

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

Held on Monday, 15 September 2025

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

Present:

Councillor T Ashby (Chair)

Councillors:	R Smith	J Treloar
	G Meadows	D Temple (In place of D Edwards- Hughes)
	D Enright	R Crouch (In place of A Bailey)
	A Mubin	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Annie Hathaway	Business Administration Apprentice
Others:	Six members of the public.	

SC515 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors D Edwards Hughes and A Bailey, Councillors D Temple and R Crouch attended respectively as substitutes.

SC516 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor T Ashby declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Agenda item 7 due to his connection with Witney Buttercross Scouts.

Councillor R Smith declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8 owing to the connection with the provider of the detached Youth Services provision through the church she attended.

Councillor J Treloar declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 14 due to his relationship with the individuals that organised the Witney Music Festival.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

SC517 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 14 July 2025 were received.

SC415 – A correction was requested to clarify that the market had not been sold but rather a new operator had been appointed to run the market.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 14 July 2025 approved as a correct record of the meeting, subject to the above amendment, and be signed by the Chair.

During the following item Cllr A Mubin arrived at 6:05pm.

SC518 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from a Director of West Oxfordshire Community Transport concerning Agenda Item 12 along with further representation from the Chair of Witney Chamber of Commerce concerning Agenda Item 11, The Station regarding Agenda Item 8 and Witney Music Festival on Agenda Item 14.

Members welcomed the varied participation and looked forward to discussing each item as they arose later in the meeting.

The Committee reconvened.

SC519 FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for budgets which were the responsibility of the Committee.

The Town Clerk noted that the Council would be considering its budget during the next cycle of meetings, and that the RFO's report had requested Members to suggest any inclusions for the 2026/27 budget. She further advised that items later on the agenda might give rise to budgetary implications.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Stronger Communities Committee for the period 1 April to 30 June 2025 be approved.

SC520 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

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

Members agreed that the Communication Survey should be rerun in order to establish which means of communication were most appropriate for residents. It was further agreed that this be included as part of the next resident's annual survey as this was delivered to all Witney properties.

Regarding the production of an additional resident newsletter Members had varied opinions on whether this should be financed by the inclusion of paid advertising from businesses. There were concerns that the news content of the newsletter would not reach its intended audience as it would potentially be seen as a piece of additional junk mail, there were also concerns regarding staff time in organising the advertisements.

It was proposed by Cllr D Enright that instead of a newsletter, a calendar of town events be considered. The Chair asked that Officers report back on the feasibility of this to the next meeting of the Committee, along with the consideration of an external company carrying out the design and advertisement procurement work.

A Member asked that inclusion of paid advertising be considered for the existing printed spring newsletter so as to reduce the overall cost to the Council of its production and distribution.

The Committee considered the erection of an information sign for the COVID Memorial following persistent Anti-Social Behaviour over the summer. Members were in agreement of a budget of £100 being set.

Recommended:

1. That the report be noted and,
2. That, the Communication Survey be rerun in the next resident satisfaction survey and,
3. That Officers report back to the Committee on the publication of an events calendar utilising an external company for its production and,
4. That consideration be given to the inclusion of paid advertising in its existing printed newsletter in order to reduce costs,
5. That, a sign be installed at the COVID memorial utilising a budget of £100.

SC521 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

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

Members were pleased to hear updates on the variety of subjects included in the Officers report and were in agreement with the proposals to support and promote the Orange the World, International Men's Day, World Mental Health Day, International Car Free Day, SSE Priority Service Register, Christmas competitions, Citizen of the Year awards and walks by the Witney Museum for Remembrance Sunday.

The Committee also discussed ideas for the celebration of British values and national pride, including ideas to mark St George's Day, with events such as a Tea Party, Civic Service at St Marys Church and a Last Night at the Proms styled event at the Corn Exchange; additionally, Members were keen that local businesses should be involved. It was agreed that a Working Party would be created with a membership of four or five Councillors along with the inclusion of non-councillor members being agreed at the next meeting of the Council. The Working Party could then explore ideas further.

Members discussed the proposed flag flying arrangements which would see the Town flag flown daily and additional flags on specific special occasions, such as the marking of anniversaries of the Battle of Britain and the United Nations which were discussed and agreed upon. Officers were requested to draft a Policy document for consideration at the next meeting of the Committee.

Members were supportive of the request from Thames Valley Police to hold a "Have a go" event on The Leys, they hoped this would go towards addressing the increase in Anti-Social Behaviour witnessed around the town, particularly over the summer months. It was agreed that the subject

be discussed further at the meeting of the Council on 6 October where a representative of TVP would hopefully be in attendance.

