



# Witham Town Council Corporate Strategy 2026-2027

## Statement from the Mayor

For the financial year 2026-2027, Witham Town Council continues to balance meaningful investment in our community with financial prudence and sustainability. This Corporate Strategy sets out our strategic direction, key priorities, and allocated budget across all service areas.

Building on the strong foundations of previous years, we have strengthened our corporate strategy to ensure it clearly articulates not only what we do but also how much we invest in each priority area. This transparency enables our residents to understand the direct link between their precept contribution and the services and improvements we deliver.

This Corporate Strategy demonstrates our commitment to:

- Making Witham a greener, fairer, and safer town
- Delivering high-quality services at the most local level
- Ensuring financial resilience and value for money
- Investing in infrastructure and community assets that reflect our residents' aspirations
- Continuous improvement and efficient service delivery

## Executive Summary

Witham Town Council operates five main service committees, each with clearly defined objectives and allocated budgets. For 2026–2027, our total gross revenue expenditure is £1,207,727, funded by anticipated income from fees and charges of £141,700 and net allocations to earmarked reserves of £46,000, resulting in a net budget requirement and proposed precept of £1,112,027.

Key investment areas for 2026-2027 include:

- Community events and social isolation reduction: £331,931
- Environmental management and green space improvements: £293,946

- Planning and transport responsibilities: £5,000
- Civic and strategic functions: £44,237
- New Witham Community Centre facility development: £51,600
- Central service delivery and administration: £481,013

Our Earmarked Reserves (EMRs) total £342,404, providing additional funding for strategic projects including tree maintenance, CCTV expansion, community safety, cycleway development, and facility improvements.

# 1. Planning & Transport Committee

## Responsibility and Mission

The Planning & Transport Committee ensures that development in Witham is fit for purpose, visually pleasing, and fundamentally justified through evidence. The Committee acts as consultee for all planning matters and continues to represent Witham's interests in the broader planning landscape.

## Budget Allocation: £5,000

### Speed Reduction Fund: £5,000

The Committee will continue its work on highway matters and parking reports, liaising with Essex Highways and the Local Highways Panel to resolve local concerns promptly.

## Strategic Objectives 2026-2027

### 1. Neighbourhood Plan Development

- Advance the comprehensive Neighbourhood Plan for Witham with formal steering group oversight
- Ensure adequate representation across the town in consultation and evidence gathering
- Objective: Complete draft plan with evidence base by the end of 2026-2027

### 2. Local Plan Representation

- Participate in any Braintree District Local Plan examination hearings
- Make representations on areas of policy concern pertinent to Witham
- Ensure fair and consistent policy application by Braintree District Council post-adoption
- Objective: Safeguard Witham's interests in the emerging Local Plan

### 3. Scrutiny of Planning Applications

- Serve as a consultee with an objective assessment of all applications
- Recommend rejection of substandard development in favour of more appropriate alternatives
- Objective: Maintain Witham's planning quality standards

#### **4. S106 and Developer Contributions Management**

- Continue oversight through the S106 Working Group
- Identify and unlock development funding for local projects
- Advance key investment opportunities
- Objective: Maximise benefit from collected but unspent S106 contributions

#### **5. Highways and Parking**

- Continue standing Highways & Parking Reports to Committee
- Refer matters of local concern to Essex Highways, Local Highways Panel, and North Essex Parking Partnership
- Objective: Resolve local highways and parking concerns in a timely manner

## **2. Community Committee**

### **Responsibility and Mission**

The Community Committee represents all human aspects of our town, ensuring services and opportunities are available to all residents. This committee takes an active role in community safety, social inclusion, event delivery, and support for vulnerable groups.

### **Budget Allocation: £331,931**

- Community Team Salaries & LGPS: £156,031
- Information Centre Operations: £58,000
- Christmas Decorations: £13,000
- CCTV: £14,500
- Community Grant Aid: £12,000
- Carnival Grant: £8,000
- Professional Advice Support Fund: £10,000
- Events and Activities: £60,400

### **Earmarked Reserves (Community Safety/CCTV): £45,000**

### **Strategic Objectives 2026-2027**

#### **1. Youth Engagement and Support**

- Examine proposals and recommendations for young people in Witham
- **Budget: £3,000 allocated from Events & Improvement**

- Objective: Provide meaningful opportunities and support for local young people

## **2. Community Safety and Special Constables**

- Continue successful Special Constable Recruitment programme with Essex Police
- Expand community warden posts to enhance local safety
- Implement CCTV expansion using earmarked reserves (£45,000 allocation)
- **Allocated Budget: £14,500 + £45,000 EMR**
- Objective: Increase community presence and safety perception

## **3. Tackling Social Isolation**

- Support recommendations for reducing loneliness across all age groups
- Continue Silver Cinema sessions
- Support local organisations providing community transport
- Objective: Strengthen social fabric and improve well-being for isolated residents

