

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

Held on Monday, 13 November 2023

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

Present:

Councillor G Meadows (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

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| Councillors: | O Collins R Smith | J Doughty G Doughty (In place of T Ashby) |
| Officers: | Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Derek Mackenzie | Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk |
| Others: | No members of the public. | |

SC601 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ashby, Cherry, Aitman and Bailey. Cllr G Doughty attended as a substitute for Cllr Ashby.

SC602 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

SC603 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities committee held on 18 September 2023 were received.

Updates were provided on:

SC485 – The Chair advised members that Councillor Aitman had confirmed that Witney Music Festival would be applying to the West Oxfordshire District Council’s Westhive scheme for additional funding towards their event at the Leys.

SC496 – The first meeting of the Christmas Lights Working Party took place earlier that day, Minutes would be available at the meeting of the Policy Governance & Finance Committee on 20 November 2023.

SC497 – Members were advised that the two grit bins agreed for Kingfisher Meadows would not be installed as the developer had refused for these to be placed on the estate.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities committee held on 18 September 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

SC604 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

SC605 **REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2023/24 AND DRAFT BASE REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25 AND REVENUE GROWTH ITEMS, SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**

The Committee received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer along with a verbal update from the Town Clerk.

In addition to hearing about revenue growth items and special revenue/capital projects, Members discussed the request from West Oxfordshire District Council for a contribution of £10,000 toward the costs of running the town CCTV. Although this amount had historically been paid by the council, Members did not feel reassured as to the benefits the CCTV provided and there was no evidence of its effectiveness. Members asked that Officers request statistics and agreed to defer any decision until statistical evidence is provided and reviewed.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the revised base revenue budget for 2023/24 and the initial base revenue budgets for 2024/25 draft estimates be noted and,
3. That, bids for Revenue Growth Items, Special Revenue Projects and Capital Projects for 2024/25 be approved and,
4. That, the Committee noted work on the above was ongoing and were subject to change in the final budget and,
5. That, Officers request evidence of the effectiveness of the CCTV system for future consideration by the committee.

SC606 **RESIDENT'S SATISFACTION SURVEY**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which provided the outcomes of the resident's satisfaction survey.

Members were pleased to see the very positive responses to the Foral Display and Christmas Lights and the action that had already been taken to address concerns about the Bus Shelter provision. A question on the ownership of a flowerbed at Queen Emma's Dyke was raised.

In response to a negative comment about the 2022 Remembrance event Councillor J Doughty took the opportunity to offer her thanks to all officers and staff involved in the 2023 Remembrance event that took place the day before. Members noted that the Council, and its officers facilitate, but do not run all events for the town.

Due to the number of "Not Applicable" responses to the Civic Events question members asked that this was reworded to include "Community Events" as it was thought that residents completing the survey were unaware of the events that the Council facilitates. It was agreed the

Council would continue to display its support banners for events that it provides financial support to in order to highlight its presence.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised members that the newsletter due to be issued in January would include a calendar of dates of events so that residents are advised of and see the activities that the council facilitates. A member suggested the use of a QR code to a dedicated webpage to allow updated information to be shared as events planning progresses.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, an amendment is made to the Civic Events question in future editions of the survey and,
3. That, the Officers investigate the ownership of the flower bed on the corner of Queen Emma's Dyke and Corn Street and,
4. That, Officers consider the use of QR codes in order to update residents of event details.

SC607 **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer which provided an update ahead of the preparation of the Spring 2024 Newsletter to residents and the Council's 50th Anniversary in 2024.

Members discussed the items covered in the report and were very keen to commence campaigns to reduce the level of dog fouling and Vandalism; they felt these should be informative and carry a serious tone and supported the comments made about advising residents of the costs incurred to put right act of Vandalism.

Regular social media posts as well as traditional posters would be utilised and displayed in prominent positions including the council's noticeboards, schools and the library.

Members also asked that the spring newsletter, as well as including details of costs incurred to put right act of vandalism, that it also included an explanation of the costs incurred by the council for providing or supporting the organisation of events and services such as the cost of football pitch maintenance, fairs, Christmas lights, warm/cold spaces days and other community benefits.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the wording " Celebrating 50 Years" is added to the Commemorative Town Council logo and,
3. That, campaigns are commenced to discourage dog fouling and highlight the financial impact of vandalism and,
4. That, the spring newsletter include details of the services provided by the Council and costs incurred.

SC608 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer outlining upcoming Community events.

Members had numerous ideas for how the council could mark the 50th Anniversary of becoming a Town Council, such as the launch of an annual speaking and debate competition for school children, a 50th Anniversary board to mark the work and efforts of people that have given support to Witney over a prolonged period of time and a display of Witney history across that 50-year period. They also considered ideas for how the Council could be involved in the allocation of special 50th Anniversary grants during 2024. It was decided with so many ideas that the decision of which to progress delegated to Officers in agreement with the Mayor & Deputy Mayor.

Members were reluctant initially to reduce the use of the Community Window to two weeks; they heard from the Senior Administrative Clerk who explained further reasoning for the change in order to facilitate more groups and to offer the opportunity for those that only require a shorter period such as Witney Pride to be accommodated. A proposal was made, and a vote was taken to agree the recommendation to reduce the use to a two-week period. Three members were in favour, one member, Councillor O Collins voted against. All members agreed to review the decision in 12 months' time.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, decision regarding the events for the councils 50th Anniversary be delegated to Officers in agreement with the Mayor & Deputy Mayor and,
3. That, a budget of £5,000 be requested for the Councils 50th Celebrations and,
4. That, the use of the community window be reduced to 2 weeks from May 2024 and,
5. That, the time period for use of the community window be reviewed in 12 months.

SC609 **WITNEY TOWN PARTNERSHIP**

Members received a verbal update from the Town Clerk/C.E.O following the meeting of the Witney Town Partnership held on 19 September 2023.

Members were advised that the next meeting was due to be held later that week and that stakeholders in the Partnership had recently carried out a walk around the town centre to carry out an evaluation of signage.

Members gave their views with requests that perhaps the signage could be more "modern" and that Visual signage displays could be erected on the main road gateways to the town to promote events if this is something that West Oxfordshire District Council could finance.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

SC610 **YOUTH COUNCIL TASK & FINISH GROUP**

The Committee received notes of the Youth Council Task & Finish Group meeting held 6 November 2023.

Resolved:

That, the summary notes of the meeting be noted and the recommendations therein be approved.

SC611 **EXPERIENCE OXFORDSHIRE PARTNERSHIP**

The Committee received correspondence from Experience Oxfordshire and considered if the Council should sign up to the scheme.

Members discussed the benefits which included the promotion of events in Council venues, particularly given that the Corn Exchange had had to cancel a recent event due to low uptake of ticket sales.

Members had concerns about the outreach of the scheme's website and social presence. They asked that Officers obtain further information so that a decision can be made at a future meeting however, asked that the amount to join the scheme be taken into account when setting the budget for 2024/25.

Recommended:

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, Officer obtains further information from Experience Oxfordshire and,
3. That, the sum of £1,199 +Vat be included in the Budget Setting for 2024/25.

The meeting closed at: 7.38 pm

Chair