

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

**Held on Monday, 23 September 2024**

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

**Present:**

Councillor R Smith (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors:	O Collins T Ashby S Simpson	D Temple (In place of J Doughty) J Aitman (In place of G Meadows)
Officers:	Derek Mackenzie  Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Annie Hathaway Polly Inness	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Business Administration Apprentice Communications & Community Engagement Officer
Others:	Three members of the public.	

**SC513 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Meadows and J Doughty with Councillors J Aitman and D Temple attending as substitutes respectively.

**SC514 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor R Smith declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10 as she was a member of the church that provided the Detached Youth Service.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers at this point in the meeting.

Later, Councillor D Temple declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5 as he was a past employee of Bob Wilson Funfairs.

**SC515 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 15 July 2024 were received.

SC392 – The Communications & Communities Engagement Officer provided details of the activity and support provided to Witney Talking News.

SC399 – A member of the public had showed interest in the Spruce up your sign scheme; the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed a decision on insurance cover from the Council’s insurers would be available soon so that the scheme could progress.

The Committee Clerk updated Members on the progress of the graffiti competition at the Wheeled Sports Park which was due to take place on 5 October and also provided detail of the temporary graffiti boards that would be installed to complement the permanent artwork.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee held on 15 July 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair and,
2. That, the verbal updates be noted.

SC516 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

*The Committee adjourned for this item.*

The committee received representation from a member of the Witney Music Festival team (WMF) concerning Agenda Item 13. An update of the 2024 event was provided.

Further representation was received from two members of the detached youth service “The Station” concerning Agenda Item 10 who provided an update on its activity.

*The Committee reconvened.*

SC517 **YOUTH SERVICES**

*With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the members of public could hear the discussion and outcome.*

Members received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with the verbal update from the two members of The Station that had proceeded the item.

The Station

Members heard the result of the ‘KICK’ sessions held at the 4G astro-turf pitch during the summer months. The sessions had seen approx. 35-40 attendees at each of the 15 sessions. They explained the lessons learnt and the ideas for improvement in the future so as to encourage more female attendance and participation along with potentially an exclusive use of the facility.

Overall engagement with young people had continued to be positive with outcomes and success evident as they brought large numbers of young people together.

The main issue that The Station faced was the lack of space in times of poor/cold weather for somewhere that the detached youth team could signpost young people to so that they may participate in an activity or just somewhere to sit and chat. Members discussed potential venues including the Corn Exchange however, it could only offer sporadic availability due to other community groups and existing bookings.

The member of the Witney Music Festival Team that was present indicated that he may be able to help facilitate introductions to the music venues around the town such as Fat Lils and Studio 7

who had potential space available during weekdays. The Station would follow this up and progress with WMF's help.

Assisting Parents of Children Affected by Mental Health (APCAM)

The Deputy Town Clerk provided a verbal update following the sessions run by APCAM over the summer months. The sessions saw assistance provided to 10 families with support still continuing for 2 of these.

APCAM had offered their thanks to the Council for the award of the grant funding and had expressed an interest in extending the offering further in order to support more families. It was agreed that Officers explore the options further and report back to the Committee.

Witney Youth Council

14 Applications had been received and Members agreed that interviews would be offered to all applicants. Two members of the Witney Youth Council mentors would be available to sit on the panel along with Officers. Interviews would be arranged as soon as possible in order to not delay the progress of the project.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, all applicants for the Youth Council be invited to attend an interview and,
3. That, delegation be provided to the Deputy Town Clerk to explore with APCAM the possibility of providing services throughout the year, this potentially being monthly, during half-term and or summer holidays.

*(The three members of the public left the meeting at 6:57pm)*

SC518 **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.

Members were pleased to see that the income and expenditure was within the projected budgets however acknowledged that some expenditures, such as the Christmas Lighting, were not spread across the financial year.

