

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

Held on Monday, 17 November 2025

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

Present:

Councillor T Ashby (Chair)

Councillors:	R Smith	J Treloar
	G Meadows	D Newcombe (In place of A Bailey)
	D Edwards-Hughes	D Temple (In place of A Mubin)
	D Enright	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Thomas Davies	Deputy Venue & Events Officer
	Polly Inness	Communications & Community Engagement Officer
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	2 members of the public.	

SC643 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Bailey & A Mubin, Councillors D Newcombe & D Temple attended respectively as substitutes.

SC644 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Smith declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 12 owing to her connection with the provider of the detached Youth Services provision through the church she attended.

Councillor J Treloar declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 19 due to his relationship with the individuals that organised the Witney Music Festival.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers.

SC645 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities committee held on 15 September 2025 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities committee held 15 September 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

SC646 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Two Members of the public with an interest in Agenda item 19 were present however there was no public participation from them at this time.

SC647 **FINANCE REPORT: REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26 AND DRAFT BASE REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2026/27**

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 also received a verbal summary of the main points from the RFO outlining the changes to allocation of staffing costs away from this Committee's spending to other areas of the Council. The 2026/27 budget would continually evolve as the RFO worked on refinements ahead of its formal presentation.

Following a Members' question regarding budget line 408/4154 – Experience Oxfordshire – the Town Clerk confirmed that these funds were to be used for the promotion of events to encourage visitors to the Town. It was hoped that with the re-establishment of the Town Forum and the new Witney Past, Present & Future Working Party, that these funds may be able to be repurposed more effectively.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the repurposing of Experience Oxford budget line be explored at the meeting of the Policy, Governance & Finance meeting on 24 November 2025 and,
3. That, the revised base revenue budget for 2025/26 and the estimated base revenue budgets for 2026/27, as detailed in the draft estimates be noted.

SC648 **REVENUE GROWTH ITEMS, SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS, AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) along with a verbal explanation of its content which indicated the need for a £13,600 increase in support of Community projects.

Members heard that further details on the proposed revenue growth items were featured in the report to the Committee later in the meeting. Members were unanimously in agreement hearing that the existing equipment would be repurposed and that £1,200 be allocated for the replacement of digital signage.

A further question was raised regarding a Leys water refill station which officers advised would be presented to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,

2. That, that the Revenue Growth and new Capital items be forwarded to the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee for consideration.

The RFO left the meeting at 6:17pm.

SC649 **THIRD PARTY EVENTS**

With the permission of the Chair the item was moved up the agenda to allow the members of the public present to hear the discussion.

The Committee received the report of the Venue & Events Officer which provided a report back to the Committee on the 2025 Witney Musical Festival (WMF) along with proposals for the organisation of the 2026 event.

A request had been received from WMF to utilise the site on the Thursday evening, Members heard that this would not have any financial impact on the Council as the site set up will have commenced, a question was raised regarding Health & Safety of visitors to the site during the period of construction and a response provided by both the V&EO as well as one of the WMF directors who was in attendance, who assured the Committee that mitigating measures would be taken.

Additionally, a question was raised regarding the potential additional impact to the field particularly any sports pitch area. The V&EO advised that this would not occur as the area of the site to be used was not on any pitch area.

Members were therefore unanimous in agreement to allow the additional use of the site on Thursday evening and welcomed the idea of a comedy event to enhance the already varied and diversified entertainment provided over that weekend.

The V&EO summarised the points in his report regarding the continuance of the partnership Agreements and the report received from WMF regarding the 2025 event.

Members welcomed the detail provided in the WMF report and financial appraisal. The Committee acknowledged that the event should be viewed as an outsourced event akin to those delivered by other local organisations, such as Witney Rotary who provided them with the support of the Council. Additionally, when compared to other grants a contribution of £10,000 to WMF illustrated exceptional value for a two-and-a-half-day event.

It was also noted by the Committee that the positive impact on local businesses by visitors to the event should not be underestimated.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, WMF be granted use of The Leys for an event on the Thursday Evening in 2026 and,
3. That, that the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee authorise a partnership grant payment of £10,000 to support the 2026 WMF event.

*The Venue & Event Officer left the meeting at 6:30pm
along with both members of the public.*

SC650 **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO).

The C&CEO also provided a verbal summary of the report which provided an update to Members on the progress of the review of the Communications Strategy, which was welcomed however, it was agreed that the pages detailing information on digital analytics be removed.

The Committee considered the information regarding the production of a sponsored Newsletter and acknowledged that rather than creating one themselves it would be better use of Officers time to provide information to existing publications to support those, rather than appearing to compete with them.

On the subject of the production of an events calendar, Members were in agreement that in order to ensure accurate information was provided to residents that information was released on a regular basis via the existing newsletters rather than as an annual calendar that had the potential to be incorrect should dates change.

Members were disappointed to hear that there had only been 39 responses to the budget consultation survey so far, they agreed that the survey should be published earlier and with more direct questions as they may be more appealing to people to complete.

