

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

Held on Monday, 15 June 2026

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

Present:

Councillor G Meadows (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillors:	D Enright	R Smith
	A Mubin	J Treloar (In place of J Doughty)
	S Simpson	J Aitman (In place of A Bailey)
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
	Polly Inness	Communications & Community
		Engagement Officer
Others:	Councillor Rachel Crouch	

SC296 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Ashby and J Doughty, Councillor J Treloar attended as a substitute for the latter. Councillor J Aitman also attended the meeting and substituted Councillor A Bailey.

SC297 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

SC298 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

In the absence of both the Chair of the Committee and the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, Councillor S Simpson presided and called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee.

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor G Meadows be elected. There being no other nominations it was:

Resolved:

That, Councillor Georgia Meadows be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2026/27 municipal year.

Cllr G Meadows assumed Chairship for the remainder of the meeting.

SC299 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Stronger Communities committee meeting held on 23 March 2026 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Stronger Communities committee meeting held on 23 March 2026 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the chair.

SC300 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

SC301 **COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk and considered whether any changes were needed to the current Terms of Reference.

No amendments were required therefore it was:

Recommended:

1. That, no amendments be made to the Terms of Reference and;
2. That, the Terms of Reference be recommended for re-adoption at the Full Council at the meeting of 13 July 2026.

Councillor A Mubin joined the meeting at 6.07pm during the following item.

SC302 **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.

Members were advised that the year-end accounting adjustments were currently being completed. It was noted that services had been delivered within budget and that the final outturn was approximately £6,000 below the revised budget projection, with much of the variance relating to movements in Earmarked Reserves (EMRs).

Members raised a query regarding the presentation of figures within the report and requested clarification from officers.

The Committee also reviewed the budget provision for Experience Oxfordshire and, having noted that the allocation was no longer required, resolved to remove the budget line and return the funds to the general budget provision.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the provision for Experience Oxfordshire be removed;
3. That, the management accounts of the Stronger Communities Committee for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 be approved.

SC303 ANNUAL RESIDENTS SURVEY RESULTS

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the results of the resident's annual satisfaction survey which was held at the beginning of the year.

Members received the report setting out the results of the recent resident satisfaction survey for services within the remit of the Committee. The report presented the combined percentages of respondents rating services as satisfactory or above, compared with those rating them as poor. Comparative data from previous years was also included to provide benchmarking. Members noted that the report contained all unedited comments received in relation to the services.

Members welcomed the significant improvement in satisfaction with communications, noting that this had been a recurring area of concern in previous surveys. It was further observed that, while satisfaction levels for services delivered by some other Committees had declined, the improvement in communications reflected positively on the work of the Community Engagement and Events teams.

Whilst acknowledging the positive progress made, Members agreed that there remained scope for further improvement. They welcomed the inclusion of proposed measures to enhance community engagement within the next report.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

Councillor R Crouch joined the meeting at 6.19pm during the following item as a non-Committee Member.

Cllr J Treloar declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in the following item in relation to a Town Guide for Witney as a competitor was known to him.

SC304 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

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

Members welcomed the report, which provided an update on the delivery of the annual newsletter and outlined communications initiatives, including the proposed launch of a Town Council WhatsApp Channel and the potential introduction of an externally produced Town Guide.

The Committee discussed the low level of engagement with the annual survey amongst residents under 40 years of age. It was noted that many younger people did not regularly access Council services or engage with the Council's newsletter. Members considered alternative methods of engagement, including working with Rotaract, repeating the survey at the Town Carnival using display boards, involving the Youth Council, and promoting surveys through advertising before film screenings at the Corn Exchange. The Committee also reviewed comments received through the recent youth survey.

The Committee endorsed the creation of a Council WhatsApp Channel as a one-way communication tool for sharing information with residents. Members noted that the channel would require minimal additional officer resources and could provide an effective means of disseminating Council news and updates. It was agreed that appropriate protocols would be required regarding content and use.

Members also discussed opportunities to collaborate on a Town Guide. Suggestions included the inclusion of a town map, visitor information, Council services, details of Council responsibilities and precept expenditure, local events, and community information. The Committee noted that the publication was advertising-led and produced at no cost to the Council. Members considered that the guide could provide a valuable resource for residents, tourists, and visitors, and that contributions could be sought from the Town Centre Forum and the Chamber of Commerce as part of the Visit Witney project. Officers were requested to explore the scope for developing the guide further and report back to a future meeting.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, further engagement suggestions as outlined, including the provision of the Council's survey at Witney Carnival be explored and;
3. That, the town council's WhatsApp channel be officially launched and;
4. That, in consultation with the Chair & Vice Chair of the Committee, officers investigate the biannual town guide proposal further and sign-up, if appropriate.

SC305 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

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

The Committee received updates on the successful Brass on the Grass concert held in June, preparations for Witney Carnival, Love Parks Week activities, including a Volunteer Picnic, and the procurement of Town Council bunting.