The Committee discussed budget considerations for the 2025/26 financial year, Members were reminded of the resolution passed by the Council in July 2024 to enhance support for Youth Services.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted.
2. That, the management accounts of the Stronger Communities Committee for the period 1 April to 31 July 2024 be approved.
3. That, Officers consider the establishment of separate budget lines in order to maintain the funding of The Station and Home Start Oxford, currently £28,000 and £11,000 per annum respectively along with the retention of the existing £40,000 Youth Provision budget from 2025/26 onwards which should be re-opened as a grant fund.

SC519 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved:**

That in accordance with section (1(2) of the Public Bodies (admission to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

SC520 **WITNEY FEAST - RENEWAL OF AGREEMENT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer along with a confidential verbal update from the Town Clerk/CEO following the initial discussions with Bob Wilson Funfairs Ltd.

Members heard details of the meeting held the previous week. They considered various options and provided the Town Clerk with a proposal to be presented to Bob Wilson Funfairs Ltd for further consideration.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the confidential written and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, Officers present the agreed offer of new terms to Bob Wilson Funfairs.

*(On conclusion of the item the meeting reverted back to open session)*

SC521 **RESIDENT SATISFACTION SURVEY ACTIONS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk regarding actions resulting from the annual resident's satisfaction survey.

Members asked that the illustration that Officers had prepared showing the services provided by each level of local government be published on a regular basis to ensure that residents were reminded of the services that the Town Council provided.

A Member asked if a bench located on Tower Hill near the entrance to Union Way could be reviewed and potentially turned so as to face away from the traffic.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers highlight the services of each Council regularly and,
3. That, Officers consider the orientation of the Tower Hill Bench.

SC522 **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (CCEO) concerning the Council's communications strategy.

Members were concerned to hear of the impact that negative social media posts had and agreed that improvements could be made to ensure Members support the action of the Council

wherever possible. Councillors were also asked to feedback to the CCEO so that communication could be improved.

The Committee also agreed that steps should be taken to highlight the work of the Council whether that be operationally, grant support or by any of the other means that it assists the community.

Members discussed the idea of adding signage to promote the Witney Country Park, it was agreed that waymarking from the Leys be considered and that the CCEO provide details to be considered in the 2025/26 budget setting.

Updates were also provided regarding the Council's website, engagement via surveys and the autumn newsletter which was due to be published at the end of October.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted.
2. That, Officers explore options for signage/waymarking from The Leys to the Witney Country Park for consideration and,
3. That, Officers and Councillor encourage engagement with partners to highlight the work of the Council.

*(A member of the public joined the meeting at 7:42pm remaining until the closing of the meeting – they did not verbally participate in the meeting)*

*(Councillor T Ashby left the meeting at 7:42pm and rejoined at 7:45pm)*

**SC523 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (CCEO) concerning the planned events in the upcoming months.

The Committee were supportive of the idea to offer the Gallery Room to carers and the people they cared for in order that they could attend the Christmas Light Switch on Event in more comfortable surroundings. They asked that Officers progress the idea however asked that they advise the attendees from previous years of these plans so that they may make alternative arrangements.

Members considered the commemoration of both VE & VJ day in 2025, it was proposed by Councillor R Smith, seconded by Councillor D Temple that arrangements to be of a similar level to the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day, a Task & Finish group be established with a budget of £1,500. Members were unanimous in agreement.

Members were also all in agreement with the idea of providing additional picnics to recognise the work of volunteers with a budget set at £500. The procurement of event specific table and chairs for events such as these was also agreed along with suitable storage.

The Committee noted the correspondence regarding the ageing of towns and agreed with the Deputy Town Clerk's thoughts that this needed to be reflected in future decisions the Council made and in a Community Engagement Strategy being developed by the C&CEO.

Members were pleased to hear of the suggestion to establish a “Welcome to Witney” leaflet and asked that Officers explore the options further with potential partners and also speak with West Oxfordshire District Council as to whether any funding existed to help progress the project.

