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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Community Committee**

Date: **Tuesday, 19th August 2025**

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

Present: Councillors J.C. Coleman (Chairman)
P. Heath (Vice Chairman)
L. Headley
J. Martin
R. Playle
R. Ramage
J. Robertson
E. Williams

Also in attendance: Cllrs P. Barlow
J.M. Coleman
T. Hewitt

Essex Police Sergeant S. Jesse (Community Special)
S. Westfield de Cortez (Health Watch)
J. Stokes (Heath Watch)
N. Smith (Town Clerk)
G. Kennedy (Committee Secretary)
J. Brown (PA to the Council)

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Barlow, Heath and Williams.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

15. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Committee held 27th May 2025 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

16. INTERESTS

No interests were declared at this time.

17. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no members of the press or public present.

18. GUEST SPEAKER

The Chairman welcomed Sharon Westfield de Cortez and her colleague Jane Stokes from Health Watch.

Sharon explained that they are an independent charity which covers the whole of Essex and provides a free service. Their core function was to be an information centre for health and care services. They would listen to people's experiences, identify issues and ways to empower and move forward. They were available Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. via email, WhatsApp, etc., and telephone and messages could be left on the answerphone.

Sharon explained that they also gather data so they could understand what was happening in Essex. She said that there were three integrated care systems, and therefore, it was a postcode lottery for patients. She said that they had plotted core topics since 2010 and noted that mental health issues had increased along with housing, homelessness and abuse. She said that they undertake project work targeting subjects such as the lack of dentistry in the county. They also conducted outreach work and had a van equipped with a kitchenette, providing a safe space for people to share their concerns. She said that they had a commitment to speak to those less likely to be listened to, such as travellers and those with dementia. They had also been invited into schools and held well-being events. They were also included in Essex County Council Meetings and attend the Pharmaceutical Needs Committee. She added that they had focused on men's mental health and identifying unpaid carers.

Jane said that she was part of the information and guidance team. In January they had been commissioned by Essex County Council to engage with carers, the first step being to identify them as they were entitled to support. She said that focus groups were held and surveys undertaken. Results were analysed with unprecedented responses citing mental health issues, as being the main problem along with isolation, loneliness and employment. Problems arose once patients were discharged from hospital and more local support was needed. They had identified an additional 6,000 carers who need support early rather than later on. She was saddened that people were being diagnosed with dementia and sent home without advice.

Sharon explained that next year Health Watch England was being abolished but their work would continue albeit under a different name. She said that they receive core funding and were commissioned by the Department of Health and Local Authorities to undertake work so they had good resources and were sustainable. She considered that they were dynamic and diverse in their work.

Members spoke of the lack of secondary care services for the town and the inability to get to hospitals easily by public transport. It was hoped that there would be government support to site a health hub in Witham. In answer to a question on mental health and disabilities, Sharon explained that they visit supported learning facilities and undertake lots of networking. They had a library of reports on their website. Mention was made of the problems that occurred during COVID. Sharon said that they were able to talk to those in mental health crisis and refer people to agencies for help.

The Chairman thanked both Sharon and Jane for their presentation and looked forward to working with them in the future.

19. ESSEX POLICE

The Chairman welcomed Special Sergeant Simon Jesse to the Meeting.

He explained during the summer months, policing was stretched and therefore he had been unable to get out onto estates as he was picking up live incidents. He was pleased that help was coming as they had a new Special and they would be able to get out into the neighbourhood. There had been issues of anti-social behaviour in the town centre. He said that whilst young teens had the skate park, a lot of other activities cost money but he understood that the Football Club was arranging free sessions. He said that he had made two recent arrests, one a driver who had a high level of alcohol in his blood and would be charged and lose his licence in due course. He said that there had been incidents of children getting into flats in the Dorothy Sayers area and residents needed to report to police.

He said that he liaised with the Street Warden, linking in with him for the evenings when he was on duty.

The Chairman said that vapes had been contaminated with drugs making youngster hyper-active. Sergeant Jesse responded that energy drinks were a problem too and not regulated with no age restriction on purchase. Members spoke about young teens gathering outside the new vape shop late evening and the owners rightly not allowing them to enter.

Members were pleased there was a new recruit which meant there were three active specials. He clarified that policing was stretched because the number of foot patrols in seaside towns was increased during the summer holidays but stressed that things would improve in September.

The Chairman thanked Sergeant Jesse for his report.

20. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk explained that she had nothing to report.

21. COMMUNITY COMMITTEE INCOME, EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET REPORT

The Community Committee Income and Expenditure report for the period up to 13th August 2025 was received.

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

22. EVENTS UPDATE

The Town Clerk said that 250 children attended the recent Teddy Bears' Picnic that had been much enjoyed. The VJ event at the RAFA club had been well attended. On Monday, 1st September at 10 a.m. there would be the unveiling of the Notice Board to commemorate the 120th anniversary of the Witham Rail disaster and on Saturday, 20th September the Street Festival.

The Chairman considered that Members were not supporting these events as they should and hoped this could be remedied.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

23. **SOCIAL MEDIA**

The social media report was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

24. **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 S.1(2) and in accordance with Standing Order 3(d), the press and public should be excluded from the remainder of the meeting due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

25. **INFORMATION CENTRE**

A report from the Information Centre Manager was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

26. **COMMUNITY TRANSPORT**

The Town Clerk gave a verbal report.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

27. **HEALTH FACILITIES**

A report was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and a meeting of the Improving Healthcare Facilities Working Group be organised.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 9.03 p.m.

Councillor J.C. Coleman
Chairman
NS/GK/29.8.2025