

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 12 June 2023

Title: Witney Youth Council

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk - Adam Clapton

Background

Witney has had a Youth Council, administered via the Town Council several times in recent years with the most recent administration in 2019 – 2020 (ended during the Covid Pandemic).

In January 2021, this Committee was supportive in reintroducing a Youth Council (minute no. SC34 refers) with an updated constitution and operating model, but due to resources this was not possible in the last 12 months.

Current Situation

As the recent resident's satisfaction survey attests, there is a problem with engaging young people in dialogue and in making decisions which affect their lives and the town.

Many Authorities have attempted Youth Council's with differing successes, with many failing due to lack of commitment and waning interest amongst Members. The most recent Youth Council at Witney was only able to keep running due to continued interest from 1 or 2 dedicated Councillors. The reasons for failure are often related to autonomy to make decisions, lack of budget and lack of clear rationale.

There is a large amount of work to undertake at an early stage on how the Youth Council should be constituted, its rationale and its budget along with how it works alongside the Council, its agreed processes and procedures (including safeguarding). This could include a form of consultation with young people or relevant stakeholders, i.e., Witney Schools Partnership.

There are several potential ways to re-establish a Youth Council which officers can prepare for the next meeting of this Committee, for example, not holding elections, approaching local schools and organisations for nominated representative (possibly from an existing school Council) and holding meetings online via Teams. Alternatively, Members may like to recommend creating a task and finish group of 4 Councillors to progress this ahead of the next meeting in July.

The British Youth Council has issued a guide on the topic due to the reasons above which is attached as **Appendix A**. The former Youth Council's details are attached as **Appendix B**.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Without youth engagement, the Council is not engaging with a key portion of the town's population. This demographic can offer a unique view of the services and projects provided by the Council as they are the ones who will live with the outcome of decisions taken now.

Financial implications

- The set-up and administration of the Youth Council will have an associated resource cost which is not known at this time.
- There is a budget of £500 agreed for a Youth Council in the current fiscal year.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. The re-establishment of a Witney Youth Council and;
2. Delegating to Officers or a task and finish group on how the Youth Council should be constituted and run effectively. A report to be presented to the next meeting of this committee on 17 July 2023.