

**MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 17 June 2024

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

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	G Meadows	L Cherry
	J Aitman	R Crouch
	D Enright	D Newcombe
	R Smith	J Robertshaw
	D Temple	S Simpson
	A Bailey	J Treloar
Officers:	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	No members of the public.	

329 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Ashby, J Doughty, G Doughty and D Edwards-Hughes.

An apology was also received from Inspector C Ball of Thames Valley Police.

330 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

331 MINUTES

The minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 8 May 2024 were received.

There were no questions, therefore the Chair moved their acceptance. Members were unanimous in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 8 May 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

332 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

333 **WITNEY COMMUNITY POLICING ISSUES**

The Council were disappointed to hear a representative from Thames Valley Police was unable to attend the meeting.

The Chair asked Members with any questions or points that they had wished to raise to email Inspector Chris Ball directly.

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

West Oxfordshire County Council (WODC)

Councillor D Enright advised most major works and communications were suspended due to the pre-election period but did inform Members of the Deer Park South Nature Park, which was due to be open soon. The area connected to the existing Deer Park Wood which in turn was adjacent to the Town Council's West Witney Recreation Ground.

Footpaths had been improved as well as bridges, nature rubbing posts and a bench was being installed to improve the enjoyment of the area for all ages.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

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

Witney Town Charity

Councillor R Crouch advised Members the Charity operated Almshouses for the poor and needy in Witney but also provided grants for those in need within the area. She encouraged Members to contact herself or Councillor J Aitman if they became aware of any individuals that may benefit from the award of a grant from the Charity.

Witney Fairtrade Action Group

Councillor R Smith informed Members that she had received a thank you from the group in respect of the granting of the subsidised let of the Corn Exchange for their upcoming event.

West Witney Sports & Social Club

Councillor R Smith confirmed to Members that she and Councillor D Newcombe, Chair of the Parks & Recreation Committee would be meeting shortly with the Witney Swifts Cricket Committee and would report back to the Council.

Resolved:

That, the verbal updates be noted.

336 **COMMITTEE PLACES**

The Council received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk relating to proposed changes of membership for two of the Councils Committees.

It was proposed by the Chair, seconded by Councillor R Crouch that a single vote be taken on both recommendations noted in the report. The result was:

For	12
Against	1
Abstentions	0

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the membership of the Personnel Sub-Committee be reduced to seven members for the 2024/25 municipal year and,
3. That, Councillor R Smith be elected Vice-Chair of the Stronger Communities Committee for the 2024/25 municipal year.

337 **CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY & PLANNING - 15 APRIL, 23 APRIL, 14 MAY & 4 JUNE 2024**

P304 – In response to a question raised by a Member regarding the appropriateness of the Oxford Traffic Filter meeting being Chaired by a Councillor when it was not a Council event, it was advised that as the arrangements for the meeting had been delegated to the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee and that the appointment would stand.

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance, seconded by Councillor G Meadows, all Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee meetings held on 15 April, 23 April, 14 May and 4 June 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

338 **PARKS & RECREATION - 13 MAY 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance seconded by Councillor R Crouch, all Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Parks & Recreation Committee meeting held on 13 May 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

339 **HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS - 20 MAY 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance seconded by Councillor J Aitman, all Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 20 May 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

340 **STRONGER COMMUNITIES - 3 JUNE 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance seconded by Councillor R Crouch, all Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 3 June 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

341 **POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE - 10 JUNE 2024**

The Chair of the Committee presented the above minutes to Council and moved their acceptance seconded by Councillor G Meadows, all Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Policy Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 10 June 2024 be received and any recommendations therein approved.

342 **CIVIC ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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

The Mayor expressed thanks to his Deputies, Councillor G Meadows and Councillor A Bailey as well as his secretary. He also thanked all the Staff and Officers who helped with the 80th D-Day Anniversary arrangements, a sentiment which was echoed by all Members.

He encouraged members to attend if they could, and promote the Mayor Gala Event being held on 28 June 2024. A Member advised that consideration be given to advertising future Town Council events via the Witney Gazette.

The Mayor also announced that he would be adding a third charity partner for 2024/25 to compliment APCAM and Yellow Submarine. The charity being "Band of Brothers" who worked with young men involved in the criminal justice system. They provided support to make the transition to an adulthood free of crime.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted.