The Town Clerk asked the Committee to consider the extension of an invitation to RAF Brize Norton to exercise their Freedom of the Town on what would be the 50th anniversary on its granting on 24 September 2027. Although there were concerns raised as to the presence of weapons in the town at such an event, all Members were in agreement.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a Working Party be created to explore ideas celebrating Britishness and national pride and,
3. That, Nominations of up to five councillors to join the Working Party be taken at the meeting of the Council on 6 October 2025 and,
4. That, the anniversary of the Battle of Britain be added to the Council flag flying calendar and,
5. That, Officers draft an updated flag flying policy for consideration at the meeting of the Committee on 17 November and for it to be widely advertised upon adoption and,
6. That, the Council support the request for a guided walk at Tower Hill Cemetery on Remembrance Day and,
7. That, the Council provide support to the “Orange the World” campaign with social media posts and lighting of the Corn Exchange on 25 November and,
8. That, the SSE priority service be promoted both via social media outlets and the users of café 1863 and,
9. That, the 80th Anniversary of the United Nations on 24th October be marked by a flag flying and coffee morning with all costs being met by the Mayor’s civic allowance and,
10. That, the Council support Thames Valley Police’s “have a go” event with free use of The Leys and,
11. That, the updated Community Window Policy be recommended for approval and,
12. That, RAF Brize Norton be invited to mark its 50th Anniversary of the Freedom of Witney in 2027.

SC522 WITNEY FORUM MEETING NOTES

The Committee Clerk apologised for the inclusion of the Witney Forum notes as these had been presented and noted at the meeting of this Committee on 21 July 2025.

*During the following Agenda Item.
Cllr J Treloar left the meeting briefly between 7:25 and 7:28pm
A Member of the public joined the meeting at 7:30pm*

SC523 YOUTH SERVICES

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with the earlier participation from the representative of The Station.

Members acknowledged the updates provided on the Youth Services grant allocations and welcomed the way in which the grant allocations had been dealt with.

The Committee welcomed the update provided in the report as well as the participation of The Station’s representative outlining their proposals for future funding. Members were in

agreement that the use of the 1863 café be granted for evening half-term youth cafés in October and February with The Station covering the cost of a bar staff member and purchasing drinks at cost price. Regarding the future funding of The Station the Chair suggested that this item be considered at the end of the agenda in closed session.

Members were disappointed not to receive a report from APCAM providing feedback on the Mental Health Drop in & We Game sessions however, they hoped that this would be forthcoming ahead of their consideration of the 2026-27 budget.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, the updates regarding the youth services grant awards be noted and,
3. That, The Station be granted use of Café 1863 to run evening youth café on the terms agreed previously.

SC524 **YOUTH COUNCIL UPDATE**

The Committee received the report of the Communications & Engagement Administrative Assistant regarding the recent activity of the Youth Council.

Members were informed of two new additions to the Youth Council, along with two further potential members. It was hoped that, with the continued support and guidance of Officers, Youth Councillor mentors, and possible collaboration with existing local school Councils, progress could be made towards achieving some of the Youth Council's objectives.

Members were in agreement with the use of WhatsApp to aid communication within the Youth Council and for the creation of a newsletter to be issued to local schools, it was suggested that the Kings School and Cokethorpe School were included in the distribution.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, WhatsApp be approved as a form of communication and,
3. That, a monthly slide newsletter be created and issued to local schools.

CLlr A Mubin left the meeting at 7:34pm

SC525 **CHRISTMAS TREE AND EVENT SPONSORSHIP**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Project Officer which covered the upcoming Christmas activity for 2025.

Members discussed the options for the distribution of the Social Value Fund, provided via the Christmas Lights contract and agreed the charities supported in 2024 should once again be the recipients as they offered support to a broad scope across the town. These were; Witney Foodbank, Witney Food Revolution, Witney Community Church and High Street Methodist Church and they should each be awarded £250 from the fund.

The Committee also welcomed the proposal to raise sponsorship for both the Christmas Trees and the Advent Fayre Event. It was felt this would enhance local business relations as well as provide budget relief for the Council.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and
2. That, Officers advise LITE of the beneficiaries of the Christmas lights social value fund and
3. That, the Christmas lights sponsorship scheme be approved.

Cllr A Mubin rejoined the meeting at 7:40pm

SC526 WITNEY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with the earlier participation from the Chair of the Witney Chamber of Commerce.

Members discussed the reformation of the Witney Town Centre Forum as they felt it important to work with West Oxfordshire District Council, Cotswold Markets, and local businesses. It was also felt that the Town Partnership organisation which had been led by WODC Officers should be involved so that any information and ideas gathered by them could be incorporated.

The Committee were pleased to support this initiative and lead as an organisation so as to take a strong role in progressing the formation of the Forum which they hoped would be supported by the Witney Chamber of Commerce.

Members agreed that the Town Council should have three positions on the Forum and that nominations of these should take place at the meeting of the Council on 6 October 2025.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, establishment of a Town Centre Forum be approved with Witney Town Council carrying out administration of the Forum.
3. That, nominations of the three Councillors to join the Forum be taken at the meeting of the Council on 6 October 2025.

Cllr D Enright left the meeting at 7:45pm

SC527 WEST OXFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

The Committee received the request from West Oxfordshire Community Transport along with representation from a Director of WOCT earlier in the meeting. The request was for an increase to the annual grant awarded by the Council.

Members were advised of a correction to the amount being requested. The letter had stated an increase from £21,000 to £26,000, however the current level of grant was £23,500 and therefore an increase of only £2,500 was requested.

