

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE



Agenda Item:	Youth Council Update
Meeting Date:	Monday, 17 November 2025
Contact Officer:	Admin Assistant – Communications & Engagement

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on 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 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 key skills among Witney's young people.

Current Situation

New Members

Since September 2025, the Witney Youth Council has welcomed four new members. They are very driven and have already contributed a lot of ideas.

Youth Council Meeting Notes – 21st October 2025

For the new members, officers held an informal introductory meeting. This involved answering three questions to find common issues they would like to tackle and give them an aim to work towards. Here is a summary of their responses:

- **What do you like best about Witney?**

Response: Youth Councillors frequently brought up the scenery (buildings), the wildlife, and the peaceful atmosphere of Witney. They enjoyed the sense of community, the diversity, and how accepting residents are. Some mentioned they appreciated the winter events such as the Christmas Light Switch-On.

- **What is the biggest issue facing young people in Witney?**

Response: Youth Councillors emphasised the lack of activities and clubs to do after school time for young people. They agreed that vaping was a large issue and very prevalent amongst

young people their age. Mental health and bullying were also mentioned, both physical and mental, as well as anti-social behaviour.

- **What can the Witney Youth Council do to tackle these issues?**

Response: Almost all Youth Councillors mentioned the need for a Youth Club, specifically for secondary school aged young people. Some things the Youth Council discussed to hold were charity fundraising work, car boot sales, cake sales, cultural days, raffles, hot chocolate stands, as well as group visits to the Fire Station, Police Station, Hospital, Foodbanks, and local Charities. They expressed they would like more frequent meetings and chances to ask other young people in person what they would be interested in, as surveys can be dependent on whether they are filled out or not.



Figure 1 Post It Notes from 21/10/25 - Youth Council Meeting

Officers explored these questions using coloured pens and post it notes and offered cakes and sweets as an incentive to boost attendance. This led to ten members attending this meeting - a significant improvement from the one member attending previously. The session overall proved very successful in encouraging members to interact, share ideas, and express their thoughts in writing.

Next Youth Council Meeting - 19th November 2025

The next three Youth Council Meetings will take place more frequently than others as requested to keep motivation and attendance up (once a month), as well as increasing the likelihood of identifying a clear project to take forward.

The following will be discussed in the next meeting:

- Youth Council Roles Refresh
- WhatsApp Youth Council Notifications
- First Project Plans

Officers suggest the current official format of the Youth Council may not be conducive to getting the best out of members and that the roles and terms of reference be reviewed. The agreed TORs can be viewed here: [Witney-Youth-Council-Terms-of-Reference.docx](#)

Officers suggest the following amendments:

2. Membership

2.2 The term of Youth Council membership will be for 2 years (if a member wishes to serve longer than this time the Town Council will review the request)

~~2.8 The core membership of the Youth Council shall consist of 10 members made up from the following schools:~~

~~2.9 The remaining 10 Members will be elected from groups or organisations in Witney, subject to applications being received from their members.~~

~~2.11 Any places left by departing members during the course of the year may be co-opted from the waiting list by Witney Town Council.~~

3. Youth Council Elected Roles

Officers suggest the roles are revised to:

- Chair/Vice Chair
- Media Officer
- Treasurer

This simplification will help clarification of roles and responsibilities.

4. Meetings

With a regular attendance of 5 to 10 members, meetings often are unable to meet the current quorum number of 7. To keep meetings productive and allow the youth councillors to achieve their ideas, it is suggested that quorum is lowered to 4 (one third of members). Subsequently, the terms of reference will need to be adjusted to represent this.

It is also proposed that meeting frequency requirements be made more flexible. Youth councillors often face challenges attending meetings during exam periods and summer holidays, while at other times, particularly when planning events, they express a desire for more frequent sessions. Adjusting the schedule to reflect these seasonal needs would help maintain engagement and support effective project planning.

Communicating through WhatsApp

Officers will be sending out a parental consent form to youth members to be contacted via their mobile phones through **WhatsApp** as agreed in the last Stronger Communities meeting.

As emails are frequently not responded to, WhatsApp provides a more familiar and accessible means of contact for the youth councillors. It is important to note:

- This communication method is managed by the Communications and Engagement Administrative Assistant as well as the Communications and Community Engagement Officer using a work mobile. *Best practice is to have two DBS checked adults in every WhatsApp chat as you would at any gathering.*
- This is not a group chat but a direct messaging system, ensuring privacy and protecting confidential information. To not use WhatsApp to reply to individual young people – but to switch to SMS instead – and then to only communicate information.
- Youth Councillors under the age of 13 cannot legally use WhatsApp as per their Terms of Service (which can be found here: www.whatsapp.com/legal/terms-of-service).
- Parents and Guardians of youth councillors under 18 are informed of the above information in line with the WhatsApp terms of engagement.

Youth Council Projects

Plans for the **High Sheriff's Big Breakfast Conversations** will not proceed due to focus on other areas of interest, and the Youth Council is unable to meet the November deadline.

The Youth-led Culture Day is a significant project from previous meetings that was also brought up again as an option. It is recommended that first they plan a small and simple project such as a raffle stall or cake sale for their first project. The next meeting will be to decide on this.

Remembrance Day

The Witney Youth Council were also in attendance at the Remembrance Day service. It was wonderful to see the Chair and Vice-Chair laying a wreath and representing the young people of Witney.

Christmas Lights Switch-on Events

The Communications & Community Engagement Officer intends to ask the Youth Council to assist in welcoming Be Free Young Carers on the evening in the Gallery Room at the Corn Exchange.

Daily Slides and End of Term Newsletters

News of the Witney Youth Council and Witney Town Council relating to young residents of Witney has begun to be sent to local secondary schools.

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 – Witney Youth Council inherently tackles inequality by giving a voice and a platform to young people, often apart of diverse communities. Many issues youth councillors want to tackle involve discrimination.
- b) Biodiversity – The Youth Council has begun to show interest in climate initiatives, although specific plans to help Witney's green spaces have not yet been discussed.
- c) Crime & Disorder – Helping young people feel listened to through avenues such as a Youth Council can help reduce anti-social behaviour and crime by Young People through promoting mental health awareness, peer-led activities/initiatives, and improving the reputation of young people in Witney.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency –When Witney Youth Council buy items for their projects, we have prioritised sustainability and the use of eco-friendly materials.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

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.

- Organisations and local groups able to gather valuable insights on the perspectives and needs of young people in Witney through a small, representative sample.
- Young residents of Witney feel heard and that their voice can make an impact.

Financial implications

- Officers' working time
- Additional internal hall hire and costs relating to Corn Exchange bookings for the Youth Council meetings.

Recommendations

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

1. Consider the changes to the Youth Council roles and terms of reference.