

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

Held on Monday, 18 November 2024

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

Present:

Councillor R Smith (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors:	G Meadows O Collins T Ashby A Bailey	J Aitman D Temple S Simpson
Officers:	Adam Clapton Derek Mackenzie Sharon Groth Nigel Warner	Deputy Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Town Clerk Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	One members of the public. Councillor Rachel Crouch	

SC634 ELECTION OF CHAIR

Due to the resignation of the former member for Central Ward who had previously sat as Chair, Members discussed whether a replacement Chair should be appointed for the remainder of the municipal year.

It was proposed by Councillor O Collins and seconded by Councillor J Aitman that no election for Chair should occur and that the Vice Chair should continue to Chair the remaining meetings of the municipal Year.

A Vote was then called for. The proposal was carried, with voting as follows:

In Favour	6
Against	0
Abstentions	1

In response to a Members question, Officers confirmed that in the absence of the Vice Chair the Council Standing Orders would be followed with either the Mayor officiating if present, or the Committee appointing a Chair for those meetings.

Resolved:

That, the position of Chair remains vacant for the remainder of the municipal year, with the Vice-Chair, Cllr R Smith acting as Chair until that time.

SC635 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

SC636 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor R Smith declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10 as she was a member of the church which provided the Detached Youth Service.

During the discussion of Agenda Item 10, Councillor O Collins declared a personal interest due to APCAM being one of the nominated charities for his current term as Mayor.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

SC637 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities committee held on 23 September 2024 were received.

SC528 – Officers advised that Witney Music Festival had only forwarded the requested financial statements within the past few days, therefore these would be presented to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 25 November 2024.

SC528 – The Chair encouraged Members to assist with the running of the Advent Fayre on 1 December as only a few Councillors had committed their support to the event.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 23 September 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

SC638 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

SC639 **FINANCE REPORT: REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25 AND DRAFT BASE REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2025/26**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) concerning the base revenue budget, draft estimates on budget parameters for 2024/25 and the revenue budget summary.

For the benefit of Members, the RFO outlined the contents of the report and explained that although monitoring took place throughout the year, this was the initial report of the Committee budget setting cycle and this would be refined ahead of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting on 25 November.

During this process, the Committee were advised the RFO scrutinised budget lines and looked at the inflationary rises. He also considered changes resulting from public sector pay increases and employer national insurance contributions. Due to uncertain energy prices, he suggested the

budget line should be held at the same level as 2024/25 however, water rates had outstripped inflation and therefore a 18% increase had been included in the budget forecast.

Members were pleased to receive confirmation that the Project Officer had agreed additional Christmas event sponsorships which would help to increase income revenue.

The Committee was also pleased to hear that the 2024/25 budget projections showed a surplus however, understood the cost rise impact for 2025/26.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the draft revised base revenue budget for 2024/25 and the estimated base revenue budgets for 2025/26, as detailed be agreed.

SC640 **REVENUE GROWTH ITEMS, SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS, AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) along with a verbal explanation of its content which indicated the need for a £67,000 - £76,000 increase in support of Community projects.

Many of the proposals discussed at this point of the meeting were featured in the reports to the Committee later in the meeting.

Members were pleased to see the inclusion of improvements to the services provided to the community and discussed the impact of each of these. They were conscious that the budget needed to remain within sensible bounds as any increases would be met by the taxpayer.

A Member advised that in a report of the Institute of Fiscal Studies that every £1 saved by Councils in budget setting led to £8.25 in criminal justice costs and therefore careful consideration was necessary if decisions were made to reduce the proposed budget recommendations for youth services.

Members were in agreement that the payments to support both Home Start and The Station should be retained. In light of this, the Committee discussed the amount to be attributed to the Youth Services Grant budget line, a discussion was held as to the current budget of £40,000 and if that could be reduced however, Members were all in agreement that it remain and that the APCAM budget line be removed and that should an application from APCAM be received then it could be considered under the Youth Services Grant budget.

It was proposed by Councillor R Smith and seconded by Councillor J Aitman that the detached youth service be asked to budget for the provision of the Youth Café from their existing grant payment.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Station Detached Youth Project be asked to provide a Youth Café and,
3. That, the existing £40,000 Youth Service Grant budget remains unchanged, and
4. That, that the Revenue Growth and new Capital items be agreed by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.

(Councillor G Meadows left the meeting at 6:40pm, returning at 6:43pm)

(The Member of the public left at 6:45pm during the discussion of Item 8 – Communication Report)

SC641 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer concerning the progress of current and proposed communication projects.

Members were pleased to hear work assessing the Council's website in order to ensure that it was compliant and followed the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines was underway

The Committee discussed the paper-based communications that the council provided to residents. It was felt that an additional newsletter should be delivered to each household however, the existing £3,000 budget remain and therefore Officers should make the publication A5 in size and utilise QR codes so residents could obtain additional information on subjects.

In consideration of the proposed new residents' leaflet, it was felt by Members that this should be an electronic leaflet provided by estate agents or solicitors on completion of house purchases with a link to a page on the Council's website.

Members also asked that paper copies of the newsletter and residents' leaflet be made available via the Councils administration office; these would be printed in house and therefore avoid any additional printing cost.

