

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

Held on Monday, 14 July 2025

At 6.01 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor T Ashby (Chair)

Councillors:	R Smith	A Mubin (Till 6:10pm)
	G Meadows	J Treloar
	D Edwards-Hughes	J Aitman (In place of A Bailey)
	D Enright	G Doughty (In place of A Mubin from 6:10pm)
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer &
		Committee Clerk
Others:	None.	

SC406 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A Bailey with Councillor J Aitman attending as a substitute.

Additionally, Councillor A Mubin advised he would have to leave the meeting after a short period at which point Councillor G Doughty would become his substitute.

SC407 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor T Ashby declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the grant application submitted by Witney Buttercross Scout Group by virtue of his participation with the group as a volunteer.

Later in the meeting Councillor R Smith declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the grant application of Bright Futures owing to their connection with the church of which she was a Member.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

SC408 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities committee held on 2 June 2025 were received.

SC305 – The Chair confirmed that the amount of the Youth Services grant pot had been confirmed by Officers at £20,000.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 2 June 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

SC409 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

At 6:10pm Cllr A Mubin left the meeting with Cllr G Doughty becoming his substitute as previously advised.

SC410 ANNUAL RESIDENTS SURVEY RESULTS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the results of the resident's annual satisfaction survey which was carried out at the beginning of the year.

Members were advised that the report represented the survey results for the services under the remit of this Committee and showed the combined satisfactory and above percentages against poor ones. Previous years data was also included to help benchmark the results. The report also contained all unedited comments on the services.

The chair noted the large response from under 18-year-olds and reflected on the contributions they made, it was hoped that the changes currently underway at The Leys would have a positive impact on their comments.

It was acknowledged by Members that the Council aspires for excellence and should continue the work currently under way to improve services across the town; this included the need to promote its work to residents, such as the rolling programme of repairs to street furniture as the perception was that this was neglected.

The Chair raised the idea of a Working Party for a small number of Members to consider ways in which the Council could promote itself further, however Members wished to provide greater support to the work of the Communication & Community Engagement Officer in improving communications

Members were in agreement of a suggestion to issue a second printed newsletter at an estimated cost of £3,000. It was proposed that Witney businesses could be approached to subsidise costs however, this would need to be weighed up with the potential impact on officer time to arrange this. The Committee requested that the Communication & Community Engagement Officer look into this further and report back.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Communication & Community Engagement Officer research corporate sponsorship of an additional printed newsletter.

SC411 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

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

A Member raised that the draft Social Media Policy did not include items that were in the previous version which he felt were important and should be carried over. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that Officers would review again along with any additional comments that Members may wish to submit ahead of an adoption of the Policy at the meeting of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 21 July 2025.

Several Committee Members raised issues with the speed of the Council Website though they were appreciative of the contents of the site and the help that it provided to residents, especially the features such as the land ownership map, which helped guide queries to the Council body responsible.

Resolved:

That, the report and verbal updates be noted.

SC412 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

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

Members welcomed the news that the Army & Air Cadets would be involved with the tidying of war memorials and thanked Officers for the notification of flag raising events which they were able to attend.

The Committee was also pleased to hear of the ongoing work with Thames Valley Police in relation to anti-social behaviour in town with a meeting taking place earlier that day between TVP and Council Officers. Members asked that TVP be approached with a request that an Officer or PCSO attend the monthly Councillor in the Café events as it was thought that this would provide additional feedback to them of other problems that arise within the town. All Members were in agreement.

Members also heard an update on the success of the visit from Le Touquet Youth Council on 8 July which had been enjoyed by all those involved, they were especially thankful of the attendance of the High Sherriff and the further engagement work he had promised.

There were also updates on the proposed climate event to be facilitated by the Council, of the recent meeting of the Witney Forum and an update from The Station, were pleased to report that funding had been achieved for their hot chocolate van project and that the Kick football events would recommence for the summer holidays after their success last year.

They were also looking at their short and longer term objectives and financial planning and would be providing details on these to the Council in an aim to secure a further service level agreement.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, TVP be invited to participate in the Councillor at the Café events.

SC413 **WITNEY FORUM NOTES - 24 JUNE 2025**

The Committee received the minutes of the Witney Forum which had been attended by the Chair who expressed his enjoyment at meeting all the various organisations that participate.

Resolved:

That, the notes of the Witney Forum meeting on 24 June 2025 be noted.

SC414 **YOUTH COUNCIL MINUTES**

The Committee received the notes of the Youth Council meeting held on 19 June 2025.