343 **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT FOR 2023/24**

The Council received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) in respect of the final report of the Council's internal auditor, which had been recommended for adoption by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting held on 10 June 2024.

He advised that throughout the year, Auditing Solutions Ltd, the Council's independent Internal Auditors carried out a number of visits and also undertook some work remotely, in order to scrutinise internal procedures and accounting.

Auditing Solutions Ltd had completed the final audit work for the 2023-24 period and duly signed the Internal Auditor section of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).

In response to a Member's question, the RFO advised that as noted in the report, new processes had been implemented to address the previous recommendations regarding stock control at the Council's venues

It was recommended by the Chair, Seconded by Councillor J Aitman that the Internal Audit Report for 2023/24 be approved. All Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Internal Audit report for 2023/24 be approved and formally adopted by the Council.

344 **ACCOUNTS & AUDIT (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2015 - ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) 2023/24**

The Council received the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) in respect of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) for 2023/24 under its obligations to the Accounts & Audit (England) Regulations 2015. The Policy, Governance and Finance Committee had recommended approval and adoption at the meeting held on 10 June 2024.

In his report, the RFO pointed out that Members took a collective responsibility for ensuring there was a sound system of internal control in order to agree Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement. It was recommended by officers that all measures were in place, and it could therefore be agreed and signed at the meeting.

The Accounting Statement formed section 2 and officers recommended it should be agreed and adopted. The remainder of the report was for information; Section 3 would be submitted to the external auditor with supporting information and would be an analytical review concentrating on variances year on year, or above a certain percentage.

The general public would have the right to inspection the documents which would be published on 18 June 2024 via the Council's noticeboard and online.

The Leader of the Council thanked the RFO for his diligence and in presenting the information in such an accessible format.

It was recommended by the Chair, Seconded by Councillor J Aitman that the Internal Audit Report for 2023/24 be approved. All members were in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Annual Governance Statement at Section 1 be approved and adopted by the Council with questions 1 to 8 answered “yes” and question 9 “not applicable” and,
3. That, the Statement of Accounts at Section 2 of the Annual Return for the year ended 31 March 2024 be approved and adopted and,
4. That, the Notice of Public Rights and Publication for 2023/24 be approved and published.

(The Responsible Financial Officer left the meeting at 7:45pm)

345 **MOTION - THAMES WATER**

The Council received and considered a Motion proposing a vote of no confidence in Thames Water, proposed by Councillor G Meadows and seconded by Cllr R Crouch.

Councillor Meadows introduced the motion and explained that it had arisen from a similar proposal put to Henley Town Council in recent weeks. The background to the motion was in the full version which was included with the agenda pack

From the outset, it was clear that Members were universally disappointed with the actions of Thames Water and the disregard to the public concerns over water quality of the rivers in and around Witney.

Individual Members shared how their lives and that of their families were affected. Several spoke of similar concerns being expressed to them by residents and local organisations such as Windrush Against Sewage Pollution (WASP) who campaigned to seek accountability from Thames Water and support from other water organisations such as OFWAT and the Environment Agency.

Despite a General Election being due in early July 2024 which would see a potential change in the position of Secretary of State, it was agreed that due to the cross-party agreement, that it be delegated to the Town Clerk/CEO to liaise with Henley Town Council in order to advise the Leader of the Council as to when submission of the letter should occur.

On being put to the vote the unamended motion was unanimously carried.

Resolved:

1. That, the Notice of Motion be supported and therefore,
 - a) Witney Town Council has no confidence in Thames Water’s competence as a sewerage undertaker.
 - b) Witney Town Council sends a letter from the Leader of the Council to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, urging His Majesty's Government to place full regulatory and administrative limits on Thames Water, suspending bonuses, bringing criminal charges to individuals responsible where found and to evaluate the pros and cons of the renationalisation of Thames Water.
2. That, the Town Clerk/CEO liaise with Henley Town Council and advise the Leader when submission of the letter should take place.

