

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 18 September 2023

Title: Community Engagement Report

Contact Officer: Communications & Community Engagement Officer

Background

This report is intended to inform Members of any community initiatives which the Council may wish to support. It's traditional at this time of year to start looking at budget planning for events for next year.

Notes from the Witney Forum meeting on 6 September 2023 are attached for information as **Appendix A**. This is a meeting facilitated by West Oxfordshire District Council which provides local groups and charities a chance to inform and network on their work.

Current Situation

Other events and initiatives for the Council's consideration are:

Mental Health & Wellbeing Event – 10 October 2023

To mark World Mental Health Day, this Committee has already agreed to facilitate an event in the Corn Exchange.

We aim to tap into the expertise of local mental health charities by asking them to suggest content such as taster sessions and to put forward a suggested list of core organisations and others that should be invited to be present.

The theme for 2023, set by the World Foundation of Mental Health, is 'Mental health is a universal human right'. Mind have the strapline, 'Awareness is just the start. It's time to act.'

Dedicated planning time for this event has been challenging with other activities taking precedence. Mental Health and Wellbeing has become one of the most concerning national issues in recent years and the Communications and Community Engagement Officer feels that any event the Council facilitate should be of the highest standard and have had a good deal of publicity to make sure that the opportunity to attend is given to the greatest possible number of people. In short, we need to do it justice and that means drawing on the expertise and resources of established mental health organisations to provide comprehensive information and representation from as many of these organisations as possible.

While it is important to mark World Mental Health Day, that is only a month away and it might be that it would be better to bring into being a really worthy event either later in the year (December, January and February being notably the months where people tend to struggle the most).

The Council could still light up the Corn Exchange in the associated colour for World Mental Health Day, publicise and support other local events that are happening around that time and share social media posts and signposting posts. This all fits with the fact that World Mental Health Day is about raising awareness of mental health and driving positive change for everyone's mental health.

In line with the Mind Strapline, the Council can then follow this up with some action and deliver a comprehensive event later on.

Car Free Day – 22 September

As part of Car free the Council has managed to get a volunteer from Witney Museum who has started doing history walks based on Church Green to offer two of these on the day. One at 10:30 am and one at 1:30 pm.

The walks began as a way of raising funds for the museum and Sonia charges people £5 to join her informative walk.

As the Council does not make a charge for its Car Free Activities Officers have agreed to cover the £5 for each of the walkers up to a maximum of around 20 across the two walks, so that the museum has not lost out. There is a budget for Car Free Day which will be used. Tickets will be issued by the museum and Officers will have a copy of these and numbers to create an audit trail for the Council's accounts.

Citizen of the Year 2023

The Council has held a Citizen of the Year award for several years to highlight the unsung heroes in Witney who go above and beyond in what they do for the community.

Nominations for this award are usually opened in November, with the awards held at the Council's Civic Reception in March. Members are asked to consider whether they would like to continue with this competition in the same format as before. The awards are Citizen and Young Citizen of the Year, but the Mayor (as judge) does have the right to award team/group and special awards for merit, depending on the nominees' contributions. In 2023, these additional awards included services to education and sport.

White Ribbon Promise

'The National Association of Local Council (NALC) has become a White Ribbon Accredited organisation for its commitment to ending men's violence against women in the workplace and the local community.

As a White Ribbon Accredited organisation, NALC will deliver a three-year plan to change staff culture, systems, and wider community. The plan will help NALC eliminate attitudes and behaviours that lead to violence against women, which includes staff training, holding online events, attending the White Ribbon conference, and raising awareness within the local (parish and town) council sector.'

The benefits of the Town Council signing the White Ribbon Promise can be seen on the link here: <https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/organisations> In 2022, the Council facilitated displays in the Corn Exchange and community window.

D-Day 80th Anniversary – 6 June 2024

Members must be realistic as to what the Council can achieve on its own. Participation by local groups, including armed services, air and army cadets and RBL members would seem appropriate as a reflective, rather than celebratory event. A guide to taking part can be found online here:

https://www.d-day80beacons.co.uk/?utm_source=MEMBERS&utm_campaign=a02d8e21d2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_06_08_03_15_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_206970988f-a02d8e21d2-323671313&mc_cid=a02d8e21d2&mc_eid=4b9f83d8ba

If Councillors wish to have a bonfire the event would have to be held at the Leys. Alternatively, there is a dedicated D-Day beacon that could be used in the Market Square and can be purchased for £549.00. This would be lit at 21:15 (page 35, 39). There is an International tribute (page 34) to be read as the bonfire is lit, by a Civic leader, or we could hold a competition for members of the public to have the honour of lighting the beacon and/or reading the Tribute.

National Fish and Chip Day is one of the suggested elements (page 23). The Corn Exchange has been provisionally booked for events throughout the day and evening.

At 8am there is an official proclamation (page 10) to be delivered by the Town Crier. The natural place for this to happen would be the Market Square but it is worth noting that 6 June is a Thursday, and the market will be setting up at this time, so it might not have the best chance of being heard properly. Moving it to the undercroft of the Town Hall might be all that is needed. Again, the Corn Exchange could be lit for the occasion and commemorative knitted poppies from 2018 could be utilised.

If Witney is taking part there is an opportunity to register a public event by 30th May 2024.

Oxfordshire County Council Community Transport Grant (added by the Deputy Town Clerk)

Oxfordshire County Council has announced the launch of a new grant funding package to support new and improved community transport provision. A total of £250,000 is available for the wider Oxfordshire area, with a maximum per application of £50,000.

Witney Town Council supports West Oxfordshire Community Transport by way of an annual grant already and the information has been forwarded to them. Witney's Independent Parish Transport Representative has advised,

“The larger £800,000 Rural Transport Improvements pot is primarily aimed at areas with little or no public transport, but Community Transport is clearly very important to Witney and hopefully the town can benefit from it.... The Community Transport Grant is meant to improve services so if anyone on the Town Council has views on what improvements they would like to see I am happy to talk with them and include them in any submission to the County Council.”

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.

Financial implications

- The World Mental Health Day event can be covered from the existing events budgets (4141/408)
- There is a budget in place for the Citizen of the Year Awards of £200 (4153/401)
- If the Council were to go ahead with a specially designed beacon, a budget in the region of £1,000-£1,500 would be prudent for D-Day 80th Anniversary commemorations (dependent on aspirations of the Committee/Council).

Recommendations

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

1. To note the notes of the Witney Forum Meeting held on 6 September,
2. The content to mark World Mental Health Day on 10 October,
3. Payment for attendees on the Car Free Day Heritage walks,
4. Whether to run a Citizen of the Year Award for 2023 (and if yes, in the same format as previously)
5. Whether Witney Town Council should explore signing the White Ribbon Promise, this will also need to be agreed by the Personnel Sub-Committee for staff recommendations.
6. A budget for the 80th Anniversary of D-Day 2024 to inform budget-setting for 2023-24
7. The creation of a D-Day 2024 task and finish group, if appropriate
8. To note the Oxfordshire County Council Community Transport Grant Scheme and direct any queries to the Parish Transport Representative, if appropriate.