

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

Held on Monday, 2 June 2025

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

Present:

Councillor T Ashby (Chair)

Councillors:	R Smith	D Enright
	G Meadows	A Mubin
	A Bailey	J Treloar
	D Edwards-Hughes	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	One member of the public.	

SC298 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

SC299 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

SC300 MINUTES

The minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 24 March 2025 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities Committee meeting held on 24 March 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

SC301 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Simon Watson from Carterton Town Council who was attended the meeting with a particular interest in Agenda Item 10 – Youth Council.

The Committee reconvened.

SC302 **YOUTH COUNCIL**

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda to allow the visiting Councillor from Carterton to hear the discussions.

The Deputy Town Clerk and Leader of the Council outlined the progress of the Youth Council to date explaining in brief how the Council has approached the re-establishment of the Youth Council. The recruitment had ensured it was open to all to apply and that each potential member had the opportunity of a face to face meeting to discuss what they wanted to achieve.

Overall, the Youth Council has been a great success with any challenges being overcome and objectives set.

The Committee then received the minutes of the meeting of the Youth Council on 28 April 2025 and were pleased to see that it would be active and participate with interaction at the upcoming Witney Carnival.

Members also heard of the upcoming visit from the Le Touquet Youth Council on 8 July 2025 and it was proposed with all Members in agreement that a budget be set to subsidise the costs of providing a takeaway meal and use of the Corn Exchange that day. Additionally, it was suggested that non Youth Council members be invited to participate in the meeting to encourage cultural bonds between the twinned towns.

Recommended:

1. That, the verbal updates be noted and,
2. That a budget for a reception meal be considered by Policy, Governance & Finance at their meeting of 9 June 2025 and,
3. That, the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held 28 April 2025 be noted.

SC303 **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee.

It was proposed by Cllr J Treloar and seconded by Cllr T Ashby that Councillor D Edwards-Hughes be elected.

An additional proposal was made for the election of Cllr G Meadows by Cllr D Enright which was seconded by Cllr R Smith. There being no other nominations a vote was taken:

In favour of Cllr Edwards-Hughes	Four
In favour of Cllr Meadows	Four

The Chair exercised his casting vote in favour of Cllr Edwards-Hughes.

Resolved:

That, Councillor David Edwards-Hughes be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2025/26 municipal year.

SC304 COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the terms of reference for the Committee.

Members welcomed the suggested amendments and additions in the report which highlighted the Council's commitment to equality and engagement.

Recommended:

That, the Committee terms of reference be updated to include all suggestions in the report and recommended for Council approval on 23 June.

SC305 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 2025/26

The Deputy Town Clerk advised clarity would be provided to Members in respect of the quoted £40,000 at a later date.

In response to a question, Members reflected on the support the Council may provide to Witney Chamber of Commerce (WCoC) and the towns businesses in general following submission of results from a survey they had held earlier in the year, and due for discussion at the next meeting. It was noted that there were already several objectives included in the report and that the Town Council could work to explore these opportunities further.

The Mayor confirmed that she was due to meet with the Chairman of WCoC later that week to discuss their needs.

Later in the meeting when the Committee considered Agenda Item 9b – Annual Resident Satisfaction Survey – it was agreed that an objective be added to review the need for an indoor meeting venue for young people.

Resolved:

1. That, the Committee Objectives & Work Plan for 2025/26 be noted and
2. That, additional clarity of the amounts of Youth Service and Community Transport Grant be provided to Members and,
3. That, an objective be set to review in conjunction with The Station and Courtside Hubs for provision of an indoor meeting venue for Young People.

SC306 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer, with the points in the report being summarised by the Chair.

Members agreed that West Oxfordshire District Council be contacted in respect of the Welcome to Witney guide so that the Town Council could help promote the work being carried out by them as part of their wayfinding project.

The Committee considered the press coverage and asked that Officers ensure that press releases were issued whenever possible; Members were disappointed to hear that even when provided with a press release this had not necessary lead to publication as had been the case with the 80th VE Anniversary celebrations and the opening of the refurbished Splashpark, both of which would have illustrated and educated residents on the work of the Town Council.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers issues a press release when relevant and continue to monitor inclusion in the press.

SC307 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer, again the points in the report were summarised by the Chair following thanks and pride in the management and facilitation of the excellent VE Day 80th anniversary events in Witney.

Members welcomed the news that The Station would attend to the next meeting of the Committee and provide their 3-year plan.

In respect of the Witney Carnival, the Committee considered their participation in the procession event with mixed interest. Members were reminded of the positive feedback received following the 2024 event which helped to show the Councils “human side”. It was agreed a decision be made by 9 June. However, the Committee noted the participation of the Youth Council and looked forward to supporting them on the Council stand.

Members were unanimous in agreement that the Town Council facilitate a Climate event to highlight the work of local organisations and Council bodies, additionally the Committee agreed that promotion of heritage events, walks, and activities be promoted such as those arranged by Witney Museum to coincide with Heritage Open Days.

The Committee heard from the Chair who highlighted the work of the Community insight Profile Steering Group and encouraged Members to engage with the group.

The Chair would

follow up with his Oxfordshire County Council contacts and also investigate how the Town Council could potentially get more involved.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Council decide whether to participate in the Witney Carnival by 9 June and advise officers and,
3. That, the Council facilitate a Climate awareness event,
4. That, the council promote local heritage open day events.

SC308 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

Members received and considered the updated Community Engagement Strategy.

Members suggested some minor amendments and agreed to provide any final comments to the Community & Communications Officer ahead of the meeting of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 9 June.

However, Members were unanimous in agreement with its recommendation for adoption.

Recommended:

1. That, the updated strategy document be noted and,
2. That, any final amendments to the Community Engagement Strategy be advised to Officers ahead of agreement at the 9 June meeting of Policy, Governance & Finance and,
3. That, the strategy be recommended for approval.

SC309 **ANNUAL SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS**

The Committee received and considered the results of the annual residents' satisfaction survey.

Members were pleased to see that the highest percentage of responses had been from the under 17 age group, Officers advised they believed this to be due to push on social media to local schools and also youth council members.

Officers advised that each individual Committee would receive detailed information and comments for areas under their jurisdiction and that Members were welcome to provide any comments or suggestions for improvement.

The Committee were pleased how highly the Councils Civic Events had been scored and how this reflected on the organisation and effort of Officers.

They were however, concerned to see comments from younger residents stating they were not made to feel "welcome" and were "moved on" when they congregated. In response to this it was suggested that the Council consider again what support that The Station could provide either utilising the Corn Exchange or the upcoming Courtside building on The Leys perhaps once a week as an indoor meeting venue for younger people. It was unanimously agreed that this be added an objective for the Committee.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, an objective be set for the Committee to consider an indoor venue provision for young people.

SC310 **WITNEY FORUM NOTES**

The Committee received the notes of the Witney Forum Meeting held on 25 March 2025.

The Chair confirmed his intention to attend the next meeting of the Forum on 24 June 2025 in order to find out more about the groups that were working hard to provide assistance to the town's residents.

In reflection of the work of the Witney Forum he asked that a social media post be created to celebrate the work of volunteers across the town as it was currently National Volunteer Week, all Members were in agreement.

Resolved:

1. That, the Witney Forum minutes of 25 March 2025 be noted and,
2. That, Officers recognises the work of Volunteers in the community by way of a social media post.

The meeting closed at: 6.58 pm

Chair