The Committee also received a current press coverage record and approved a new website accessibility statement for the Council.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, details of events be included in each of the newsletters and,
3. That, the updated Communication Strategy be agreed with the amendment as detailed and,
4. That, Officers explore the options and costs for issuing information to other publications and,
5. That, the updated Council website accessibility statement be approved.

SC651 **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO).

Again, the C&CEO gave a verbal summary of the report which provided Members with an update on the current activity and engagement within the community which included details of the Citizen of the Year celebrations, Christmas light switch on engagement, details of the success of the Witney Town Band summer events and the proposals for the 2026 edition of Witney Carnival.

The Committee welcomed the invitation to participate in the Witney Food & Drink Festival and agreed that a stall in the style of Councillors at the Café be confirmed.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the Council attend the Witney Food & Drink Festival and host a stall and,
3. That, the Council continue to support Witney Town Band by way of summer program at its venues and,
4. That, the proposed use of Café 1863/Corn Exchange by Witney Day Centre be agreed.

Cllr D Edwards-Hughes left the meeting briefly from 7:05pm to 7:07pm.

SC652 WITNEY FORUM MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting of the Witney Forum held on 2 October 2025. The Chair highlighted the Witney Volunteer Recruitment Fair which would be held in January 2026.

Though not included in the Minutes, Members were pleased to hear the news that Volunteer Link Up had been awarded The King's Award for Voluntary Service (KAWS) earlier in the week for its work connecting volunteers with people in need of support.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 2 October 2025 be noted.

Cllr J Treloar left the meeting briefly from 7:08 to 7:10pm.

SC653 NATIONAL PRIDE WORKING PARTY

Members received a verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk as well as the Chair of the National Pride Working Party following its inaugural meeting on 13 November 2025.

Members heard that the working party group had discussed and agreed a change of name more befitting with its objectives settling on Witney Past, Present & Future.

The Committee also agreed that a budget of £2,000 be set to promote their activities such as St Georges Day.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the name of the Working Party be changed to Witney: Past, Present & Future be noted and,
3. That, a budget of £2,000 be requested for the promotion of activities to celebrate Witney's past, present and future.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Witney: Past, Present & Future Working Party be approved and the recommendations therein be approved.

SC654 **IN BLOOM COMPETITIONS & COMMUNITY GARDENING 2026-27**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer (C&CEO).

Members welcomed the proposals to improve the area around Unterhaching Park which it was believed would complement the improvement works and changes being made by West Oxfordshire District Council to the Marriotts Close Shopping Area adjacent to the park.

A Member noted that the signage agreed for Unterhaching park was not yet erected and asked that Officers review this and other parks as it would hopefully address issues being reported regarding dogs in the park.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, £1,500 from the In Bloom budget be approved for works at Unterhaching Park and,
3. That, the purchase of four new Schools in Bloom wheelbarrows be approved and,
4. That, budgets of £50 be approved for vouchers and prizes and,
5. That, £40 community gardening vouchers be issued for 2026–27.

The Communications & Community Engagement Officer left the meeting at 7:12pm

SC655 **YOUTH COUNCIL**

The Committee received the report of the Communications & Engagement Administration Assistant outlining the activity of the Youth Council.

Members heard that the Youth Council has received new impetus with the recruitment of four new members, it was hoped that this would be a catalyst to further activity.

The Deputy Town Clerk provided some additional details regarding the need for the change in the roles and Terms of Reference to better suit the make-up of the Youth Council. All Members were in agreement with the changes.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the change to the Youth Council roles and terms of reference be approved.

SC656 **YOUTH SERVICES**

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk which provided an update on Youth Services being funded by the Town Council.

Members welcomed the details in the report that provided confirmation of the budgets proposed for the 2026/27 fiscal year. Members agreed that amounts budgeted provided exceptional value for money for the services provided by the recipients and it was agreed that this amount be ringfenced ahead of budget consideration.

The Committee did however note that information received from APCAM was limited and did not include specific details regarding the numbers of families they had supported in Witney. It

was agreed that the decision on the inclusion of a provision of funding be deferred to the meeting of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee to allow Officers to request further details from APCAM.

The report also ignited a discussion between Members regarding the lack of Youth Club facilities; the Deputy Town Clerk reminded the Committee that the funding for The Station was provided on the basis of it being a detached service and therefore it was not simply a case of finding a home for their offering. It was unanimously agreed that an agenda item be added to a future meeting of the committee to discuss this further.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the amount of £28,500 and £12,000 be ringfenced in the 2026/27 budget for grant funding to The Station and Home-start Oxford respectively and,
3. That, the Youth Development Officer at WODC be invited to a future meeting and,
4. That, an agenda item be added to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss Youth Club provision and,
5. That, the decision to include grant funding provision for APCAM be deferred to the meeting of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 24 November 2025.

SC657 FLAG FLYING POLICY REVIEW

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk in respect of the Council flag flying policy and were unanimously in agreement with its adoption.

Members also agreed to the purchase of an Oxfordshire Flag, it was agreed that even with the proposed changes to Council Governance the border of Oxfordshire would not change, and Witney should be proud of its place within the County.