346 **WITNEY TOWN CENTRE CCTV SCHEME - UPGRADE TO HD DIGITAL**

The Town Clerk/C.E.O advised that the Council had received notice of changes to the Witney CCTV scheme, which the town council contributed to annually. A recent District Council report provided with increased indicative figures for forthcoming years which the Council was asked to agree in principle.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the Council held a duty under The Crime & Disorder Act 1998 to work with others and to consider crime and disorder implications on all activities and therefore consideration of the scheme was required.

Councillor D Enright gave an update following the District Council discussion which took place at the West Oxfordshire District Council Executive Meeting on 12 June 2024. He reported that agreement was reached as proposed; Thames Valley Police would lead on the upgrade and monitoring on the updated system which would allow for cost and efficiency savings. He further advised that some of the costs would need to be met by Town & Parish Councils

Members considered the sums outlined in WODC's report. It was proposed by Councillor R Smith, seconded by Councillor G Meadows that the Council agree in principle that contributions of £11,267 (2025/26) £11,591 (2026/27) and £11,922 (2027/28) be considered for budget purposes. Councillor R Smith advised that these sums may increase slightly as the WODC calculations had since be revised however this would only equate to a few hundred pounds.

Members were unanimous in agreeing in principle to the sums outlined over the next three years.

Resolved:

That, the Council agree in principle to make contributions of £11,267 (2025/26) £11,591 (2026/27) and £11,922 (2027/28) towards the CCTV scheme.

347 **COMPLIMENTS & COMPLAINTS**

The Council received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which outlined complaints, comments and compliments received since the last report in December 2023.

Members were pleased to note that the number of compliments had once again increased significantly compared to the previous feedback.

However, Members were disappointed to see the level of complaints resulting from grass cutting and the general state of the town. The majority of these complaints were outside of the Council's remit and were the responsibility of the District or County council. The Town Clerk/CEO advised that she was in the process of meeting with Officers from the other Council bodies to discuss their maintenance regimes and that the Town Council had agreed a part time post to improvement the appearance pf the town centre and Town Council land.

A Member asked that the proposed bins at the newly refurbished stake park were installed as the area was looking scruffy and this would hopefully provide a quick resolution to the issue.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the verbal update from the Town Clerk/CEO be noted and,
3. That, Officers expediate the implementation of bins at the Skate Park.

348 **HEALTH & SAFETY**

The Council were advised by the Town Clerk/CEO that a recent Independent Inspection had been carried out and a summary report would be presented at a future meeting.

Resolved:

That, the verbal update be noted.

349 **VANDALISM**

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

Members were concerned to see an increase in the incidents and severity being reported and as unfortunately Thames Valley Police had been unable to attend, they could not gain feedback on the outcome of these incidents.

The Deputy Town Clerk also tabled a report from the Biodiversity & Green Spaces Officers regarding a fire that occurred in the vicinity of the entrance to the Country Park from the Station Lane industrial Estate which had resulted in costs of approx. £450 to the council to clear.

The Town Clerk/CEO advised that officers would look for an alternative position for the flower pole that was vandalised. Also, at the suggestion of a member a copy of the report would be shared with the detached youth service, The Station.

Resolved:

1. That, the reports and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, Officers, if possible, relocate the flower pole and,
3. That, the vandalism spreadsheet be shared with The Station.

350 **COMMUNICATION FROM THE LEADER**

The Leader reminded members that should they wish to participate with the Witney Carnival parade that they needed to start finalising their costumes.

She also reminded members that the Councillor in the Café event for July would be replaced by Councillors at the Carnival and that all councillors should try and make themselves available to speak with residents as it would be an excellent opportunity to discuss ideas for the new Splashpark and also gather thoughts for the Ralegh Crescent MUSA/MUGA.

Resolved:

That, the verbal report be noted.

351 **WITNEY INFRASTRUCTURE NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP**

The Council received and considered correspondence from Witney Neighbourhood Infrastructure Group (WING).

Members agreed that as Councillor R Smith and Councillor A Bailey were representatives of the Council on the group that they would provide updates when they arise.

Resolved:

That, the correspondence be noted.

352 **QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

There were no Questions for the Leader of the Council.

353 **SEALING OF DOCUMENTS**

There were no items sealed since the last meeting.

Resolved:

That the seal of the Council be affixed to any documents arising from decisions taken by this meeting of the Council.

The meeting closed at: 8.28 pm

Chair