

**FULL COUNCIL MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 19 February 2024

At 7.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	G Meadows J Aitman T Ashby D Enright R Smith D Temple A Bailey R Crouch	G Doughty J Doughty D Edwards-Hughes D Newcombe J Robertshaw S Simpson J Treloar
Officers:	Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Derek Mackenzie	Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	None.	

Before the meeting Councillor O Collins paid tribute to former Mayor Michael Chadwick who held the position in 1978, 1987 & 88 and finally in 1991. A one-minute silence was held.

85 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor L Cherry (by previously agreed dispensation).

86 REQUEST FOR DISPENSATION

A further dispensation request was received from Cllr L Cherry to 18 September 2024 and agreed by Members.

Cllr G Meadows would continue to assume Chair-ship of the Stronger Communities Committee and attend the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee and Personnel Sub-Committee meetings as substitute.

Resolved:

That, the further dispensation for Cllr L Cherry be agreed.

87 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

88 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Full Council meetings held on 4 December & 11 December 2023 and 8 January 2024 were received.

Minute Item 4 - The Leader requested a minor amendment to the minutes of 8 January 2024 to clarify that no comments were received in response to the precept budget proposal she made.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Full Council meetings held on 4 December & 11 December 2023 and 8 January 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

89 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

90 **WITNEY COMMUNITY POLICING ISSUES**

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

Insp Ball reported that his team had recently:

- Made four arrests relating to drug offences.
- Facilitated education workshops in local schools supported by ex-gang members.
- Provided education to individuals riding E-Scooters
- Been engaged in the operation to locate a local individual who was thought to be lost to the River Windrush.

A Member asked if the use of E-Scooters was related to drug trade. Insp Ball confirmed this was the case and that the team were combating this with the use of cycles which were able to target individuals who attempted to use the pathways around estates to elude enforcement.

The Member also raised the need for Neighbourhood watch scheme. Insp Ball agreed to pass on details of the Oxfordshire Coordinator for Neighbourhood Watch.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

Inspector C Ball left the meeting at 7:10pm

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

Oxfordshire County Council (OCC)

Cllr D Enright advised that OCC would be meeting in order to pass the 2024/25 budget the following day and was confident that despite the pressures from Social Care requirements, that a balanced and sustainable budget would be passed.

West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)

Cllr J Aitman advised that WODC had set up and funded a Youth Officer who would work with Parishes and Town Councils to improve the provision for young people, the position was new and yet to be filled; she would provide further updates when available.

Cllr R Smith recommended Members look at a recent proposal to create a “Nature Recovery Plan” which would engage with parishes to support Biodiversity in the area.

Following positive feedback from a Member that had been received at one of the Town Councils “ Councillors in the Café” mornings it was agreed that an invite be extended to WODC and OCC to attend future events to give residents the opportunity to discuss issues that are not under the control of the Town Council.

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

Witney & District Twinning Association

Cllr O Collins advised that the Annual General Meeting of the Association would take place on 27 February and welcomed any members to attend alongside the Council’s representatives.

Witney Town Charity

Cllr R Crouch updated the Council on work being undertaken to improve the Almshouses.

She also advised that Witney Town Charity were providing support to Families in Poverty which was a scheme to help provide beds and mattresses to reduce the need for parents and children to share.

Lastly, she reported that the charity had purchased property at Wilkinson Place and was assisting 8 to 10 residents with their needs.

Witney Town Band

Members congratulated the band on their competition wins the previous weekend.

93 **CLIMATE BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING COMMITTEE - 28 NOVEMBER, 19 DECEMBER, 9 JANUARY & 20 JANUARY**

The minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee meetings held on 28 November & 19 December 2023 & 9 January and 30 January 2024 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee meetings held on 28 November & 19 December 2023 & 9 January and 30 January 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

94 **PARKS & RECREATION COMMITTEE - 15 JANUARY**

The minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 15 January 2024 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 15 January be received and any recommendations therein approved.

95 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE - 22 JANUARY**

The minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 22 January 2024 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 22 January 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

96 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE - 29 JANUARY**

The minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 29 January 2024 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 29 January 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

97 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE - 5 FEBRUARY**

The minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 5 February 2024 were received.

F79 – The Chair advised he had left the meeting for the discussions on West Oxfordshire Community Transport and a mayoral subsidised letting request due to conflicts of interest.

Resolved:

That, subject to the addition above, the minutes of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 5 February 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

98 **WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL CODE OF CONDUCT & REGISTER OF INTERESTS**

Members were reminded of their obligations relating to declaring their disclosable pecuniary interests in order to keep their Register of Interests up to date, in line with the adopted Member Code of Conduct.

A form was available for any updates, and it was the responsibility of Members to update the register within 28 days of the changes taking place.

Resolved:

That, the update be noted, and members update their Register of Interests in line with the Member Code of Conduct.

99 **MEMBERS USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

The Council received and considered a recommendation provided by the Monitoring Officer at West Oxfordshire District Council which suggested that the Town Council considered the need to promote a better understanding of the use of social media to its Members.