Additionally, it was agreed that in order for the England Flag to be flown with pride that a replacement should be purchased.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the revised flag flying policy be agreed and adopted and,
3. That, an Oxfordshire Flag be purchased at a cost of up to £300 and,
4. That, a replacement England flag be purchased at a cost of up to £150.

SC658 PUBLIC SPACE PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO) - A40 DUAL CARRIAGEWAY

The Committee formally received notification of a Public Spaces Protection Order from West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) to prohibit Pony & Trap racing on a section of the A40 dual carriageway.

Members agreed that the following response be submitted.

Witney Town Council welcomes and fully supports this proposed Public Space Protection Order, recognising its importance in maintaining the public safety and usability of a key traffic route into and out of the town. Ensuring this main artery remains safe, accessible, and free from behaviours that compromise road safety is essential for residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

Resolved:

1. That, the correspondence be noted and,
2. That, the above response be submitted to WODC.

SC659 BUS SHELTER REPLACEMENT 25/26

The Committee received a verbal report from the Deputy Town Clerk regarding the need to replace the bus stop at the junction of Church Lane and Oxford Hill.

Members heard that following a number of acts of vandalism the proposal was to replace the existing shelter with a new vandal proofed version with a sedum roof at a cost of approximately £7,500 which was available from the infrastructure earmarked reserve.

A Vote was taken with the result being six members in favour of the replacement with one abstention.

A Member also raised the need for a shelter to be considered for Woodgreen and asked that it be added to the revenue growth items for the Committee.

Recommended:

1. That, the verbal report be noted and,
2. That, a budget of £7,500 be agreed for the replacement shelter and,
3. That, a request for a shelter at Woodgreen be added as a revenue growth item.

Cllr D Temple left the meeting at 7:52pm.

SC660 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO 5(W)

Resolved

That, Standing Order 5(w) be suspended in order to allow the meeting to continue as it had now lasted for two hours.

SC661 VEHICLE ACTIVATED SIGN (VAS) FOR WITNEY

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk following a request for consideration of the installation of Vehicle Activated Signs or Speed Indicator Devices.

Members raised the existing 30mph signs which were not situated in 20 mph zones and asked that the Council write to Oxfordshire County Council with the request for an audit of any redundant signs, such as the two on Curbridge Road to be re-sited.

The Committee felt that the requested audit be completed along with an assessment of the impact of the opening of the Shores Green junction and the rerouting of the A4095 which would follow. And that these steps should be completed prior to the potential purchase of additional VAS or SID signage.

It was agreed that the subject be added to the next agenda of the Witney Traffic Advisory Committee on 20 January 2026 to inform them of the Council's position.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, Officers write to OCC to request an audit of all redundant signage in and around the town and,
3. That, any research of result is shared with Witney Traffic Advisory Committee and,
4. That, the Council reconsider the request in December 2026 to allow sufficient time for the changes to the A40 and A4095 to take effect.

SC662 LITTER PICKING EQUIPMENT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk following a request for community voluntary litter picking stations.

Members considered the units illustrated in the report and agreed that they were better suited to parks or enclosed areas. An additional design option was presented by the Chair, this being a unit that was both a bin and an integrated equipment store. The cost of these units was not known, and Officers were asked to further investigate the potential as this was the preferred option.

The Committee also agreed that one of the units suitable for the park environment be considered for donation to Courtside Hub on The Leys as it offered a suitable collection point.

Members also highlighted that equipment was still available from the Town Hall administration office, this was currently underutilised and therefore should be further promoted.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the idea be further researched and referred to Policy, Governance & Finance on 24 November for consideration for inclusion as a growth item in the 2026-27 budget and,
3. That, the council consider for donation to Courtside Hub on The Leys for it to be considered as a collection point.

SC663 STREET FURNITURE CORRESPONDENCE.

The Committee received and considered the proposed street furniture for the High Street redevelopment.

Proposals had been received from both West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire Country Council for consideration. Prior to discussion the Chair advised that he had already written to WODC and OCC to request further information and an urgent review as he was concerned that installations would not be appropriate for the town and that they did not offer value for money. The thoughts of the Chair were echoed by members who were also disappointed at the lack of consultation and I approach to the proposal details received.

Members asked that the Town Clerk support the Chair's correspondence and also write to both OCC and WODC to convey the Committee's concern that individual requests for street furniture on the High Street were being considered without proper context or cohesive design and that

the Council wanted proposals to reflect a unified approach that fitted the town's Market Town identity and must be agreed with conservation officers. Additionally, a request for full consultation on aesthetic elements should be made along with an urgent meeting between the Council and the High Street Project Team ideally before Christmas to review designs so as to ensure that the project stays on track.

Resolved:

1. That, the correspondence of WODC and OCC be noted and,
2. That, confirmation be sent to WODC asking that they do not proceed with the proposed seating outside the Shake Shop, however the Council welcome town centre seating and,
3. That, confirmation be sent to OCC to rebut their recommendation for signage
4. That, the Town Clerk write to OCC with a request for an urgent meeting.

The meeting closed at: 8.32 pm

Chair