned due to external delays while there were reports on others on the agenda for this meeting.

In response to a member query, it was agreed that £10,000 be ring-fenced towards water safety education.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, there was no one priority above all others, they would be achieved through a natural cycle within the year.

**SC254 FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk and were advised the financial position of items within its remit were in a good position.

**Resolved:**

That, the report of the Town Clerk be noted.

*Councillor L Ashbourne joined the meeting at 6.08pm*

**SC255 YOUTH SERVICES GRANT REVIEW**

The committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the Youth Services Grant for 2022.

Members were pleased to hear the County Council had re-introduced youth crisis funding, that a new Youth Work team was working in West Oxfordshire and they had made contact with town council officers. The aims and work of this team were as yet unknown and would develop over the coming months. It did give the town council the opportunity to extend the remit of its youth services grant, totalling £40,000 for the current year.

The Committee discussed the merits of using some of the fund towards 'free' hire of premises but heard that the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall didn't meet the requirements of at least one group which offered outreach work in the town. There was further discussion on whether part of the fund could be earmarked towards a new, permanent youth facility, potentially at The Leys, as part of a future and wider re-development.

Members agreed that the funds could be used for and publicised as such, for hire costs of any facility to hold youth evenings/events and for funds towards a permanent youth structure.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Youth Services Grant criteria be amended to add and highlight that funding may be used towards facility hire costs and towards a permanent youth structure.

**SC256 COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer concerning the annual resident's satisfaction survey results, the town council App, and championing local.

Members were pleased to see several hundred survey responses had been received from residents. They noted there was still confusion over Local Government tiers, and which Council provided services and therefore, the results may be skewed because of this misunderstanding. There were positive comments which were welcome and negative ones which should be addressed, either by the town council through feeding into strategies, or by forwarding onto the relevant authority.

The Committee also considered the relevance of the Town Council App which figures showed was not being utilised in a meaningful way. There was a small number of residents who used it but nothing had been submitted through it for some time and the same news and information was available via the Website, which was largely mobile-friendly. There were seemingly no other town or parish council's who were using an app and there was no transactional or interactive functionality which could generate further interest.

The report also included suggestions on improving community engagement by championing local sports clubs and organisations, initially through social media but then officially through the committee process.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, comments from the survey concerning town council services are addressed directly or by being incorporated into existing strategies and,
3. That, 'You Said, We Did' video shorts with members are published in response to the comments and
4. That, comments concerning County & District Council's are filtered and forwarded to the Leader of those Council's and Members with Cabinet responsibility for those issues and,
5. That, the Town Council App be discontinued at this time and,
6. That, as part of the Communications Strategy Review, the website is reviewed to improve access and functionality and,
7. That, the Town Council highlights and congratulates local sports clubs and organisations through the use of social media and,
8. That, these achievements be recognised at Full Council under Communications from the Leader and,
9. That, the possibility of recognising sporting achievements be considered when the Civic Reception/Citizen of the Year Awards are reviewed and,
10. That, the Press Coverage report and Witney Forum minutes be noted.

SC257 **TOWN HALL WINDOW - COMMUNITY USE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the Town Hall windows.

Members were advised re-branding of the Town Council was nearing completion and once that was done, the windows would be utilised more to advertised Council services and the events at the Corn Exchange. There was one window which could be offered to local community groups or organisations and members were supportive of the suggested policy on how this could be implemented. Confirmation was given that the intent was this should be free of charge.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the Town Council welcomes community groups to use one window for advertising and;
2. That, the policy on such displays is formulated from the suggestions in the report; namely:
  - a. It is for free community use only, open to charities, groups or community organisations operating in Witney or the promotion of free services. Advertising for paid services would not be permitted.
  - b. It is let for one month at a time on a first-come, first-serve basis
  - c. There is no cost for this service
  - d. It is booked through the Council's Bookings Office
  - e. Groups are responsible for setting up and clearing the space
  - f. Any display must adhere to health and safety rules i.e. no lighting etc.
3. That, a back up display be developed for when not in use.

**SC258 THIRD PARTY/ LARGE EVENTS**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk.

Members were advised that Witney Pride appeared to have been a successful event at the Leys and the organisation of future upcoming events were in hand with the Venue & Events Officer. Paperwork had been received and reviewed for most and there currently didn't appear to be any issues the committee needed to be aware of.

The Chair stated he was pleased the Witney Pride event had gone so well and the organisers should be complimented on the organisation and execution of the event.

