

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

**Held on Monday, 18 September 2023**

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

**Present:**

Councillor G Meadows (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	J Doughty
	R Smith	D Edwards-Hughes
	T Ashby	J Treloar
	A Bailey	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	Two members of the public.	

**SC480 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O Collins & L Cherry.

**SC481 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor R Smith declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 as she attends the church who was proposing to run the detached youth services programme.

Councillor D Edwards-Hughes also declared a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item 8 as his employer has provided financial support to Homestart.

**SC482 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities committee held on 17 July 2023 were received.

**Resolved:**

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities committee held on 17 July 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

**SC483 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

*The Committee adjourned for this item.*

The committee received representations from representative of Homestart concerning a grant application to be discussed under Agenda Item 8.

Further representation was made by a representative of Witney Music Festival concerning Agenda Item 11.

*The Committee reconvened.*

SC484 **HOMESTART - GRANT REQUEST**

This subject was due to be discussed as part of Agenda Item 8 however with the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the member of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

Following questions to the Homestart representative the Committee received and considered the grant application. They recognised the issues that Homestart faced with raising funds in order to provide essential support to families with young children. Though they hold reserves and are not at risk of closure these funds are necessary to provide future reassurance.

Councillor R Smith proposed the approval of a £10,000 grant, this was seconded by Councillor J Aitman and a vote was taken. All members were in agreement.

Recommended:

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, a grant of £10,000 be made to Homestart, £8,400 from the remaining Youth Services Budget (4169/408) and £1,600 from the general grants budget (4100/407).

SC485 **WITNEY MUSIC FESTIVAL - FINANCIAL SUPPORT REQUEST**

This subject was due to be discussed as part of Agenda Item 11 however with the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the member of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

The Committee having heard a passionately prepared proposal from the representative of Witney Music Festival (WMF) discussed at length the request for an additional £5,000 of grant funding to provide a disabled platform and toilets for the 2024 event. Members agreed with the festival's aim to be "for all" and therefore inclusive and diverse, however members were also aware of the growing contribution being made to this event which is provided for not only Witney residents but also those from the wider council district.

It was proposed by Councillor J Aitman that the £10,000 contribution made by the council in 2023 continues by way of the partnership in place for 2024 and that she works with WMF in her capacity as West Oxfordshire District Council's Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities to support them in an application via the new "Westhive" fundraising platform, the proposal was seconded by Councillor J Doughty and a vote was taken.

Five members were in agreement with both parts of the proposal, one member voted against the first part of proposal regarding the £10,000.

**Recommended:**

1. That, subject to the financial standing of the Council during the budget cycle that the continuation of a £10,000 be made to Witney Music Festival in 2024 and,
2. That, Councillor Aitman assist Witney Music Festival's application for funding via the WODC Westhive Scheme.

SC486 **FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) which summarised the budgets under its remit, along with associated costs centres and codes.

Members were reminded to commence consideration for items to be included in the 2024/25 budget setting, these would need to be presented for discussion at the next meeting. Members were welcomed to contact the RFO with any suggestions.

The Town Clerk advised that if the committee wishes to continue with the drop in sessions provided by APCAM then these would need to be a budget consideration.

**Resolved:**

That, the report be noted.

SC487 **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer outlining guidance for Councillors social media communications.

Members were pleased to receive the information provided; they considered ways in which they could improve interactions with residents such as better organisation of the 'Councillors in the Café' events, perhaps with the use of a Gazebo outside of the Corn Exchange on fine weather days so that they are more visible. A Member laboured the point that it was also important to understand that residents could contact councillors at any time and that this should be encouraged.

Members also agreed that the sharing of a single social media post rather than each constructing their own would be clearer for residents to understand.

The Committee were pleased to hear of the signage being placed on the frontage of the reception.

**Resolved:**

That, the report be noted.

Councillors J Treloar & G Doughty left the meeting at 19:08pm and rejoined 19:15pm

SC488 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

Members agreed to launch the Citizen of the Year award and encouraged each other to provide nominations themselves, they were also all in support of the signing up to the White Ribbon Promise as it was felt that this must be underlined if change is to be made.

Members also discussed with vigour the idea of marking the 80<sup>th</sup> D-Day Anniversary, some members were of the opinion that a number of significant events relating to WW2 were upcoming over the next 18 months and consideration could be given to an event that would celebrate the peace that came from the heroic actions of D-Day instead. It was agreed by the Committee that a Task & Finish group would be appropriate to finalise arrangements.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, delegate decision to mark World Mental Health Day to officers and,
3. That, funding up to £100 is awarded to support heritage walks as part of car free day and,
4. That, the Citizen of the Year award is run as per the previous format and,
5. That, Witney Town Council sign the White Ribbon Promise subject to agreement by the Personal Sub-Committee and,
6. That, a budget of £1,000 be allocated to the 80<sup>th</sup> D-Day Anniversary event and a Task & Finish group created.

**SC489 YOUTH SERVICES**

Members received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding an update on Youth Services.

Members were pleased to hear that the program of events of the summer had been well received.

A verbal update was provided by the Town Clerk to members on the progress of Bright Futures. She highlighted the proposed metrics for assessing the success of the service and the members made some comments to be fed back

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the six-week summer period of activities should continue to be highlighted and,
3. That, the continuation of financial support to provide APCAM drop in sessions be explored.

