

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE



Agenda Item: Youth Council Update

Meeting Date: Monday, 21 September 2026

Contact Officer: Admin Assistant – Communications & Engagement

The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the work of Witney Youth Council.

Background

Witney Youth Council was established in September 2024 with a group of 12 members. Since its formation, the Youth Council has actively participated in town events, including the Christmas Lights Switch-on and Witney Carnival.

The primary purpose of Witney Youth Council is to provide children and young people with a collective voice that can be heard by decision makers. In doing so, Witney Youth Council supports more inclusive and responsive local government, encourages active participation, and helps develop key skills among young people in Witney.

Current Situation

Youth Council Meeting Attendance and Recruitment

The Youth Council continues to benefit from a core group of five to six Youth Councillors who regularly attend meetings and contribute to discussions and projects. To ensure all places remain active and engaged, members who have not attended or responded for three consecutive meetings are being contacted to confirm whether they wish to continue their involvement. This approach is helping to maintain engagement and remind members of their responsibilities.

Recruitment will remain a key focus over the coming months, with efforts continuing to welcome new young people to the Youth Council. It has been agreed that Youth Council meetings may be opened by invitation to peers of current Youth Councillors, allowing them to attend and see what a meeting is like. This will not be publicised to the wider public and will be limited to invitations from current Youth Councillors.

Two new Youth Councillors have joined since the last Stronger Communities Committee meeting, bringing confirmed membership to 11 members.

Annual Youth Council Meeting

The October Youth Council meeting will be the second Annual Youth Council meeting since the relaunch. As with last year, this will include voting and the possible reallocation of the following roles:

- **Chair**
- **Vice Chair**
- **Media Officer**
- **Treasurer**

Youth Council members wishing to retain or take on a role will be encouraged to attend.

Involvement with WTC Events

Due to limited expressed interest, and with many Youth Councillors preparing for exams, the previously planned event, A Taste of Witney, could not proceed. In the meantime, Youth Councillors focused on supporting Witney Town Council events over the summer:

Witney Carnival

In July, Youth Councillors supported the Witney Town Council Carnival stall by running a cornhole game, offering free drinks, and encouraging visitors to complete a survey on the proposed social media ban for under-16s. The results have since been included in a statement from the youth council, alongside members' views, and sent to MP Charlie Maynard to help inform his decisions regarding the topic.



Pictured above: A chalkboard drawn by the Youth Council Treasurer for their Carnival stall (left), and the results of their survey at the end of the day (right).

The Youth Council Media Officer subsequently posted photos and a summary of the day on the Witney Youth Council Instagram Account (@youthwitney).

Brass on the Grass Litter Pick

In early August, Youth Council Members held a Youth Council litter pick around The Leys while the town band gave its final summer performance of the year. They also attended the volunteers' picnic and collected a significant amount of litter from around the park.



Pictured above: Youth Councillors litter picking at the Volunteers' Picnic.

Witney Youth Council's "Politics and Pizza", also known as "A Slice of Politics"

Members of the Youth Council have expressed a strong interest in creating more opportunities to discuss politics and current issues with other young people in the community. Following the success of Oxfordshire County Council's recent Pizza and Politics event at the Corn Exchange, there is evidence that young residents would value a dedicated space to share their views, ask questions, and engage in political discussion.

Planning has progressed well, and the event is scheduled to take place on Thursday 29 October, from 11am to 2pm. Town Councillors and local PCSOs will be invited to discuss a series of questions and topics selected by Youth Councillors and young people in Witney. Pizza will be purchased from the Youth Council budget to encourage young people to attend.

The options for purchasing pizza are as follows:

- Business 1, the Youth Council's preferred option – 10 large pizzas for £75
- Business 2 – 10 medium pizzas for £120
- Business 3 – 10 medium pizzas for £142

Councillors are invited to consider the options and agree which supplier should be used. Members may also wish to provide any additional comments or suggestions to support planning for the event. There was previously discussion around a young person's Annual Town Meeting (as only the electorate (over 18's) can officially take part in the one held annually by the Town Council in March.

Increase of the Youth Council Age Limit to 19/20/21

The Youth Council asks the Committee to consider amending the current membership age range of 11 to 18. Some members wish to remain part of the Youth Council but are approaching the upper age limit. The options discussed in the August Youth Council meeting:

Option 1 – Preferred by the Youth Council

Raise the membership age limit to 19. Members older than 19 may remain involved as mentors, or in a mentorship role for younger members, until the age of 21; however, they would not be able to vote on Youth Council decisions.

Option 2

Retain the current membership age limit of 18. Members older than 18 may remain involved as mentors or in a mentorship role for younger members until the age of 21; however, they would not be able to vote on Youth Council decisions.

Option 3

Raise the membership age limit to 21, reflecting the wider definition of young people as those aged 10 to 21. Members older than 18 may need to provide additional documentation, but would be able to vote on Youth Council decisions.

Councillors are invited to discuss and decide on an appropriate option moving forward.

Youth Council Webpage Improvements

Youth Council members are being asked for their views on changes and improvements to the Youth Council webpage. They have requested simpler wording, less text, and a sleeker overall design. More visible buttons have been introduced, and additional improvements will be made as further requests are received.

A Microsoft Form has also been created alongside the PDF application form, reducing barriers for interested young people who wish to apply. Paper copies are also available for collection from the administration office.

Dates of Future Meetings

The Youth Council Chair requested more consistent meeting dates to better fit members' schedules. Following discussion and a vote at the August Youth Council meeting, meetings will now take place on either the first or second Thursday of each month. The upcoming Youth Council meeting dates are as follows:

- Thursday 1 October 2026 - 4pm to 5pm
- Thursday 5 November 2026 - 4pm to 5pm
- Thursday 3 December 2026 - 4pm to 5pm

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillar of the plan:

2. An Engaged & Supported Community

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 supports equality by giving a voice and platform to young people, including those from diverse communities. Many of the issues Youth Councillors wish to address involve discrimination.
- b) Biodiversity – The Youth Council has begun to show interest in climate initiatives, although specific plans to support 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 among young people by promoting mental health awareness, supporting peer-led activities and initiatives, and improving perceptions of young people in Witney.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – When Witney Youth Council purchases items for its projects, officers prioritise 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 mitigate 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 are able to gather valuable insights into the perspectives and needs of young people in Witney through a small, representative sample.
- Young residents of Witney feel heard and understand that their voices can have an impact.

Financial implications

- Officer working time.
- Additional internal hall hire and costs relating to Corn Exchange bookings for Youth Council meetings and events, including the proposed "Politics and Pizza"/"A Slice of Politics" event. This is intended to be funded from the Youth Council budget line 4

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. That, the report be considered and noted.

2. That, Members agree which pizza supplier option should be used for the Witney Youth Council “Politics and Pizza”/“A Slice of Politics” event, noting the options set out in the report.
3. That, Members agree which Youth Council membership age limit option should be adopted based on the three options set out in the report.