

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 26 June 2023

At 7.00 pm in the Main Hall, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor G Meadows (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	R Crouch
	T Ashby	G Doughty
	D Enright	J Doughty
	R Smith	D Edwards-Hughes
	D Temple	J Robertshaw
	A Bailey	S Simpson
	L Cherry	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	None.	

337 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O Collins and J Treloar.

338 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

339 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 17 May 2023 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 17 May 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

340 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

341 **WITNEY COMMUNITY POLICING ISSUES**

Members received a verbal update from Inspector C Ball of Thames Valley Police (TVP).

The update advised reported crime and anti-social behaviour was low in Witney. There were ongoing operations at Marriott's Walk and increased patrols at Witney Lake where swimming was still occurring. There had been a social media campaign around water safety so it was disappointing the message was not getting through to some but there were no powers to stop people entering the water, education was the main tool at their disposal.

The Council was also advised there had been fewer issues with drugs recently and dealers were being targeted to resolve any long-standing issues. There had been a recent breakthrough with bike thefts which it was hoped would impact the frequency of this crime.

In response to questions from members, Inspector Ball advised he was aware of the metropolitan police move to step back from mental health call outs, but it was too early to advise how this would affect local policing. The emergence of class A drugs was being dealt on locally, and the ongoing issues regarding cars at Tungsten Park appeared to be under control. There were other ongoing operations in the town with new PCSO's working with others to address the problems. Members also heard a new restructuring was currently only affecting the senior level of service and he had only positive news about potential further PCSO and PC positions.

Finally, Inspector Ball advised Councillors to be mindful of the information appearing on social media which was not always factually correct.

Members thanked the local policing team for their work in the community.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

342 **AN UPDATE FROM WITNEY OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCILLORS AND WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCILLORS**

Oxfordshire County Council

Cllr Enright advised the Council was working on a charter which would establish new relationships between all council levels, this would refresh existing relationships and build new partnerships.

Tree policy – The Council was actively committing to drive an initiative called Canopy for Oxfordshire which would plant 200k trees over the County in the next decade and which needed to be in partnership with the town councils.

High Street Consultation/Engagement Exhibition – This would be launching at the end of the summer as a team was being recruited to deal with the project. There was agreement the process had taken too long, and the town council should be involved. It was suggested the town council should develop its own ideas over the next Committee meetings cycle.

West Oxfordshire District Council

Cllr J Aitman reiterated the lack of youth services across West Oxfordshire; the District Council had a working group as there was nothing in place for the summer. A plan was being drawn up, but it was part of a wider funding issue.

Play Areas – The District Council was pleased the play parks currently in their ownership would be transferred to the town council imminently. It was hoped other parish councils would follow suit. It had been a hard process and compliments were expressed to all those involved.

Food security – A successful open day had been held at the Witney foodbank, the simple issue was that there were more people, less food, and less money available. It was hoped there would be a decline in the number using them, but it appeared to be getting worse. The District Council had grants to ensure families were fed and supported.

343 **REPORT BACK FROM THE COUNCILLORS ON THE WORK WITH EXTERNAL BODIES WHERE THEY SERVE AS THE TOWN COUNCIL'S NOMINATED REPRESENTATIVE**

Witney Town Charity

Cllr Aitman advised that WEF, Witney Town Charity and Cogges Welfare Trust were all dealing with similar issues and helping families where they could. The Town Charity in particular were broadening their reach beyond the supply of white goods. They had recently provided accommodation for another group at Church Green.

Witney Educational Foundation (WEF)

Cllr Aitman advised there were many parents applying for grants towards school uniforms, and school trips which the charity was assisting with.

344 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE - 18 APRIL, 2 MAY, 23 MAY & 13 JUNE 2023**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee meetings held on 18 April, 2 May, 23 May and 13 June 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

345 **PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE - 22 MAY**

The Vice Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 22 May 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

346 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE - 5 JUNE**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 5 June 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

347 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE - 12 JUNE**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

SC298 – Witney Youth Council. The Deputy Town Clerk asked for nominations to a Youth Council task and finish group, tasked with establishing the framework for a new Witney Youth Council.

It was proposed and agreed the membership should be Councillors G Meadows, R Smith, S Simpson, J Aitman and L Cherry.

SC299 – Bus Shelters. The Deputy Town Clerk advised a final list of new and replacement shelters had been provided to officers and that a contribution was being requested from the town council. The RFO confirmed funds could be covered from the Community Infrastructure earmarked reserve and Members were in favour of agreeing as the project would be beneficial to Witney. There were, however, several concerns on the siting of shelters near residential properties and a query on whether advertising could be included, so Members requested officers contact the County Council to discuss further ahead of the next meeting.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 22 May 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.
2. That, membership of the Youth Council task and finish group should consist of: Councillors J Aitman, L Cherry, R Crouch, S Simpson, and R Smith.
3. That, £7,000 be agreed to help facilitate further bus shelters in Witney, subject to further discussion.

348 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE - 19 JUNE**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 19 June 2023 be received, and any recommendations therein approved.