At this juncture the Town Clerk/C.E.O requested the permission of the Chair to make a statement she had prepared as Head of Paid Service and Proper Officer of the Council expressing her disappointment regarding a party-political leaflet which had been issued to residents and reminded Councillors of their duty of care towards its employees.

The publication contained false information concerning the agreed Council budget meeting held on 8 January 2024 and while it contained derogatory attacks on the Council, claims of 'mismanagement' impacted on the Officers and staff who worked extremely hard to deliver services and were understandably concerned about the comments and their future employment with the Council.

The Town Clerk advised that despite the number of projects, financially the Council was in a reasonably comfortable position and officers worked hard to recommend a budget with a minimal increase in line with inflation. She pointed out that Officers try to achieve value for money and are governed by Financial Regulations, audited by independent internal and external auditors.

There were some very exciting and big projects which all Members would be keen to celebrate – despite whether they voted for the budget or not.

Referring to the recommendation from the Monitoring Officer to promote better understanding of the use of social media to its Members – the Town Clerk requested that those responsible for political campaigns be conscious of the impact their narrative had on staff and Council Officers who all work extremely hard to keep services running – in sometimes quite difficult circumstances. She reminded Members that they all signed up to the Civility & Respect Pledge – and that employees should all be afforded dignity at work.

The Chair thanked the Town Clerk for her comments and asked that Members heed the sentiment.

The Leader also welcomed the comments and echoed the Chair. She pointed out that the recommendation before the Council from the Monitoring Officer was for the Council to consider

Social Media Training. There was training available via one of the Council's training providers and she stressed the importance of Members taking this type of training when it became available.

Resolved:

That, the recommendation from the Monitoring Officer at the District Council be approved and the statement from the Town Clerk/C.E.O be noted.

100 **EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS & OUTSIDE BODIES**

The Council received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding vacancies to external organisations and outside bodies.

Firstly, Members considered the vacancy for a nominated trustee on the Witney Educational Foundation. It was proposed, seconded and carried that Mr R Barton be re-appointed to the position for a further four-year term.

Secondly, the Council were invited to consider joining a collaboration group concerning the strategic housing development in North Witney. The Leader gave the background to this group having been approached by the Chairs of the surrounding Parish Councils who had initiated the invitation to Witney.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Mr R Barton be re-appointed as the town council's nominated trustee on the Witney Educational Foundation and,
3. That, Witney Town Council appoints two representatives to the North Witney Collaboration Group and,
4. That, Cllrs R Smith and A Bailey be appointed to those positions.

101 **CIVIC ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Council received the report of the Mayor and Mayor's Secretary which highlighted the civic engagements of the Mayor and Deputy since the last meeting.

He expressed thanks to his Deputy and Secretary and all those who supported a recent mayoral quiz night, which raised funds for APCAM and Yellow Submarine.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

102 **CALENDAR OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS 2024-25**

The Council received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the calendar of Committee meetings for the 2024/25 municipal year, deferred from the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.

The report included several options on how the first two committee cycle of meetings could be accommodated between the Annual Council meeting and the beginning of August. Members

agreed Option four, which utilised the Tuesday after the late May Bank Holiday would be preferred.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Option four be approved and published accordingly.

103 **HEALTH & SAFETY**

The Council received a verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk.

He had been advised by other officers there was little new to report since the last meeting. Options on improving security at the Corn Exchange were still being explored following incidents which had occurred at the end of 2023.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

104 **VANDALISM & ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR REPORT**

The Council received a list of vandalism reports since the last meeting.

Members were pleased it was a comparatively short list compared to previous meetings.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

105 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader had nothing to be communicated.

106 **PCC CORRESPONDENCE**

The Committee received correspondence from the Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police, not the Crime Commissioner as published, which provided an update on a Police Effectiveness, Efficiency and Legitimacy (PEEL) report.

107 **OXFORDSHIRE HEALTHY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE**

The Council received correspondence from Oxfordshire County Council concerning the provision of the Young People's Public Health service in the County.

108 **ACCESS TO WITNEY (SHORES GREEN WEST FACING SLIP ROAD) SCHEME**

The Deputy Town Clerk advised correspondence regarding this scheme had been received earlier in the day from Oxfordshire County Council, hence why it was raised verbally at the meeting.

It was advised that, as the Town Council had previously shown support for the scheme, a letter of support would be issued to the Secretary of State outlining the benefits in regard to a recent upcoming public inquiry.

109 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

A Member asked the Leader if she had an update on the situation with the Welch Way shopping precinct which was damaged during recent storms, and which was surrounded by inaccessible scaffolding causing an obstruction on the footpath.

As a non-town Council responsibility, the Leader deferred to the Deputy Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council who agreed the current situation was unacceptable. It was complex issue regarding varying stakeholders, but it was hoped different scaffolding which would provide better accessibility would be provided in the coming days.

A further question was raised regarding flooding at Lakeside allotments and whether the Council were considering any options. Officers advised the issue had been investigated approximately three years ago and the costs were prohibitive.

110 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no documents sealed.

The meeting closed at: 8.10 pm

Chair