A meeting had been scheduled for 8 July 2025 to include the attendance from Le Touquet Youth Council Members; however, the meeting did not take place due to time constraints with the other activities on the evening. The meeting would be rescheduled.

Resolved:

1. That, the informal notes of the Youth Council meeting held on 19 June 2025 be noted.

During the following item – Cllr J Treloar left the meeting briefly between 6:55pm and 6:58pm

SC415 **WITNEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE SURVEY**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which outlined the results of a report provided to the Council by Witney Chamber of Commerce (WCoC).

It was agreed that the Chair should extend an invitation personally to the Chair of WCoC in order that the Committee hear first-hand of the issues faced.

Members thanked the Officers for facilitating the survey on behalf of the Witney Chamber of Commerce and acknowledged the importance of combining the results with that gathered from the under 18's survey to create a clearer roadmap for assisting witney's business community.

It was mentioned that Witney needed to be seen as a destination and not simply a convenience town, the subject of coach parking was raised as this had been an issue over the preceding weeks and no provision existed.

In respect of the recommendation to consider the re-establishment of the Witney Forum to replace the Witney Town Partnership it was unanimously agreed that the Forum be resurrected and administered by the Town Council in order to ensure the necessary traction.

It was highlighted by a Member who was also a Councillor for West Oxfordshire District Council, that he hoped the sale of the town market rights would breathe new life and create a connection with the Marriotts shopping area; the buyer of the market had been successful in other towns where it ran markets.

In response to a Member's question it was confirmed that the project to review wayfinding around the town was also a casualty of the continued delays to the High Street and Market Square redevelopment. It was hoped that this along with a strategy to deal with the unkempt

nature of the centre, such as the flyposting of bus shelters and utility boxes could be looked at again and improvements implemented.

The Committee was encouraged to consider the importance of making a submission to the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 which would highlight the need for improvement in order to support the town's business community.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, an invitation be extended by the Chair to his counterpart at Witney Chamber of Commerce to attend a meeting to discuss plans in person. And,
3. That, Officers draft a framework of how the Council can work collaboratively with WCoC for presentation at a future meeting.

SC416 QUEEN EMMA'S DYKE COMMUNITY GARDEN

The Committee received a verbal update from the Committee Clerk outlining that Officers were awaiting a response from the individual(s) looking to establish a community garden. Design of planters and a location had been agreed by the Operations Manager and it was now left with the community to agree responsibility for the upkeep and running.

Resolved:

That, Officers await the community's action with the Queen Emma's Dyke Community Garden.

SC417 WINTER PREPARATIONS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager relating to grit bins across the town.

It was agreed unanimously that a bin be requested to be introduced at Springfield Oval, Members were encouraged to consider other locations within their wards so that any additional requests could be considered at the meeting of the Committee on 15 September.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers submit a request to OCC for consideration of the grit bin to be sited at Springfield Oval.

The Meeting took a short adjournment from 7:15 – 7:20pm

SC418 EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC

Resolved:

That in accordance with section (1(2) of the Public Bodies (admission 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.

During the following Agenda item, the following took place:

*Cllr J Treloar left the meeting at 7:27pm and did not return.
Cllr D Edwards-Hughes left the meeting briefly between 7:50-7:53pm*

SC419 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO 5(W)

Resolved:

That, Standing Order 5(w) be suspended in order to allow the meeting to continue as it had now lasted for two hours.

SC420 YOUTH SERVICES GRANT - EVALUATION OF APPLICATIONS

The Committee received and considered the applications for the Youth Services Grant. Applications totalling £54,342 had been received from fourteen organisations. However, there was an allocated budget of £20,000.

It was agreed early in the discussions that the Committee would review the applications prior to a decision being taken by the Chair, Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council in conjunction with the Deputy Town Clerk at a future scheduled meeting later that week. All Members were in agreement.

However, Members spoke on the merits of each application in order to provide guidance to those delegated to make the final decision. The Committee was supportive of those organisations that provided a clear benefit to Witney residents, and noted that some of the applications had been received from organisations outside of the parish and it was agreed that a scoring system be implemented in order to assist decision making.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised the Committee that a report would be compiled for presentation to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 21 July 2025 for formal agreement on the awarding of funds.

Recommended:

1. That, the decision of awarding the youth services grant be delegated to the Chair, Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council in conjunction with the Deputy Town Clerk and,
2. That, a proposal for the awarding of the Youth Services grant be provided to the meeting of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 21 July 2025.

The meeting closed at: 8.15 pm

Chair