Members also received a verbal update on Heritage Open Days (11–12 September). Planned activities included opening the Chapel, heritage displays, children's activities in partnership with the Museum, and a heritage walk. The Committee agreed to allocate the remaining £200 from the St George's Day budget towards delivery costs.

The Committee considered proposals for a community "Big Lunch" event and agreed that this should not form part of future St George's Day celebrations. Members noted that alternative delivery options by third-party organisations could be explored and that interested groups could apply for Council grant funding.

With regard to Armed Forces Day, the Committee received an update on arrangements for the event at The Leys on 27 June. Organised by the Joint Cadet Forces, the event would include demonstrations, military vehicles and information stands.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the format and times for the Heritage Open Day events be approved and;
3. That, the underspend of £200 from the St George's Day Event be vired for this purpose and;
4. That, the event for St George's Day event runs along the similar lines in 2027 and;
5. That, community groups be offered the opportunity and funding to host a 'Big Lunch' in June 2027 and;
6. That, a Volunteer 'thank you' picnic be held at the Leys on 2 August 2026 and;
7. That, Car Free Day 2026 be promoted digitally as in 2025 and;
8. That, the purchase of bespoke bunting with town Council branding be approved and delegated to the C&CEO to procure from existing budgets.

SC306 **WITNEY FORUM MINUTES**

The Committee received the notes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 24 March 2026.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Witney Forum meeting held on 24 March 2026 be noted.

SC307 **SPECIAL EFFECT CHARITY**

The Committee received thanks from the Special Effect Charity for allowing them to communicate their work via the Council's community window.

Resolved:

That, the thanks from the Special Effect Charity be noted.

Cllr R Crouch left the meeting briefly at 7.11pm during the following item.

SC308 **YOUTH COUNCIL**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Administrative Assistant-Communities & Engagement.

The Committee received an update on Youth Council membership, recruitment and retention, together with a summary of current and forthcoming activities. Members were advised that a number of engagement initiatives were being explored, including a "Pizza and Politics" style event. The Youth Council had also secured membership of the National Youth Council, with plans for a local heritage tour, daily information slides and end-of-term newsletters.

Members noted that member retention and achieving a quorum for meetings continued to present challenges despite a range of engagement methods having been trialled. It was acknowledged that an easily accessible, well-supported event could provide a positive opportunity to increase participation, with the Council taking responsibility for organising the event and allocating roles. In terms of recruitment, it was suggested that existing Youth Council members be encouraged to invite friends to attend meetings to learn more about the Youth Council and its work.

A proposal, duly seconded, was put forward that prospective Youth Council members should attend a minimum of three meetings before becoming official members. Following discussion, the proposal was put to the vote and was not carried. Members considered that young people often had significant commitments outside school, including exams and extracurricular activities, and that introducing such a requirement could discourage participation and create a barrier to recruitment.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, no new term of references for official membership after attendance at three meetings be progressed.

SC309 **YOUTH COUNCIL MINUTES**

The Committee received the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 14 May 2026.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Youth Council meeting held on 14 May 2026 be noted.

SC310 **LITTER PICKING CABINETS**

With the permission of the Chair this item was moved up the agenda.

The Committee received and considered the report of the Administrative Assistant - Facilities concerning the possibility of the Council procuring litter-picking cabinets.

Members welcomed the report, which followed a matter raised during budget setting regarding the provision of litter-picking equipment for community use.

The Committee noted the growing interest in volunteer litter-picking and the potential benefits in supporting community involvement and civic pride. Members considered the options presented and agreed to purchase three litter-picking cabinets under Option 2.

It was further agreed that the cabinets should be located on Town Council-owned land, with specific locations and procedures to be determined operationally by officers. Councillors would be provided with access codes where required.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the Council should purchase three litter picking cabinets to the value of £1,800 from the Infrastructure earmarked reserve and;
3. That, the most appropriate location of the bins on town council land be delegated to officers per above and;
4. That, sponsorship may be considered in the future.

Cllr R Crouch left the meeting at 7.32pm

Cllr J Treloar left the meeting briefly at 7.34pm during the following item.

SC311 **YOUTH SERVICES & GRANT APPLICATIONS**

Cllr G Meadows declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item due to being a member of the Town Hall Charity which let a facility to one of the applicants.

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the applications for the 2026/27 youth services grant.

Officers advised that all applications were presented in the pack and that as agreed at the previous meeting, evaluation would be delegated to a panel consisting of the Chair, Leader & Deputy Leader who would meet later in the week with any accompanying documentation.

The Committee were pleased to see the applications and asked that consideration be given to those offering the best value to Witney residents and that would not normally be covered by other educational, or stakeholder funding.

Finally, Members were also advised that a Service level Agreement (SLA) had been signed between the Council and Bright Futures Oxford to provide a detached youth service in Witney.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the signing of the SLA between the Town Council and Bright Futures Oxford be noted and;
3. That, the direction as noted above be passed to the Youth Services Grants Evaluation Panel ahead of their decision on awards.

The meeting closed at: 7.42 pm

Chair