

STRONGER COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 26 September 2022

Title: Witney Forum – Future Administration

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk – Adam Clapton

Background

Witney Forum was brought together by West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) as an opportunity to bring new and existing local groups together, update on activity, encourage partnership working, collaboration and support around particular issues and to plug a gap in connectivity.

The Forum started during the Covid-19 Pandemic, virtually and has since moved to in-person 1 ½ hour meetings every 8-10 weeks in the Methodist Church. It has been well received and feedback has been good as there was previously no connectivity or information exchange.

Current Situation

Communities officers overseeing the Forum have left the District Council, and keen for it to continue, have asked if the town council would take on this task.

The meetings are informal and there is no set agenda, updates are provided by group representatives and individuals are responsible for their own actions. Notes are taken and administrative officers at WODC who would continue to retain the distribution list, would produce notes, and send out meeting details once approved by the town council. There are concerns about who would cover this if they are not available. It should be noted that the forum was run by a team of Communities officers, a resource the town council does not have.

The format, frequency and venue of the meetings could change if required if the Council were to agree to the request.

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.

There are no environmental risks associated with this project.

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.

Financial implications

- The cost of facilitating the Forum meetings is negligible in terms of direct costs, but it would need to be overseen by town council officers, mainly the Communications & Community Engagement Officer, which would divert from time spent on other matters. If the church does not continue to host it there may be a financial impact as the Corn Exchange may have to be used. A cheaper solution would be to use Zoom and meet remotely.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider whether the town council should oversee the future administration of the Witney Forum.