

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 24 January 2021

Title: Community Engagement Report

Contact Officer: Communications & Community Engagement Officer - Polly Inness

Background

This report focuses on two significant items for members to consider.

Current Situation

The spring issue of the newsletter is the one which is used to gather feedback from residents about Witney Town Council's services and understand residents' overall perception of the Council itself.

With the last Youth Council having come to an end during the Pandemic it is time to consider the recruitment of new members.

Newsletter

Aside from the front page and a third of a page space on the back page there is no room for news as the rest is taken up with the survey, precept and spending information and the freepost return page on the back cover. In the last two years the front cover has featured news of the Youth Services Fund being established and News about the Public Halls on the back cover (2020) and front page, The Tiny Forest and back page Covid Hero awards (2021). Councillors should consider the news content for these two areas.

With regard to the focus of the survey, on occasions this has been specific. In 2019 the survey asked residents to prioritise in order of importance to them, three proposed Council Projects: Corn Exchange Phase II Redevelopment, Lake & Country Park - Long-Term Recreation Plans or Sports Facility Provision. In 2020 the focus was on awareness of existing Youth Services and any perceived gaps in these. In 2021 the survey asked residents which of the Town Council's services they had accessed/valued most during Lockdown.

Given that the budget this year has been oversubscribed, revisiting the prioritising of projects might give valuable feedback to assist in decision making.

Youth Council

Councillors have expressed interest in reinstating a Youth Council as they provide a vital source of engagement with younger members of the town and have their own views and ideas for projects and events they would like to undertake in the community.

The Lead officer has looked through the Youth Council documents and noted that the constitution document has not been adopted. There were some concerns that some information contained in the document was not relevant to the Witney Youth Council, given its size and function (number of officers, as an example). Some revisions have been suggested. The Introduction to the Youth Council brochure would benefit from an update, and the safeguarding documents, such as the Parental Consent Form would also benefit from a check through. Each of the documents is attached for information.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

The hard copy format newsletter delivered to each home happens just once a year with all other issues being digitally accessed unless requested in another format.

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.

The Youth Council documents, and its administration/management need to be assessed to ensure that sufficient safeguarding is being undertaken with regard to Youth Council members.

Financial implications

The cost of the newsletter is reported in the Communications report.

- The Youth Council has a budget of £500 (budget line 4103/408). This is primarily for them to hold fundraising events.
- There is no budget to cover the administration of elections – this has previously been completed in the town's Secondary schools at no cost to the Council.

Recommendations

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

1. Whether members would like a focus for the Annual Satisfaction Survey and what this should be.
2. Any important content they would like to see in the remaining space on Front and Back covers of the newsletter.
3. Any amendments/refresh of Youth Council Documents before the recruitment process begins during the Spring. Members may like to consider delegating this to Officers and the Youth Council Mentors.