

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

Held on Monday, 23 March 2026

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

Present:

Councillor T Ashby (Chair)

Councillors:	R Smith	D Enright
	G Meadows	J Treloar
	D Edwards-Hughes	O Collins (In place of A Bailey)
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
Others:	James Edney	Youth Development Officer (WODC)

SC142 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Mubin and A Bailey, Councillor O Collins attended as a substitute for the latter.

SC143 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or officers.

SC144 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Stronger Communities committee held on 26 January 2026 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities committee held on 26 January 2026 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

SC145 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representations from James Edney, Youth Development Officer for West Oxfordshire District Council concerning Agenda Item 10

James provided the Committee with an update on actions being taken following the 2022 Youth Needs Assessment, which highlighted ongoing gaps in local youth provision and the need for stronger, more sustainable support for young people. He also provided updates on several other

youth issues affecting the town and potential future projects and available funding opportunities.

The Committee reconvened.

Following his contribution James Edney left the meeting at 6:32pm

SC146 FINANCE REPORT

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.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Stronger Communities Committee for the period 31 December 2025 be approved.

SC147 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

The Committee received the report of the Communications & Community Engagement Officer.

Members noted the apparent disappointing delivery rate of the spring newsletter and heard that Officers would follow this up further with the distributor. The Committee looked forward to receiving the results of the annual survey in due course, acknowledging it was still early in the return period.

The Committee welcomed the proposal to include local charity information within the digital newsletter. They also expressed their satisfaction with the successful use of Vevox polling application at the Annual Town Meeting and agreed it should be utilised for future engagement and consultation exercises.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the press coverage since the last meeting be noted and,
3. That, officers investigate the delivery issues with the spring newsletter further with delegated authority to the Deputy Town Clerk to follow up with the distributor as necessary; and
4. That, the Committee consider additional uses of Vevox for future engagement and consultation activities.

SC148 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

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

The Committee welcomed the plans for the St George's Day event and considered the Council's participation in the Great British Spring Clean. Members agreed unanimously that while the latter initiative should be supported, this should be done virtually by advertising the availability of the Council's litter-picking kits, and that no budget would therefore be allocated for future years.

The Committee was enthusiastic about the request from Thames Valley Orienteering and welcomed the proposal positively. Members also heard the idea to repurpose leftover spring flowers for planting within Windrush Cemetery.

The Committee noted the free domestic-abuse awareness training offered by *Reducing the Risk* and agreed that an invitation should be extended to all Councillors. It was further agreed that the annual Christmas competitions should proceed, with officers again seeking sponsorship for the festive period.

The Committee received an update from a Member regarding the forthcoming visit from Le Touquet and Unterhaching and, subject to approval by Full Council, it was agreed that an informal drinks reception be arranged in the Corn Exchange Café, with a proposed date of 1 May.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the plans for the St George's Day event be noted and welcomed; and
3. That, the Council support the Great British Spring Clean virtually by promoting the availability of litter-picking kits and,
4. That, the request from Thames Valley Orienteering be supported and welcomed; and
5. That, the proposal to use leftover spring flowers for planting at Windrush Cemetery be approved; and
6. That, an invitation to the free domestic-abuse awareness be extended to all Councillors; and
7. That, the Christmas competitions proceed for 2026, and officers seek sponsorship for the festive period; and
8. That, subject to approval by Full Council, an informal drinks reception for the twinning towns be arranged at the Corn Exchange Café for May.

SC149 WITNEY FORUM MINUTES

The Committee received the notes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 29 January 2026.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 29 January 2026 be noted.

SC150 YOUTH COUNCIL MINUTES

The Committee received the report of the Communications & Engagement Administration Assistant along with the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 11 March 2026

Members received an update from a Youth Council Mentor on the recent activity of the Witney Youth Council and were pleased to note that the group was gathering momentum.

Members were advised that the planned *Taste of Witney* event was struggling to attract interest from local restaurants despite the efforts of Youth Council members. In light of this, the Committee discussed potential alternative engagement activities, including the possibility of hosting an event similar to the successful *Pizza and Politics* session previously delivered by Oxfordshire County Council, should the *Taste of Witney* event not come to fruition.

Recommended:

1. That, the verbal update be noted and
2. That, the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 11 March 2026 be noted and,
3. That, officers and Youth Council members explore an alternative event, such as a *Pizza and Politics*-style session, should the *Taste of Witney* event not proceed due to limited restaurant engagement.

SC151 WITNEY: PAST PRESENT & FUTURE WORKING PARTY

The Committee received the report of the minutes of the working party meeting held on 18 February 2026.