Finally, the Committee noted the updates provided from the Community Insight Steering Group meeting held on 3 July and Parish Transport meeting held on 16 July.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the Gallery Room be offered to carers and their families for the Christmas Light Switch on event and,
3. That, Officers investigate options to mark the VE & VJ dates in 2025 utilising a £1,500 budget and,
4. That, a VE & VJ Day Task & Finish group be established and,
5. That, three picnic-type events be arranged annually to recognise Volunteers work utilising a budget of £500 and,
6. That, Officers progress the idea of a Witney Information leaflet and,
7. That, Tables & Chair sets and a storage unit be procured at a cost of £1,343.92 and £1,800 respectively.
8. That, the minutes of the Community Insight Steering group and Parish Transport meetings be noted.

**SC524 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS**

As the meeting had now reached over 2 hours in length, the Committee agreed to suspend standing order 48 in order to allow the meeting to continue for a further 20 minutes.

**SC525 COMMUNITY WINDOW - REVIEW OF POLICY**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Reception & Bookings Administrator which included details on the activity of the Community Window at the Market Square Reception Office.

A Member noted that this was the first report that the Committee had received from the Reception & Bookings Administrator and asked that thanks were passed to her.

Members were pleased to hear of the success that the window had provided to local community organisations in helping them promote their activities.

Members considered the guidance document along with the request to provide a £500 budget to provide support materials to organisations. All members were in agreement.

**Recommended:**

1. That, the report be noted,
2. That, the Receptionist & Bookings Administrator be thanked for her contribution and,
3. That, the Community Window Guidance Document be approved and,
4. That, a budget of £500 be considered for 2025/26 for display material/equipment.

*(Councillor O Collins left the meeting at 8:10pm rejoining at 8:13pm)*

SC526 **PARK YOGA REQUEST**

The Committee received correspondence with a request to host outdoor yoga sessions.

Members heard that Officers had requested further information and invited the individual to attend the meeting however they had not heard further prior to the meeting.

The Committee were principally in support of the proposal however more information such as details of Public Liability Insurance and a Health & Safety Assessment would be required before they could consider the request fully, but in principle, use of the Council's parks would be permitted on receipt.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, Officers follow up to request further information.

SC527 **WINTER PREPARATIONS**

The Committee received the report of the Operations Manager in relation to Salt Bin preparations for the Town.

A verbal update was provided by the Committee Clerk in relation to the efforts made by the Town Council to site salt bins on the Kingfisher estate however these had been refused by the developer. The issue would be highlighted at the upcoming Witney Traffic Advisory Committee.

Members were pleased to hear that preparations were in place to provide salt to residents in the event of bad weather. No new suggested locations were offered at the meeting.

**Resolved:**

That, the report and verbal update be noted.

SC528 **EVENTS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Venue & Events Officer relating to past and upcoming events that the Council were involved in or supporting.

Members had earlier received a verbal update from the representative of Witney Music Festival which members were very keen to receive. The two-day event at The Leys was attended by over 5,000 people, however WMF had seen an increase in costs of 30% therefore WMF thanked the Council for its continued support. Members asked that the financial accounts for 2023 be made available as soon as possible along with an interim financial statement for 2024 so that the Council may see how the £10,000 monetary contribution was allocated. It was confirmed that no funds were being provided by WMF to Witney Town FC as an official sponsor.

The Committee were disappointed to hear of the issues being experienced following the introduction by West Oxfordshire District Council of a new policy surrounding the application for street closures which had resulted in Town Council Officers having to hand deliver over 100 letters to local businesses and residents and obtain signed agreement in order to submit an application to close streets for the period of Remembrance on 10 November. Members who

were also Councillor on WODC agreed that they would investigate the matter to ask if a dispensation could be offered.

Members heard of the plans for the annual children's Advent Fayre and were asked to ensure that they provide their help in order that the event can successfully run.

**Resolved:**

1. That, the report be noted, and
2. That, accounts from Witney Music Festival are provided to the Town Council ahead of the next meeting and,
3. That, Councillors note support is needed from them to ensure the Advent Fayre can run successfully.

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The meeting closed at: 8.20 pm

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Chair