Councillor A Bailey left the meeting – 20:01pm

**SC490 RESIDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which provided feedback following the annual residents survey.

Members were unsurprised to see that many of the comments were about issues outside of the Town Councils control however they were pleased to see that Officers were engaging with other authorities and organisations to address those issues also.

The Committee also believed that the publication of issues that the council does address should be promoted via social media, noticeboards including the new digital noticeboard that would shortly be installed in the reception window.

The Town Clerk advised that a meeting had been arranged for all three level of Councils , WTC, WODC and OCC to discuss the grounds maintenance and the overall appearance of the town.

**Resolved**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers continue to lobby authorities and organisations to ensure issues raised are addressed and,
3. That, “You Said, We Did” posts are issued via the council’s various information outlets.

**SC491 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

As the meeting would now exceed 2 hours in length, the Committee agreed to suspend standing order 48 in order to allow the meeting to continue to its conclusion.

**SC492 TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP**

The Committee received the report of the Town Clerk outlining the plan to reformulate a Witney Partnership Forum.

As advised in the report the first meeting was scheduled for the following day, 19 September 2023, the Town Clerk welcomed comments from members ahead of the meeting on what the objectives of the Town Partnership should be. She would report back on the outcome at a future meeting.

Members asked that questions were raised as to how the market could be improved with such ideas as more affordable rents, better signage and the cleaning up of open spaces all of which would lead to drive footfall into the town and support existing and encourage new businesses. Other towns run successful markets so no reason Witney could not.

Members also asked the identification of Safe Spaces for youths was part of the forum discussion.

**Resolved**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, members comments be raised at the forum meeting by the Town Clerk.

Councillor A Bailey rejoined the meeting – 20:08pm

**SC493 EVENTS REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Venue & Events Officer regarding upcoming events for the remainder of 2023.

Members were grateful for the work that Oxfordshire Play Association put into the very successful and well attended event, Councillor J Aitman proposed that the council continue to

support this free event for Witney's children, it was seconded by Councillor J Doughty with unanimous agreement of members.

The Town Clerk provided a verbal update to confirm that Remembrance Service arrangements were progressing, if councillors had any questions they should be directed to Officers.

Members were encouraged by Councillor J Aitman to ensure that they support the Childrens Advent Fayre, another very popular free event put on by the Town Council, she stressed that however it needed councillor support on the day in order to proceed.

**Resolved**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Oxfordshire Play Association correspondence to be noted and the Council continues to support the event next year with a grant of £1,000,
3. That, the Councillors participate in the children's advent fayre to ensure the event proceeds safely.

SC494 **IN BLOOM**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer providing an update on the In Bloom Competition.

Members welcomed the reuse of the High Street Planters elsewhere on the Council estate they also liked the idea of the Community Gardener Competition which could include individuals as well as businesses as this would complement the other activities and participation that In Bloom creates.

They discussed ideas for the 2024 planting scheme and suggested ideas such as, Bee friendly, herbs and lavender. Members were happy though for officers to take the lead on the decision.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Witney Community Support Group be offered the option to adopt a school in bloom barrow and,
3. That, a planting scheme incorporating the idea expressed is considered and,
4. That, a Community Gardener Competition is introduced.

SC495 **BUS SHELTERS – WEST WITNEY**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk outlining the imminent install of four new bus shelters at Windrush Place.

A member raised that the original agreement was that six shelters would be provided and that in June 2023 it was agreed between Tetra Tech and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) that these would include Sedum living roofs. It was understood that the reduction was due to two of the original planned shelters being sited directly outside of properties and this was now deemed not suitable.

The member provided contact details of the officer at OCC that the consortium had been in discussions with so that Officers could investigate further.

The Committee raised their concerns of adoption of bus shelters prior to the adoption of the roadways by OCC, they ask that any damage to the shelters that is suffered whilst construction continues is the liability of the developers. Members ask that a condition of adoption to be that the shelters have sedum living roofs.

Members also ask that if only four bus stops are provided rather than the original six, they would like to see the developer cost saving for this to be paid to the council towards the ongoing upkeep of bus shelters across the town.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the adoption of shelters is subject to them having sedum living roofs and that damage during the construction stage is the responsibility of the developer and,
3. That, Officers request that the shelters have a reduced level of Perspex and,
4. That, the bus shelter maintenance budget be increased to £3,000.

SC496 **CHRISTMAS LIGHTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager regarding the need to tender for the Christmas Light contract to run from 2024-2027.

Members raised issues that they saw with the current contract, it was agreed that a Working party should be established in order for members to be involved in setting the specification for the tender and to review and award the tender. The Town Clerk therefore suggested that this item be deferred and referred to the Christmas Lights Working Party once established after full Council.

A member pointed out that the Christmas Lights was a considerable expense to the council and was comparable in amount to the Youth Services Grant budget. Officers clarified that the current budget of £44,000 was per year and not spread across the three-year term.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a working party be established to work with Officers on the specification for the tender, and the awarding of the contract in 2024.

SC497 **WINTER PREPARATIONS**

The Committee received the report for the Operations Manager regarding Winter Preparations.

Members all agreed for the need to install grit bins on the Kingfisher Meadows estate. A member also asked that the Council works team are aware of the need to ensure that pathways which form part of the Councils estate, such as Tower Hill Cemetery are well gritted when required.

**Resolved**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, two grit bins are installed at Kingfisher Meadows.

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The meeting closed at: 8.40 pm

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Chair