The Committee considered the options for signage to direct visitors to the Lake & Country Park. Members understood the difficulties of the positioning of the signage. It was suggested that it could be placed close to the new café that was due to be built in the coming year. Members were keen to ensure that the material used meant that the signage was robust from vandalism attacks however, felt that wood should be a first choice with plastic, hopefully recycled, as a second choice. The Committee delegated to Officers to further explore options including having Witney Shed produce the signage however a purchased option may provide a more longer lasting option.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a budget of £3,000 be set for the printing and delivery of two A5 newsletters in 2025 and,
3. That, a new Witney information leaflet be produced and,
4. That, a budget of £1,500 be set for the provision of signage for the Lake & Country Park to be met from the existing In Bloom underspend and,
5. That, the purchase of signage be delegated to Officers.

SC642 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO) concerning current and proposed Community activity.

Members were pleased to see the multitude of activities Officers were engaged in to promote and provide activity for the community. They received updates on Citizen of the Year, 50th

Anniversary events, support to Witney Town Band, proposals for In Bloom 2025 as well the engagement of Officers on behalf of the Council at a number of collaborative steering groups and forums.

The Committee were updated on arrangements for the evening of the Christmas light switch on. The Youth Council would also be in attendance on the evening, potentially selling hot chocolate and promoting themselves to residents. Acceptances received to the Council's invite to Young Carers and their families to make use of the Gallery Room were lower than hoped for and therefore the C&CEO would contact other local organisations to use some of the remaining space.

Members discussed the proposal of blub planting in Underhaching Park, it was agreed by all that this proceed as it would provide colour and improve what was a neglected area in the heart of the town.

The Committee also heard that the Community Engagement Strategy was currently being put together with an initial draft version to be presented at the January 2025 meeting of the Committee.

Members discussed the Council's resident's questionnaire and agreed questions should only relate to the services provided by Witney Town Council in order to obtain responses that can be acted upon. Also, as the Youth Council had reformed, then questions should be included that had been set by them.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the resident questionnaire should include three questions set by the Youth Council and that any further questions should relate directly to services provided by the Town Council and,
3. That, bulb planting in Underhaching Park take place utilising funds from the In Bloom underspend and,
4. That, additional support be provided to Witney Town Band by way of a summer concert programme and,
5. That, In Bloom vouchers for 2025 remain at the same level as the current year - £50 for schools and £40 for community gardeners and,
6. That, the minutes of the Witney Forum and Witney Community Insight Profile Steering Group be noted.

(Councillor Collins left the meeting at 7.06pm rejoining at 7.10pm during the item on Youth Services)

SC643 **YOUTH SERVICES**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which provided details of youth service spending for 2024/25 and proposed amendments for 2025/26.

Members had earlier reviewed the proposals in the report and had agreed to:

- Continue the support of Home Start Oxford (£11,000) and The Station Detached Youth (£30,000) via the creation of new budget lines.

- That the Youth Services Grant fund should be reinstated with a budget of £40,000 and that mental health sessions to be provided by APCAM should be considered via that fund rather than a separate budget line be established.
- Members had also agreed that the Youth Café provision could be provided by The Station as an extension of the detached Youth Service, subject to further discussion with them.

The Committee reflected on the success of the VR Day which was run with grant support from the Town Hall Charity and had been well received, Members were in agreement that a similar event be run in 2025 and suggested that West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) be contacted to see if they would like to run it as a joint event.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, WODC be approached in respect of the running of a joint VR-day styled event in 2025 and,
3. That, a Youth Services budget remain at £40,000, re-opening for grants and,
4. That, further APCAM mental health drop-in sessions be considered via the Youth Services Budget and,
5. That, new budget lines of £30,000 and £11,000 be established for The Station Detached Youth Project and Home Start Oxford respectively and,
6. That, discussions take place with The Station over the possibility of providing a Youth Café and ,
7. That, the above financial support be awarded under the General Power of Competence.

SC644 **YOUTH COUNCIL**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk following the inaugural meeting of the newly formed Youth Council that afternoon.

Ten of the Thirteen members had been in attendance and all Committee positions had been filled. The Council would now be working on a 12-month plan which would build on their positive ideas.

The next meeting was scheduled for January 2025 and the Mayor indicated that he would try and attend. Following this it was agreed that an invite should be extended to the Youth Council to attend a meeting of this Committee.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

SC645 **THIRD PARTY EVENTS**

Due to time constraints, it had not been possible for this report to be submitted for discussion at the meeting.

Resolved:

That, the report be presented to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 25 November 2024.

SC646 **BLEED KIT REQUEST**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager which outlined the proposal to introduce a Bleed Kit cabinet.

Members had mixed thoughts on the need for this; although the kit could be used for other serious injuries its primary function was to provide support in response to a stabbing incident. Members discussed that there was no evidence of knife related attacks in Witney and believed that the introduction of a bleed kit may increase anxiety within the community that there was a problem. The Chair also advised the Youth Council who had met earlier were in favour of the Council installing these.

The Committee also discussed the implications and social responsibility for the installation of the kits as it was recognised that knives were carried around the town and that steps should be taken to prevent the potential risk, therefore all members were in agreement to purchase and locate a bleed kit by the Town Hall.

Members asked that Officers explore further with Thames Valley Police, WODC and Oxfordshire County Council social and outreach workers as to the potential unseen risk of knife crime in and around the town. Also, Officers were asked to consider the funding opportunities such as future development Section 106 monies or OCC priority funding which could be utilised the roll out of bleed kits across the town in the same way defibrillators are considered.

Resolved:

1. That, a bleed kit be installed in the phone box along with the existing defibrillator on the corner of the Town Hall and,
2. That, it be delegated to Officers to research further the need for additional kits and explore funding options.

The meeting closed at: 7.40 pm

Chair