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**Agenda Item:** Youth Council Update

**Meeting Date:** Monday, 24 March 2026

**Contact Officer:** Admin Assistant – Communications & Engagement

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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**

#### **The Benefice of Witney Youth Chaplain**

At the March Youth Council meeting, the Youth Council were pleased to welcome the new Youth Chaplain from the Benefice of Witney, currently based at St Mary's Church. She spoke with Youth Councillors about a new Youth Café taking place every Friday at the church, as well as future plans for a Youth Culture Festival and other events. Youth Councillors were very engaged in the discussion and agreed to support any future steering groups or promotion if needed.

#### **Youth Council Meeting Frequency and Attendance**

Alternating between a formal meeting one month and an informal meeting the next has proven to be the most effective approach for maintaining motivation and progressing projects, although consistent attendance remains a challenge. Providing refreshments has had mixed success in encouraging greater attendance, but those who regularly attend do appreciate them.

#### **A Taste of Witney – Witney Youth Council Event**

Witney Youth Councillors decided to host an event for young people in response to a lack of activities in Witney, with the aim of celebrating different cultures through food. Rather than preparing the food themselves, they plan to invite local restaurants to provide samples, with

the restaurants responsible for food safety while the Youth Council provides the venue, support, and manages attendance. The free event will be held at the Corn Exchange, with any donations raised contributing to the planned water re-filling station at The Leys.

So far, two restaurants have expressed interest. At least seven restaurants need to confirm their participation by the next meeting on 14 April 2026 for the event to go ahead. Youth Councillors will continue to visit local restaurants and discuss taking part.

### **National Youth Council UK**

Witney Youth Council voted in favour of joining the National Youth Council when presented with the benefits of becoming a member and looked forward to the opportunities it would bring.

### **Witney and District Museum Youth Council Tour**

Officers have discussed the possibility of organising a Witney History Tour specifically for the Witney Youth Council with Sonia from the Witney and District Museum, who leads a number of walking tours around Witney. She has kindly offered to support this idea and, when it was raised at the March meeting, Youth Councillors expressed strong interest in taking part. Further details of the walk will be discussed in due course.

### **House of Commons Visit**

Witney Youth Council has shown a strong interest in both local and national politics and has frequently requested a visit to the House of Commons. MP Charlie Maynard has offered to provide a guided tour; however, a specific date is still in the process of being arranged with his team.

### **Daily Slides and End of Term Newsletters**

Updates from Witney Youth Council and Witney Town Council concerning young residents are continuing to be shared with local secondary schools for inclusion in their newsletters.

### **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, officers 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.

## **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 Youth Council update.