

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

Held on Monday, 17 July 2023

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

Present:

Councillor L Cherry (Chair)

Councillors:	G Meadows J Aitman R Smith	J Doughty G Doughty (In place of T Ashby)
Officers:	Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Mark Lewis Derek Mackenzie	Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Head of Estates & Operations Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	None.	

SC384 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Ashby, O Collins and A Bailey.

SC385 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Smith declared an interest in Item 8 – Youth Services due to her being a member of the church involved in the service proposal.

SC386 MINUTES

The minutes of the Stronger Communities committee meeting held on 12 June 2023 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities committee held on 12 June 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

SC387 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

SC388 FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

No questions arose however members thanked the RFO for the additional information provided in the report explaining the significant variances in agreed budgets.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

SC389 **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO) which provided an update on the work to improve the council's website and an update on the Council's summer newsletter.

Members welcome the changes to refresh the website which would realign it with other authorities in having a gov.uk template.

The Deputy Town Clerk provided a verbal update to advise Members the C&CEO's focus was now on producing an urgent list of young people's activities throughout the summer and therefore the newsletter would be issued in the week commencing 24 July 2023, not the week before as stated in the report.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

SC390 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

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

The Committee noted the comments in the report on a youth services meeting which had been held, the outcome of which would be discussed in a later agenda item and also welcomed the Witney Forum minutes showing the wealth of community-minded groups in the town.

Members were pleased to hear of the success of the Schools In Bloom wheelbarrows at the Witney Carnival and those councillors that were able to attend were impressed with what was created by the Schools and Home start. They thanked Officers and those Councillors that supported the event on the day for their time and recognised the importance of ensuring councillors worked together to ensure that there was good representation at all future events. The Committee went on to discuss the proposal for the school barrows being delivered to residential homes so residents could nurture and enjoy them over the summer period; they were supportive of this idea being implemented for 2024.

Lastly, members discussed Councillor engagement. The Leader of the council confirmed plans were in place for a monthly councillor surgery-style event in the Corn Exchange; these would be held on the 1st Saturday of each month from 10-12am starting in September.

Members went on to discuss hosting an engagement event in August regarding the proposed changes to Witney High Street. They believed it important to get opinions prior to plans being presented by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC). The Committee was disappointed at the time taken by the County Council to get the consultations underway despite the offer of use of the

Corn Exchange. There was further disappointment the interim changes that were proposed had also not been implemented and residents were understandably frustrated too.

As Councillors had been invited to a briefing presentation by the County Council on the proposed consultation and engagement strategy on 20 July they agreed to defer the decision as to when to hold the event in August to the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee on 24th July 2023.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Council supports the Barrow of Love proposal for Schools in Bloom 2024 and,
3. That, Councillor engagement meetings at the Corn Exchange be publicised through the Council's channels and,
4. That, a decision on whether the Town Council should hold a Witney High Street engagement event in August be deferred to the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee on 24th July 2023 and,
5. That, the minutes of the Witney Forum meeting on 8 June 2023 be noted.

Councillor J Treloar arrived at 6:45pm during the Youth Services Item

SC391 **YOUTH SERVICES**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with a verbal update from the Chair following meetings held between Councillors, local providers, groups, organisations following the cessation of Got2B CIC.

It was clear from the conversations, that following the closure of Got2B CIC, there would be little detached youth work in Witney and the Council needed to decide to what level and cost it could help facilitate more help for young people during the summer and beyond.

Members considered the Youth Needs Assessment provided by West Oxfordshire District Council which detailed the need for detached youth work, as well as the comments of youngsters about what they saw as priorities on safety, activities and their futures in the town. Actions from this had yet to be agreed at District Council level but a Member advised there would potentially be funds available from a WODC COVID relief fund that could be used towards the costs of the long-term solution and this should be explored further.

In relation to additional summer services, it was agreed there was only limited time to implement suggestions, but Members supported a proposal from APCAM to provide a weekly mental health session for a 5-week period over the summer in the Corn Exchange. All Members were in favour of providing this vital service at a cost of £1,200, to be taken from the youth services budget.

Members voted as to whether the remaining youth services budget should be opened for youth grant applications as in previous years, but they agreed not to proceed due to the pressing need for a detached youth service, and that the remaining budget should be used to support work in this area.

Therefore, the Committee discussed a proposal received from a local organisation to deliver detached youth work within the forthcoming year with the option to provide this under the project name Bright Futures. There were concerns from Members on the running and

governance of this scheme which would use the majority of the remaining youth services budget. A Vote was taken, all members were in agreement to proceed with the proposal with the exception of Councillor R Smith who abstained from the vote. Members asked that Officers consult further with the organisation to clarify some further points and to progress the project.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, a grant of £1,200 be budgeted for APCAM to provide five weekly young people mental health drop-in sessions in the Corn Exchange and,
3. That, no Youth Services Grant Award Scheme is launched for 2023/24 and,
4. That, the above funds be made available to support Witney detached youth work for the Bright Futures project and that officers finalise its implementation.

SC392 **LITTER & DOG WASTE BINS REVIEW**

Members received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding requests for litter and dog bins within the town.

Members were disappointed to hear of West Oxfordshire District Council's former decision to remove a large number of bins across the town, particularly in areas where rubbish was highly likely to be generated such as outside of shops was still impacting residents. The town council simply could not afford to re-install bins which had been removed, especially on land not under its ownership.

A Member discussed a number of areas and asked that council write to WODC to encourage a review of these areas and a reconsideration of reinstallation of bins. All members agreed.

Due to the ongoing issues from the above project, the Committee agreed the existing policy on installing litter and dog bins outlined in the report should be re-affirmed.

The Members discussed the costs of installation of litter and dog bins and were pleased to hear the town council was due to install additional dog bins on its land to improve the areas for which it is responsible. Again, all members agreed this action being taken and welcomed it continuing within agreed budgets. They further agreed that requests for bins in bus shelters should be declined and reviewed at a future meeting.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a letter is sent to the District Council to outline the disappointment of the council and a request to review bin locations and,
3. That, the council current policy on installation of new litter and dog bins continues and,
4. That, the council continue to invest in infrastructure on its land to ensure a clean and tidy environment.

SC393 **BUS SHELTERS**

Members received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding replacement and new bus shelters.

The Committee were supportive of the replacements scheme which was being administered and mostly funded by Oxfordshire County Council as part of an accessibility project. A sum of £7,000 would need to be provided by the town council which was affordable and provide new community infrastructure.

Members discussed the installation of poster boards inside the shelters and thought it important to make use of these to promote the activity of the council however, had reservations of potential vandalism that may be caused and the additional work that these would create for officers to maintain. There was a query on whether these could be installed retrospectively.

Members also discussed the installation of cycle racks and bins at the shelter locations. All members were in agreement of the delegation to officers to progress the project and implement cycle racks or bins as required from the community infrastructure earmarked reserve (EMR).

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the replacement project proceeds as presented and,
3. That, the committee agreed to a contribution to the scheme of £7,010.52 from the Community Infrastructure EMR and,
4. That, contrasting colour of shelters be used within the scheme and,
5. That, Noticeboards are not included in the design and,
6. That, delegated to officer to include cycle racks or bins as required from the community infrastructure budget.

The meeting closed at: 7.40 pm

Chair