

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

**Held on Monday, 3 June 2024**

**At 6.04 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney**

**Present:**

Councillor L Cherry (Chair)

Councillors:	O Collins R Smith T Ashby	A Bailey S Simpson D Edwards-Hughes (In place of J Doughty)
Officers:	Adam Cook Sharon Groth Derek Mackenzie  Polly Inness  Annie Hathaway	Project Officer Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Communications & Community Engagement Officer Business Administration Apprentice
Others:	One member of the public. Councillor Joy Aitman	

**SC273 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Doughty, Councillor D Edwards-Hughes attended as a substitute.

**SC274 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor R Smith declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 11 as she was a member of the church that provided the Detached Youth Service.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

**SC275 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities committee held on 18 March 2024 were received.

**Resolved:**

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities committee held on 18 March 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

SC276 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representation from Bright Futures Oxfordshire/The Station detached youth service concerning Agenda Item 11 which consisted of a verbal update on the work they had been carrying out since their commencement in February 2024.

A written report had also been provided to Members ahead of the meeting and Members asked questions.

The Committee reconvened.

*(The member of the public left the meeting at 6:20pm)*

SC277 **FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for budgets which were the responsibility of the committee.

**Resolved:**

That, the report be noted.

SC278 **COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES & WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR**

The Committee received the detailed report of the Town Clerk/CEO along with a verbal update concerning the Committee Objectives & Work Plan for 2024/25.

In response to a request from a Member to recommence the St George's Day parade, the Town Clerk advised that she thought this was historically organised by the local Scouting Association. The Committee discussed and were informed by a Member close to West Oxfordshire Scouts that they no longer had a desire to organise an event, the Members would respond to the residents who had raised the request.

The Project Officer provided an update on the sundial in response to a question. He was currently communicating with local organisations who had connections with the late Queen with the plan being that one would take the dial to instal themselves.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the Committee Objectives & Work Plan for 2024/25 be noted and,
2. That, no amendments to the Objective & Work Plan were required.

*(Cllr A Bailey left the meeting at 6:27pm during Agenda Item 7 – Committee Objectives, he returned at 6:38pm during Agenda Item 8 – Communications Report)*

SC279 **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Communities Engagements Officer (C&CEO) regarding the council's website, written communications and social media.

The C&CEO outlined the visual differences in the old & new website inviting Members to provide comments. She explained that town council staff would continue to work to improve the website and that the decision to carry this work out in house, rather than outsourcing it allowed for greater flexibility and a potential saving of £12,000. All Members were pleased to see the progress of the work and the considerable monetary saving.

Members were pleased to hear of the response from young residents to the survey following the communications sent to schools by Officers. The C&CEO would work to include this feedback within the Youth Forum and Youth Council.

The Committee discussed the positive and negative effects of disabling comments on the Town Councils Facebook posts. It was strongly felt that it was important not to stifle residents' views but understood the importance to not allow offensive comments. Members agreed that the Council had official channels, including the option for residents to visit the Town Hall, have face to face communications, and correspond by telephone and email should they have any issues to report.

All Members were in agreement to delegate to the Officers to decide if comments would be disabled on a post-by-post basis and for them to report back to the Committee at a future meeting.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the disablement of comments on Facebook posts be delegated to Officers and,
3. That, the C&CEO provides an update on the disablement of comments to the meeting of the committee on 23 September 2024.

SC280 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Communities Engagements Officer (C&CEO) regarding upcoming community events.

The C&CEO advised with only a few days to go, the arrangements for the 80<sup>th</sup> D-Day Commemorations were going well and encouraged all Members to do what they could to support the event.

Members were pleased to hear of the development with the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events including an activity at the Oxfordshire Play Day Event, Witney Carnival and the new visitor activities available at the country park.

The C&CEO outlined the plans for a Heritage Day, the Mayor's Coffee Morning fundraiser, offering free hire of the Corn Exchange on Mental Health Day and a potential Eurovision Party. All events were welcomed by Members.

Members also discussed the hanging of the official portrait of the King. Two locations were proposed, the Café area of the Corn Exchange and the Town Hall Reception, both which had potential footfall. A vote was taken with two votes for the Café Area and six votes for the Town Hall Reception.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report and verbal report be noted and,
2. That, the Council have a nature-based activity at the Oxfordshire Playday event and,
3. That, the Mayors Coffee morning be held on the day of the Heritage Day and,
4. That, a budget of £100 be set for the Mayors Coffee Morning and,
5. That, that the Corn Exchange hire be waived for any organisation on Mental Health Day and,
6. That, the Kings portrait be hung in the Town Council Reception and,
7. That, Officers proceed with plan to host a chargeable ticketed Eurovision Event in 2025.

SC281 **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

Having been moved to a later point on the agenda the Chair called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee.

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor J Aitman be elected. There being no other nominations it was:

**Resolved:**

That, Councillor J Aitman be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2024/25 municipal year.

*(Subsequent to the meeting it was noted that Cllr Joy Aitman wasn't a member of the Committee – the matter will be reverted to Full Council on 17 June 2024)*

SC282 **COMMUNITY INSIGHT STEERING GROUP NOTES**

The Committee received the minutes of the meetings held 25 March and 30 April 2024 along with a verbal update from the Chair who had attended the second of the two meetings.

The Chair advised that she would report back to the Committee after each meeting.