Members welcomed confirmation of the events to be held on St Georges Day and the weekend to follow and thanked officers for their work and the posters advertising the event. Additionally, they acknowledged the arrangements for the follow up meeting for residents to provide feedback which was scheduled to be held on 23 May 2026 in the Corn Exchange.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Witney Past, Present & Future Working Party meeting held on 18 February 2026 be noted.

SC152 YOUTH SERVICES

During the public participation item earlier in the meeting the committee had verbal update from James Edney, Youth Development Officer at WODC regarding his work which built on the findings of the Youth Needs Assessment carried out in 2022.

James had outlined the key issues identified in the assessment, particularly the gaps in youth provision and the challenges faced by organisations delivering services for young people. James explained how his work involves supporting and connecting local groups through the West Oxfordshire Youth Partnership. He advised that much of his focus was on helping organisations strengthen their capacity, improve collaboration, and work towards more stable and secure long-term provision for young people.

Members noted with concern that James' role was funded on a one-year fixed-term contract, which created uncertainty around the ability to deliver sustainable, long-term projects. This concern was amplified by the potential implications of any future move toward unitary authority control.

The Committee also discussed current youth club provision in Witney. It was acknowledged that some provision existed at St Mary's Church, Welcome Church, and through the detached youth outreach delivered by The Station; however, Members agreed that additional provision may be needed to address gaps highlighted in the Youth Needs Assessment.

James had also updated the Committee on a developing campaign addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG). He outlined proposals to work with a theatre company to deliver awareness-raising sessions focused on issues such as unwanted attention. Members were pleased to hear that the initiative had received support from Oxfordshire County Council, West

Oxfordshire District Council and Thames Valley Police, with £25,000 of a targeted £50,000 in funding secured to date.

In addition to the verbal update provided by James, the Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the forthcoming launch of the Youth Services Grant.

Members reviewed the proposed timescale for the application and assessment process and agreed unanimously that the evaluation of applications should follow the same approach as the previous year, with delegated authority to a group consisting of the Leader, Deputy Leader, the Chair of this Committee, and the Deputy Town Clerk.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the evaluation of Youth Services grants proceeds under the delegation listed above.

SC153 WITNEY TOWN CENTRE FORUM

The Committee received an update from the Deputy Town Clerk advising that invitations to relevant stakeholders had been issued in order to reestablish the Town Centre Forum.

Members were informed that a provisional date of 7 April had been set for the first meeting.

Resolved:

That, the update on the issuing of invitations and the proposed date of the first Town Centre Forum meeting be noted.

SC154 WODC CONSULTATION - PROPOSED CONTROLS RELATING TO DOG FOULING

The Committee received a verbal update from Officers confirming that the forthcoming consultation had been postponed by West Oxfordshire District Council due to the upcoming election period.

Resolved:

That, the update on the postponement of the consultation by West Oxfordshire District Council be noted.

SC155 WITNEY TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS

The Committee received a verbal update from the Deputy Town Clerk on the progress of West Oxfordshire District Council regarding town centre improvement matters.

Members were advised that proposals from WODC for a bench outside the Shake Shop and additional bin stores were progressing, with the town councils Head of Estates & Operations continuing to liaise directly with WODC on these matters.

In relation to the unspent Section 106 (S106) funding designation for the Town Centre, Officers confirmed that the S106 Officer had advised that the Town Council's proposal for a parklet fell outside the geographical area covered by the available funding. Members noted that WODC had

requested further information and agreed that this could be considered further at a future meeting of the Witney Town Centre Forum, recognising that any such proposal would need to be fully costed, researched and, if progressed, potentially delivered by the Town Council.

Members also discussed wider wayfinding opportunities within the town and considered whether these could incorporate an arts trail as part of a cohesive approach to town centre navigation. It was suggested that a themed concept, such as a “sheep trail”, may be an engaging option. It was agreed that these ideas also be deferred to the Witney Town Centre Forum for further exploration.

Recommended:

1. That, the verbal update be noted; and
2. That, further discussion on potential town centre improvement opportunities, including the parklet proposal, be referred to the Witney Town Centre Forum, noting that any future proposals would require full costing, research and potential delivery by the Town Council; and
3. That, the consideration of enhanced wayfinding options, including the potential for an arts trail or a themed “sheep trail”, be deferred to the Witney Town Centre Forum for further discussion.

SC156 **THIRD PARTY EVENTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Venue & Events Officer which provided details of the past and upcoming events held on the Council’s land.

Resolved

That, the report be noted and updates be welcomed.

The meeting closed at: 7.33 pm

Chair