



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE
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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Community Committee**

Date: **Monday, 21st August 2023**

Place: **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Newland Street, Witham, CM8 2FE**

Present: Councillors L. Barlow (Chairman)
P. Heath (Vice Chairman)
S. Ager
J.C. Coleman
B. Fleet
L. Headley

Also present: Cllrs. P. Barlow
T. Hewitt

Community Special Sgt. S. Jesse (Essex Police)

Citizens Advice R. Fahie (Chief Executive Officer)
K. Kentish (CEO, South Essex)

N. Smith (Town Clerk)
G. Kennedy (Committee Clerk)

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Adelaja, Playle, Ramage and Williams.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

23. MINUTES

RESOLVED receive the Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Committee held 30th May 2023 confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

24. INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest at the time but later in the Meeting Councillors Ager and P. Barlow declared non-pecuniary interests in Minute 33 – 80th Anniversary of D-Day as

members of the Royal British Legion and Councillor Headley declared an interest in Minute 39 – Charter Market, as she regularly has a stall.

25. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

Councillor Hewitt wished to endorse the motion regarding the creation of Community Orchards. He considered it was an excellent idea and an opportunity to plant heritage varieties of fruit trees.

Councillor Hewitt then left the Meeting.

26. GUEST SPEAKER

The Chairman welcomed Rachel Fahie and Kathy Kentish from the Citizen Advice (C.A.) to the Meeting.

Rachel thanked the Town Council for the opportunity to tell new Members about the work of C.A. She said that the C.A. helps people face their problems without judgement. The advice given is independent and impartial. She explained that CA is a phone first service open between 10 am and 4 pm but now operates an Essex-wide out-of-hours service from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on a Saturday.

Rachel explained that in 2022/2023 over 2,000 clients came from the Braintree District and 531 people from Witham. The top issue for contacting the CA was for advice on benefits at 18%, followed by employment and housing issues, then debt and family/relationship issues. She said that specialist advice had also been given for warm homes, money advice and disability benefits. She then detailed how cases had been referred to the ombudsman regarding energy issues and the success in recouping benefit payments. She said that if warranted home visits would be available for those with serious disabilities. Cost of living issues and fuel prices had resulted in an increase in their workload. The increase in mortgage rates had resulted in private landlords selling their properties so as a result Section 21 no fault evictions had been served with homelessness increasing.

Members then had an opportunity to raise issues, which ranged from mortgage rates to problems getting through on the phone. Rachel recognised the problems of contacting the CA and explained that only 20% of calls are answered which was why the out-of-hours service had been introduced. She added that lots of self-help advice was available on their website and an email could be sent asking for a call-back. Rachel said that young people do not use CA, with the bulk of people in the 30 to 55 age bracket but people in their 90s do seek help. She said that stress and anxiety will add to mental health issues and understood too the problems caused by lack of school places for children with special educational needs.

The Chairman thanked Rachel and Kathy for attending the Meeting and the informative presentation.

27. ESSEX POLICE

The Chairman was pleased to formally present Special Community Sergeant Simon Jesse with his five year badge and Members thanked him for this commitment to his role and the town.

Simon thanked the Town Council for his badge and said that it was his pleasure to volunteer in this way. He added that he had also been short-listed for the Essex Special Constable of the Year Award.

Simon focused on his July's report and spoke about speed checks and safety issues. He said that Flora Road was the worst area for speeding followed by Maldon Road where nearly every

vehicle was exceeding the speed limit. He said that if speed cameras and speed checks slow vehicles they were doing their job.

A discussion then took place about what work could be undertaken by a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) and Street Wardens. Simon was asked about the proposed Tru-Cam and whether PCSOs could operate. He said that both Specials and PCSOs would be trained to use this equipment. He said that the original proposal for the Tru-Cam to be shared between the Braintree Community Safety Partnership, Halstead Town Council and Witham Town Council would not work and as a consequence funding was being sought elsewhere.

The Chairman thanked Simon for his report.

28. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk's report on matters arising was received.

The Town Clerk explained that she would seek further information from Braintree District Council with regard to the refurbishment of the skate park which would be funded through Section 106 agreements. She was unsure whether Council staff could support the Carnival Association with marshals next year depending on their own events.