**Resolved:**

That, the minutes of the Community Insight Steering Group held 25 March and 30 April 2024 be noted.

*(Cllr A Bailey left the meeting at 7:34pm during Agenda Item 10, he returned at 7:50pm during Agenda Item 13)*

SC283 **INCLUSIVITY & DIVERSITY PANEL**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Leader of the Council in respect of the recent meeting she facilitated. She was disappointed that only one of the eight groups invited had attended the online meeting.

Members discussed if future meetings would be held in person and decided this should be considered along with informal Terms of Reference and guidance for this Councillor led panel.

The Chair opened up conversation on what "Inclusivity & Diversity" meant to each individual member and many different views were expressed during the conversation focusing around removing barriers, listening rather than talking, actively encouraging residents/participants views and being open to be educated by different groups.

**Resolved:**

That, the verbal update be noted.

SC284 **YOUTH SERVICES**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding an update on Youth Services within Witney.

Members had earlier in the meeting received the report on detached youth work from the representative of The Station and the report included an update from the Youth Services Forum which took place on 29 May 2024.

**Resolved:**

That, the report be noted.

*(Cllr O Collins left the meeting at 7:43pm)*

SC285 **YOUTH COUNCIL**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding progress of the Youth Council.

Members asked that Witney Scouts be added to the list of invited member organisations along with a change of working on the poster to better reflect the benefits of participation.

The Committee were keen to progress the establishment of the Youth Council and therefore all agreed to delegate any final decisions so as to no slow down progress.

**Resolved**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Witney Scouts be added to the list of invited organisations and,
3. That, the word 'Earn' be replaced with 'Gain' on the posters promoting the Youth Council and,
4. That, final changes be delegated to Officers, Leader and Chair of the Stronger Communities Committee.

*(Cllr O Collins returned to the meeting at 7:45pm)*

*(Cllr L Cherry left the meeting at 7:45pm returning at 7:48pm)*

SC286 **GRAFFITI PROJECT - SKATE PARK**

The Committee received the report of the Project Officer regarding a proposal to hold a graffiti art competition along with a verbal update.

Members were enthusiastic to hear details of the competition and were pleased to hear that Officers would have full oversight of the brief issued to potential artists.

Members also discussed the possibility of a 'temporary wall' being made available which would allow graffiti to be continually updated and hopefully deter the defacement of the feature walls.

All Members were in agreement that the competition be launched with the proposed prize and that the walls be protected to ensure their longevity. They also agreed that the brief should focus on "colour, inclusivity, youth, belonging & Witney"

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the competition be run as presented with the prize being an iPad and Apple Pencil (£428). The funding for this, along with the protective coating (£229.06) being taken from the Wheeled Sports Park earmarked reserve and,
3. That, the working of the brief be amended to replace 'environment' with 'belonging' and,
4. That, Officers consider making a wall available for temporary graffiti artwork.

SC287 **WOODGREEN BUS SHELTER UPDATE**

The Committee received the report of the Project Officer regarding the request for a bus shelter at Woodgreen.

Members were disappointed to hear that Estelle Manor felt they were unable to assist financially and agreed that the cost was outside of that affordable to the Council given the low number of passengers that use the stop.

**Resolved:**

That, the report be noted.

SC288 **SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO 48 (A)**

**Resolved:**

That Standing Order 48 (a) be suspended to allow the meeting to continue as it had now passed two hours in length.

SC289 **MARRIOTT'S BUS SHELTER**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding the removal of the bus shelter at Marriotts Walk.

The Town Clerk gave a brief verbal history of the shelter, and Members welcomed the replacement in a more fitting location.

All Members agreed that the Council take on the responsibility of the new shelter once it was in place.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the Council includes any new shelter in its bus shelter portfolio.

SC290 **BLUE PLAQUES REFURBISHMENT**

The Committee received and considered the report and verbal update from the Business Administration Apprentice regarding the refurbishment of three of the Blue Plaques on the Council's buildings.

Members agreed that having seen the great results of the renovation of the Corn Exchange Plaque, that the work to refurbish the remaining three should go ahead. Members were in agreement that to reduce cost the plaque on the Buttercross be delayed until the equipment was available during the Christmas Period or earlier should the opportunity arise.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, refurbishment of the Town Hall and Langdale Hall Plaque proceed and,
3. That, the refurbishment of the Buttercross Plaque take place later in 2024.

SC291 **THIRD PARTY EVENTS**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Venue & Events Officer regarding third party events due to take place on the Councils Land.

Members were pleased to welcome back the Oxford Playhouse to The Leys for them to provide the free outdoor theatre shows and all Members were in agreement with the request for a subsidised let.

With the express permission of the Chair the Members also heard details of a request from Witney Churches who had requested use of the events field at The Leys on 17,18 & 19 July to host events for Key Stage 3 to 5 Children. Members were pleased to facilitate these free to all events, though some held reservations over the potential religious aspect of the group running these particular series of activities.

The Committee also heard from the Committee Clerk brief details of a proposal received from a local writer regarding a play to highlight the issues of Dementia. Further details, once established, would be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a subsidised let to the value of £1,500 be agreed for Oxford Playhouses Outdoor Theatre events and,
3. That, delegation to Officers be agreed concerning Courtside CIC's request to use of The Leys for live music events during the summer and,
4. That, Witney Churches be allowed free use of The Leys on 17-19 July 2024.

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The meeting closed at: 8.09 pm

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Chair