Several members spoke passionately about the essential service that WOCT provided and their concerns if the additional funding was not provided, it was highlighted that many residents, particularly the elderly relied on the services of WOCT to complete their daily activities.

The Town Clerk advised that funds could be found to support the request from other unspent budget lines with an example of the Water safety budget being given. She also suggested that the timing of the grant was an important factor, specifically whether it applied for the Council's full financial year or was pro-rated over a shorter period, in which case the actual amount awarded this financial year would be less than £2,500.

The Chair spoke of his concerns at the awarding of the grant and proposed that no award be made and that he writes to Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) asking that they fund the gap that existed. The proposal was seconded by Cllr J Treloar.

An alternative proposal to award the additional grant of £2,500 was proposed by Cllr R Smith, seconded by Cllr R Crouch.

A vote was taken for Members to agree to one of the two proposals, a request from Cllr G Meadows asked that the names of those voting be taken. The result of the vote was:

- No additional grant award – For: Cllrs A Mubin, J Treloar, D Temple and T Ashby.
- An award of £2,500 – For: Cllrs R Smith, G Meadows and R Crouch.

It was therefore agreed that no award be made and that the Chair write to OCC to request their intervention to consider funding the gap in WOCT's needs.

Recommended:

1. That, the request from WOCT be noted and,
2. That, the additional grant award be not agreed and the annual grant remain at £23,500 and,
3. That, the Chair writes to OCC requesting their consideration of additional financial support to WOCT.

SC528 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.

SC529 WINTER PREPARATIONS

The Committee received and considered the proposed sites for additional grit bins.

The proposed sites for three bins to be installed along Centenary Way on the new Windrush Place Estate had been provisionally discussed with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Winter Services team, however as the roads were yet to be formally adopted Officers had been informed these could not be considered further.

Members agreed that Officers should reapproach OCC to establish if procurement of the same style bins was made by the Town Council, with the approval of the Windrush Place consortium landowner, would the grit bins be adopted along with the road infrastructure at a later date.

Members heard that the proposed site at Springfield Oval that had been approved at the meeting of the Committee on 14 July 2025 would shortly be installed.

Resolved:

That, Officers liaise with OCC regarding the installation of the proposed Grit Bins at Windrush Place Estate.

SC530 THIRD PARTY EVENTS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Venue & Events Officer which provided details of the past and upcoming events held on the Council's land.

Members heard that the subsidised lettings budget had been oversubscribed in 2025/26, and that requests for 2026/27 were expected to rise further, partly due to the additional use granted to users of The Leys. The Committee were broadly supportive of increasing the subsidised lettings budget, noting that costs would rise in any case in line with the annual hire rate percentage increase.

With regard to the Council's contribution to Witney Carnival, the Town Clerk advised that the Carnival Committee should submit funding applications in good time to align with the Council's budget cycle. This would ensure anticipated requests could be included in the budget, rather than received mid-year and risking an overspend.

The Committee Clerk advised that Officers had met with the organisers of Witney Music Festival earlier in the day and that they had given an understanding of the level of feedback required from Witney Music Festival in order to provide the Council with the confidence required to support the ongoing partnership. It was agreed that on receipt of the information from WMF that Officers prepare a report on the grant award for consideration by the Committee on 17 November 2025.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, the subsidised lettings budget be increased in 2026-27 to reflect the additional expenditure plus the annual percentage inflationary increase and,
3. That, an increase in the Town Council's contribution to Witney Carnival for 2026/27 be not agreed at this stage, but the Carnival Committee be encouraged to submit its funding request in good time for consideration as part of the Council's budget-setting cycle. and,
4. That, Witney Music Festival be asked to provide comprehensive feedback on the 2025 event and Officers prepare a full report for consideration of the grant award for the 2026 Witney Music Festival.

Three Members of the Public left at 8:08pm

SC531 THE STATION - SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT AND FUNDING FOR 2026/27

At the discretion of the Chair the consideration of the budget request did not take place under Agenda Item 8 and was discussed independently.

The Committee heard that the request was to increase the current funding by £10,400 from £18,000 to £28,400 which was broadly similar to the original award of £27,000 made to them for the 2024/25 financial year. The Station had evolved over the previous 18 months and now looked to develop a programme of changes to support the young people of Witney.

Members were conscious that the Service Level Agreement between The Station and the Council should reflect a detached youth service and allow for the Council to provide direction and guidance when highlighting problem areas.

The Committee unanimously agreed that the requested grant of £28,400 be included in the budget setting calculations however, this would be subject to a newly established Service Level Agreement being drawn up, the drafting of which was delegated to the Chair, Leader, Cllr R Crouch and Deputy Town Clerk.

Recommended:

1. That, the request for funding be noted and,
2. That, £28,400 be considered for budget purposes for the provision of a detached youth service in 2026-27 and,
3. That, it be delegated to the Chair, Leader, Cllr R Crouch and Deputy Town Clerk to draw up an updated Service Level Agreement.

The meeting closed at: 8.22 pm

Chair