
Agenda Item:	Youth Council Update
Meeting Date:	Monday, 15 September 2025
Contact Officer:	Administrative Assistant – Communications & Engagement

The purpose of this report is to inform Councillors about the progress and work of the Witney Youth Council.

Background

The Witney Youth Council was established in September 2024 with a group of 12 members. Since its formation, the council has actively participated in numerous town events, including the Christmas Lights Switch-on and the Witney Carnival. The primary purpose of the Witney Youth Council is to provide children and young people with a collective voice that is heard by decision makers. By giving young people a voice, the Witney Youth Council plays a vital role in shaping a more inclusive and responsive local government, encouraging active participation and developing leadership skills among Witney's young people.

Current Situation

Several youth councillors show great enthusiasm for supporting and participating in events. However, their limited communication with one another results in insufficient time to thoroughly discuss projects and ideas. They have formed a WhatsApp group between them, but as this is formed and monitored by them, therefore we cannot be sure if all members are active or included in the group chat. There are currently 5 or 6 members that are consistent with their attendance of meetings.

Officers' approach to addressing communication challenges involves expanding the Youth Council by inviting new members. Currently, officers have received two new applications, and interviews are scheduled to take place shortly. Additionally, we are offering the option for youth members to be contacted via mobile phones through WhatsApp. Since emails don't appear to be a preferred option, WhatsApp provides a more familiar and accessible means of contact for the youth councillors. This communication method is managed by the Communications and Engagement Administrative Assistant using a work mobile. It is important to clarify that this is not a group chat but a direct messaging system, ensuring privacy and protecting confidential information.

High Sheriff's Breakfast

Since the most recent Youth Council meeting in July was cancelled, the planned discussion for the High Sheriff's Big Breakfast Conversations did not take place. Consequently, Officers reached out to the High Sheriff and requested an extension for the project to hold the event in November. Further discussions on this were due to be held at a Youth Council Meeting on 5th September but was unable to be take place due to numbers.

Youth-led Culture Day

This suggested event is a significant project that has yet to be successfully planned. It was intended to be an evening featuring performances, world foods, and music representing various cultures (including Britain). The event was to be organised and led by the Youth Council. As the September Youth Council meeting was due to determine whether the planning and execution of this event would proceed it is now likely that the event will be cancelled or postponed.

Events Survey

The Youth Council initiated an events survey as one of their initial actions following their earlier meetings. This survey is designed to be distributed and promoted by the Youth Council to collect information on the preferences and interests of young people in Witney regarding upcoming events.

An additional question was included in the survey to assess perceptions of Anti-Social Behaviour following officer meetings with TVP, specifically whether young respondents believe it is a significant issue in their community. The survey has now been completed and will be distributed to schools through their daily slides, aiming to reach a broad audience of young people and gather valuable insights. The survey is attached as **Appendix A**.

Officers have discussed the importance of increasing the visibility of Witney Town Council as a brand among the youth of Witney. Many young residents seem to not be aware of the functions and roles of both the Witney Town Council and the Witney Youth Council. To improve awareness, a practical approach would be to distribute a monthly slide poster to local schools. This presentation would serve as a brief newsletter, featuring the council's logo and recent activities or initiatives undertaken by the youth and town council. As young people are less likely to follow the council on social media platforms, it is important to try to reach them directly through channels they frequently access, such as schools. Additionally, the youth council mentioned the daily slides as a successful source of information. This strategy aims to increase engagement and understanding of the council's work among the younger demographic, ensuring that all parts of the community are well-informed and involved.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – no direct implications.
- b) Biodiversity – no direct implications.
- c) Crime & Disorder – no direct implications.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – The Youth Council has not yet shown interest in climate initiatives. However, when they buy items for their projects, officers have prioritised sustainability and the use of eco-friendly materials.

Risk

Officers recognise the potential risks associated with using WhatsApp and have developed a consent form that details the data collection and usage when employing third-party applications. Youth Councillors and their guardians retain the right to refuse the use of WhatsApp and can remain to communicate exclusively through email.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates. Benefits provided by the above items are:

- Communication methods tailored to young people's preferences, enabling more effective collaboration.
- Organisations and local groups able to gather valuable insights on the perspectives and needs of young people in Witney through a small, representative sample.

Financial Implications

- Officers' working time.
- Possible costs relating to Youth Council plans for the Corn Exchange Event.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Confirmation of the use of WhatsApp as an additional form of communication (within suggested age guidelines)
2. Creation of a monthly slide newsletter for schools outlining the Council's work.