

# Witney Forum

Date: 24/03/2026

Venue: WODC, Woodgreen Office

## Organisations/Attendees

1. Neil Parker; Citizens Advice (CAOX)
2. Barry Beadle; Volunteer Link Up (VLU)
3. Jennifer Dixon-Clegg; Age UK Oxfordshire (AUKO)
4. Maria Grindley; WWOFB
5. Harry Thompson; DWP
6. Lorna Jones; Cottsway
7. Sue; Besom Charity
8. Victoria Ellis; Cogges
9. Maria; Cogges Church (St. Mary's)
10. Charlotte Bickell; West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)
11. Kerry Harris; West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)
12. Stacy Ouma; West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC)

## Apologies

1. Alistair Hobbs; Christians Against Poverty (CAP)

## Coming Up

1. Health and Wellbeing Alliance 23<sup>rd</sup> of April
2. Carterton Volunteer Fair 26<sup>th</sup> of July
3. CAP; Life Skills course
4. 26<sup>th</sup> of March; National Social Prescribing Day (EWPCN)

## Forum Meeting Minutes

### 1. Volunteer Opportunities & Recruitment

- **Citizens Advice** highlighted a need for additional volunteers, particularly for reception roles and administrative support. They are also exploring opportunities to expand outreach initiatives within the community.
- **Age UK** echoed similar needs, specifically seeking volunteers to support older individuals experiencing loneliness and isolation.
- **Cogges Farm** expressed interest in increasing volunteer involvement in their community-based activities.
- **Harry** noted that he is connected to several individuals who may benefit from volunteering opportunities and will liaise with organisations currently recruiting volunteers.

- **Maria** reported an oversupply of volunteers within her organisation and offered to refer suitable individuals to other groups in need. A broader discussion followed regarding volunteer training processes and the importance of benefits packages in volunteer retention, including initiatives such as *Tickets for Good* and *Cotswold Collective* memberships.
- **Victoria** introduced the **GoVo volunteering platform**, encouraging organisations to register opportunities there to streamline volunteer recruitment and engagement.
- **Neil** requested the organisation of another Volunteer Fair in Witney to further support recruitment efforts across the sector.

## 2. Community Support & Programmes

- **Cottsway Housing** shared several initiatives:
  - Distribution of free magazines aimed at encouraging reading among children.
  - Funding secured through Travis Perkins to support parents of young people who self-harm; currently, only 1 of 8 available spaces has been filled, and referrals are encouraged (note: this is available exclusively to Cottsway customers).
  - Promotion of the Oxfordshire Discovery College Parent Toolkit.
  - The Young Leaders Youth Camp Programme (residential), which currently has two remaining spaces for Cottsway customers.
- **Sue** highlighted available financial, furniture, and potential flooring support for individuals in need. She referenced a current case involving a client supported through the Local Area Coordinator in Chipping Norton (Katrina Fegan), who is experiencing significant challenges.

## 3. Community Safety

- **Charlotte (Community Safety Projects Officer)** raised concerns regarding anti-social behaviour (ASB), particularly in a local underpass/avenue area. Further clarification and potential action points were discussed.

## 4. Community Initiatives & Events

- **Maria (Cogges Church)** outlined plans to deliver crafting and sewing sessions in Witney. Key points include:
  - The need for a central, accessible venue.
  - Sessions aimed at low-income families and individuals facing language barriers.

- A focus on parents and teenagers to encourage both skill development and social interaction.
- **Barry** provided updates on several initiatives:
  - Volunteer Link Up (VLU), Good Neighbour Scheme, and befriending services.
  - Notification that the Witney hotel currently used for asylum accommodation is due to close in June, raising concerns about the continuity of services delivered from that location.
  - A new countywide partnership project with OCVA and Community First Oxfordshire titled *Small and Mighty*, funded by the National Lottery Fund for four years and scheduled to begin in May.

## **5. Resources & Challenges**

- **Maria** raised concerns about accommodation challenges for service users, noting that despite exploring housing options in Witney, suitable spaces remain limited.
- A decrease in food donations was also reported, dropping from 90% to 60% of required levels. Additional contributions are needed to meet demand and bridge the 40% shortfall.

## **Actions & Next Steps**

- Organisations to:
  - Promote and refer individuals to Cottsway-funded programmes to fill remaining spaces.
  - Share volunteer opportunities via the GoVo platform.
  - Collaborate on increasing awareness of available community services and initiatives.
- Further exploration required regarding:
  - Venue options for Cogges Church sessions.
  - Continuity plans for outreach services affected by the hotel closure.
  - Addressing anti-social behaviour concerns raised.