Members asked about the invitation to attend the 2024 town festival in Jüterbog and it was agreed to express an interest but that further details would be required.

RESOLVED That contact be made with Jüterbog expressing an interest in attending but that further information would be required.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

29. WITHAM YOUTH COUNCIL

A motion was received requesting that a Youth Council be set up.

Members were generally supportive of the idea but agreed that the logistics could prove difficult if younger pupils were involved and that most schools have a council. Members agreed that a remit for the proposed council would be required and that further informal discussion should take place before a decision was taken.

RESOLVED That the motion be received and Members have an informal meeting to discuss the remit of the proposed council before reporting back to Town Council.

30. COMMUNITY ORCHARDS

A motion was received requesting that the Council should consider setting up Community Orchards.

It was agreed that in future Community Orchards should come under the auspices of the Environment Committee.

RECOMMENDED TO TOWN COUNCIL That Community Orchards should come under the remit of the Environment Committee.

Members were supportive of the scheme to have mini-orchards around the town and that the Environment Committee should be asked to explore the suggestion with the Tree Group and Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee. Members thought that half the site adjacent to the

Cut Throat Lane allotments could be used as a community orchard and the remaining half as additional allotments. It was agreed that Members should forward their ideas of where community orchards could be sited to the Town Clerk.

RESOLVED That Members support the idea of community orchards and ideas for suitable siting of trees be forwarded to the Town Clerk.

31. MEETING BETWEEN AßLAR AND WITHAM SCHOOLS

A motion requesting that the Council consider facilitating a meeting between the Witham Academies and the Burgermeister of Aßlar was received.

Members whilst supportive of the idea recognised that at present neither of the academies teach German however exchange of students could be cultural. It was agreed to consider this as part of the Youth Council deliberations.

RESOLVED That the idea be considered in conjunction with the Youth Council deliberations.

32. POPCORN COMMUNITY LTD

A grant aid request from Popcorn Community Ltd was received.

Members agreed that as the further information regarding the number of young people from Witham who would be involved had not been provided, it was inappropriate to support a grant aid request.

RESOLVED That the grant aid request be refused on the grounds that no information was available to demonstrate how many young people from Witham would be helped and that it could not be guaranteed that the money would be used solely on Witham residents.

33. 80th ANNIVERSARY D-DAY

The Town Clerk gave a verbal report on the 80th Anniversary D-Day landings and explained that Councils had been asked to light a beacon on 6th June 2024 to commemorate the event. She suggested that whilst no ideas were yet in place it would be sensible to book the marching band for the occasion.

Members agreed that the date should be commemorated and the Town Council liaise with the Royal British Legion.

Councillors Ager and P. Barlow declared a non-pecuniary interest as members of the Royal British Legion.

RESOLVED That the Town Council would support an event to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day landings, the marching band should be booked and liaison take place with the Royal British Legion to finalise details.

34. COMMUNITY COMMITTEE INCOME, EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET REPORT

The Community Committee Income and Expenditure report for the period up to 30th June 2023 was received.

RESOLVED That the Community Committee Income and Expenditure report be received and noted.

35. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media statistics were received.

RESOLVED That the social media statistics be received and noted.

36. SECTION 106 FUNDING

Members were asked to identify opportunities for funding through Section 106 monies.

The Town Clerk explained that this was a standing item.

RESOLVED That the information be received.

37. ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT

An Allotment Management Report was received.

Members noted paragraphs 21 and 22 - not keeping chickens on their allotment nor having beehives and discussed the merits of having bees.

RECOMMENDED TO TOWN COUNCIL That Allotments come under the remit of the Environment Committee.

RESOLVED That the Witham Town Council Allotment Policy be agreed subject to paragraphs 21 and 22 being satisfactorily resolved.

38. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting for the consideration of the remaining items of business on the grounds they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Schedule 12A (S3) of the Local Government Act 1972.

39. CHARTER MARKET

A report was received.

Councillor Headley declared an interest as she has a stall in the market.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

40. INFORMATION CENTRE

A report from the Information Centre Manager was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 9.20 p.m.

Councillor L. Barlow
Chairman

NS/GK/30.8.2023