**Resolved:**

That, the verbal update of the Deputy Town Clerk be noted.

**SC259 PLATINUM JUBILEE WORKING PARTY MINUTES**

The Committee received the minutes of the Platinum Jubilee Working Party held on 28 April 2022.

The Chair of the Stronger Communities Committee thanked the Working Party for its work in planning a programme of events for the weekend which everyone was looking forward to.

**Recommended:**

That, the minutes of the Platinum Jubilee Working Party held on 28 April 2022 be received and the recommendations therein be approved.

**SC260 OXFORD PLAYHOUSE - PARTICIPATION EVENT AT THE LEYS RECREATION GROUND**

The committee received and considered correspondence from Oxford Playhouse concerning their 'Playhouse Plays Out Tent Tour.'

Members were supportive of the initiative which could be held on The Leys Recreation Ground, but the funds needed to facilitate were regrettably not available in the current year. A discussion could be had with the District Council to enquire whether Covid-19 recovery funds could go towards it, but it was essentially too late to prepare and advertise for June.

**Resolved:**

That, the Town Council could not accommodate the Playhouse Plays Out Tent Tour in 2022 but would consider an early request for 2023 dates.

**SC261 COMMUNITY SUPPORT - UKRAINIAN FAMILIES**

The Committee received a verbal update from members and heard that more Ukrainian families were coming in and the scheme locally appeared to be working well. School and Surgery places had been found and administration of support via Cogges Church was helping all concerned.

At the moment, there was nothing further directly required from the town council, but the subsidised use of the Corn Exchange had been welcomed, and that may be needed in the future for information dissemination.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the verbal update be noted and;
2. That, further subsidised use of the Corn Exchange may be requested.

**SC262 TOWER HILL TREE RE-INSPECTION**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer.

Members supported the need to undertake a re-inspection of mature trees at Tower Hill Cemetery following storms earlier in the year. Officers confirmed the cost would be allocated from an underspend in the arboriculture budget from 2021-22.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a tree re-inspection is commissioned for Tower Hill Cemetery at a cost of £785.00 and,
3. That, two static load tests are commissioned on beech trees T442 & T310 at a cost of £2,523.00.

**SC263 LITTER AND DOG WASTE BINS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk.

Members were advised the District Council had completed its bin replacement programme in Witney and all those which remained in place had been upgraded to dual use bins, while a number of bins had been removed and not replaced. It was understood that there was no intention to install single use dog waste bins anymore or any dual use bins in residential areas by the District Council; its adopted policy was to encourage dog owners walking in these areas to take the waste home with them to dispose of.

The Committee agreed this appeared to be counter-productive in trying to reduce littering, but the District Council had based its decisions on evidence indicating the majority of residents would act responsibly and not litter. The education of the public, publication of the scheme and policy change had clearly not been satisfactory.

Members heard that the automatic response from the District Council, that all new bin and additional bin requests must be made by town and parish council's, had resulted in complaints and requests being received for several areas due to bin removal. A review of the response had been promised by the District Council, but the requests left the Town Council in a difficult position of wanting to help residents, but not having the funds to pay for continued emptying of litter and dog waste bins previously paid for by the District Council.

It was agreed the Town Council should collect dog waste from any remaining single use dog waste bins on its land with immediate effect.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, bin emptying on town council land is taken over in its entirety by Witney Town Council and,
3. That, the Town Council considers requests for new or additional litter and dog waste bins on its land, differentiation made on each with separate bins as appropriate and,
4. That, requests for any bins on West Oxfordshire District Council land are forwarded to them to deal with, the town council declining such requests and,
5. That, requests for bins in other areas are not the responsibility of the Town Council and in line with the District Council's policy on bins in residential areas, will be declined and,
6. That, the above be reviewed in the next Council year to ascertain the current position.

**SC264 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved:**

That in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

**SC265 CLOSED-CIRCUIT TELEVISION (CCTV)**

The Committee received the confidential report of the Town Clerk/C.E.O concerning contributions towards CCTV provision.

Members welcomed a response from West Oxfordshire District Council updating on the current provision but were conscious a proposed upgrade had not materialised in recent years. There was agreement that funds should be released but that further funding for 2023 was not guaranteed and would only be considered on receipt of a further update report at that time.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the confidential report and correspondence from WODC be noted and,
2. That, it be recommended to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee that the contribution towards the CCTV scheme be released for 2022 and,
3. That, a letter is issued outlining the town council's position for 2023.

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The meeting closed at: 7.49 pm

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Chair