349 **ACCOUNTS & AUDIT (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2015 - ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) 2022/23**

The Council received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) concerning the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) 2022/23 under its obligations to the Accounts & Audit (England) Regulations 2015, along the final report of the Council's internal auditor.

In his report the RFO pointed out that Members took a collective responsibility for ensuring there was a sound system of internal control in order to agree Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement. It was recommended by officers that all measures were in place, and it could therefore be agreed and signed at the meeting.

The Accounting Statement formed section 2 and officers recommended it should be agreed and adopted. The remainder of the report was for information; Section 3 would be submitted to the external auditor with supporting information and would be an analytical review concentrating on variances year on year, or above a certain percentage. The general public would have the right to inspection the documents which would be published before 1 July.

Members were advised the final section, which included the unaudited financial statements was to note and showed transparency to electors, while not being subject to the audit. It was the cash sheet which summarised the various cash reserves and he was pleased to report the Council was in good shape financially.

The Leader of the Council thanked officers for their diligence and in presenting the information in such an accessible format.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Annual Governance Statement at Section 1 of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2023 be approved, and formally adopted by the Council and,
3. That, the Statement of Accounts at Section 2 of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2023 be approved, and formally adopted by the Council and,
4. That, in light of the above the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR) for 2022/23 be formally agreed and adopted by the Council and,
5. That, the unaudited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2023 be noted.

350 **CIVIC ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Council received the report of the Mayor's Diary Secretary which listed the civic engagements of the Mayor & Deputy Mayor since the last meeting.

The Deputy Mayor & Chair advised there had been lots of events in the first month. The events she had attended were lovely community events including the Witney Colour run, Witney Pride march & festival and a Witney Town Band concert which showcased talented musicians and children. Earlier that day, a new 216 bus service to the supermarkets run by West Oxfordshire Community Transport had commenced and she had been in attendance. The new service would benefit many residents.

A Member noted the fantastic coronation events on the list which had been well attended at the very start of this administration's term.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

351 **COMPLIMENTS & COMPLAINTS**

The Council received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which outlined complaints, comments and compliments received since the last report in November/December 2022.

Members were pleased to see the report and compliments, especially regarding football as everyone had worked hard to build a relationship with the clubs.

It was confirmed that a report on the potential use of pesticides to deal with problematic vegetation and weeds, noted in the report, would be come back to Council before agreement.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

352 **VANDALISM & HEALTH & SAFETY**

The Council received the report of the Operations Manager concerning health & safety issues and vandalism since the last meeting.

Members were particularly disappointed with the removal of lifesaving equipment from the Witney Lake area and commended staff on being so open about this on social media.

A question was raised regarding the possibility of CCTV in the Lake area, but it was advised the current scheme was only for the town centre which the town council contributes financially to. It was previously explored at The Leys, but any items have to be operable with the current and slowly emerging new District Council/police scheme.

Members were keen to stress that the vandalism was not always caused by young people and the Council needed to review strategies for all ages and creating healthy spaces for the young.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

353 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader of the Council advised there were two meetings planned in the coming weeks which would help shape the new administration.

The first was a Strategic Meeting with Committee Chairs being held later in the week. Its purpose was to initiate scoping of a strategic plan for the Council's four-year term. Members were encouraged to provide any ideas ahead of the meeting.

The second was a workshop planned for Tuesday 7th July at 6pm. Training was available to Councillors, but many were unable to take advantage due to work commitments. This workshop was an in-house session which would cover roles & responsibilities, how to get the most out of being a Councillor and how everyone could work effectively together for the benefit of Witney.

Resolved:

That, the communications above be noted.

354 **TOWN CRIER - ACCEPTANCE OF FOUR-YEAR TERM**

The Council received correspondence from the Town Crier confirming acceptance of the position for the four-year Council term.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

355 **DRAFT HEADS OF TERMS FOR THE LEASEHOLD OF MADLEY PARK PLAY AREA FROM WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

The Town Clerk presented draft Heads of Terms for Madley Park Play Area and noted advised they had already been to the Parks & Recreation Committee.

A lease would be provided once they had been returned to the District Council. It was part of a bigger piece of land and there was still an objective in taking over management of the playing fields with others, so it was likely to be a short-term lease to allow realignment with the other land in 2029.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

356 **DRAFT HEADS OF TERMS TO TRANSFER THE FREEHOLD OWNERSHIP OF RALEGH CRESCENT PLAY AREA FROM WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

The Town Clerk presented draft Heads of Terms for Raleigh Crescent Play Area.

There was a question on the wider area of recreational land and MUGA with the first being linked to a wider playing pitch strategy. It was hoped these further pieces would be transferred in the future once they were suitable, but the play area was the first parcel, and the town council held a financial interest due to the play area refurbishment which had already been completed.

The Town Clerk confirmed the future of the remaining parcels was reliant on developer funding and what would fit on the area, so negotiations were ongoing. Once transferred, the town council would be responsible for maintenance, this cost being included in future budgets and therefore precept setting.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

357 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

There were no questions for the Leader.

358 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no documents sealed.

The meeting closed at: 8.13 pm

Chair