## **4. Community Events and Celebrations**

- Deliver major events, including Witham Street Entertainment Festival (£23,000), Christmas celebrations, Easter Quest, and new community events
- Witham Summer Fayre, Dog Show, Open Garden, and Halloween events
- Christmas decorations and tree installation
- Total Events Investment: **£60,400**
- Objective: Create a vibrant, inclusive community calendar that brings residents together

## **5. Grant Aid and Community Support**

- Administer Community Grant Aid scheme (£12,000) supporting local organizations
- Support Carnival Grant (£8,000)
- Provide Professional Advice Support Fund (£10,000)
- **Total Community Investment: £30,000**
- Objective: Enable grassroots community activity and local project delivery

## **6. Civic Celebrations and Heritage**

- Manage Remembrance events and civic receptions
- Preserve historical artefacts and support local heritage awareness
- Objective: Celebrate community identity and local history

## 3. Environment Committee

### Responsibility and Mission

The Environment Committee oversees all matters relating to Witham's open spaces, public realm improvements, environmental resilience, and green infrastructure. The committee manages extensive assets, including the River Walk, Whetmead Nature Reserve, James Cooke Wood, allotments, and the closed churchyard.

### Budget Allocation: £293,946

- Operations Team Salaries & LGPS: £206,017
- Maintenance and Equipment: £8,400
- Lighting, Maintenance & Utilities: £20,000
- Tree Maintenance and Surveys: £7,500
- Toilet Block Operations: £14,000
- Open Spaces Management: £2,700
- Witham in Bloom: £15,000
- Fleet and Waste: £8,000
- Various other maintenance and operations: £12,329

### Earmarked Reserves:

- Street Lighting Sinking Fund: £10,000
- Riverwalk Cycleways: £20,000
- Tree Maintenance: £10,000
- Land Improvement: £40,000
- JC Wood Improvement Plan: £10,000

**Total Environmental Investment (including EMRs): £383,946**

## Strategic Objectives 2026-2027

### 1. Green Space and Asset Management

- Maintain all Council-managed open spaces to high standards
- Implement management plans for Whetmead Nature Reserve, James Cooke Wood, and River Walk
- Continue asset review and furniture maintenance programme
- **Allocated Budget: £2,700 + £8,400**
- Objective: Preserve and enhance Witham's green infrastructure

## 2. Environmental Resilience and Climate Action

- Continue tree planting programme (£3,000)
- Undertake enhanced tree surveys and maintenance (£7,500)
- Review and improve allotment site management and regulations
- Support biodiversity and pollinator initiatives
- **Allocated Budget: £10,000 + EMR Tree Maintenance**
- Objective: Build climate resilience and improve biodiversity

## 3. Public Realm Enhancement

- Continue review of street furniture
- Partnership with Braintree District Council and Essex County Council on joint improvements to key areas
- Witham in Bloom programme expansion (£15,000)
- Maintain festive lighting and decorative features (£13,000)
- **Allocated Budget: £35,000**
- Objective: Create an attractive, well-maintained town centre and local areas

## 4. Footpaths and Cycleways Development

- Continue Phase 1 footpath and cycleway resurfacing program on River Walk
- Support Active Travel and cycling infrastructure improvements
- **Allocated Budget: £20,000 EMR Riverwalk Cycleways**
- Objective: Enhance walking and cycling accessibility across Witham

## 5. Highways and Maintenance

- Maintain local highway maintenance and improvements
- Continue street cleaning and maintenance operations
- **Operations Budget: £206,017**
- Objective: Sustain well-maintained local infrastructure

## 6. Toilet Facilities Management

- Continue funding daily cleaning and checks of the public toilet block in Town Park
- Maintain the newly opened Changing Places toilet in the Town Hall
- **Allocated Budget: £14,000**
- Objective: Provide clean, accessible facilities for residents and visitors

## 4. Policy & Resources Committee

### Responsibility and Mission

The Policy & Resources Committee ensures exemplary governance, transparent finances, and strategic management of the Council. The committee oversees long-term financial planning, policy development, member support, and strategic acquisitions.

### Budget Allocation: £44,237

- Civic Receptions: £2,500
- Instructions & Reports: £8,000
- Mayor's Allowance: £2,237
- Member's Grant Scheme: £8,000
- Civic Gesture Fund: £500
- Newsletter & Publications: £10,000
- Members' Allowance: £7,000
- Communications & Exhibitions: £1,500
- Surveys & Consultations: £1,500

### Earmarked Reserves:

- VAT Reserve: £25,000
- Town Hall Development: £32,000
- Elections Reserve: £19,884
- Major Repairs & Renewals: £30,000
- Equipment Replacement: £25,000

**Total Policy & Resources Investment (including EMRs): £176,121**

## Strategic Objectives 2026-2027

### 1. Financial Management and Sustainability

- Maintain robust financial controls and governance frameworks
- Continue long-term financial planning with transparent reporting to Full Council and Policy and Resources Committee
- Monthly financial reports to individual committees
- Annual budget setting cycle (September to December)
- Risk management and mitigation strategies

- Objective: Ensure financial resilience and value for money

## **2. Communications and Community Engagement**

- Review and enhance Council communications strategy
- Improve social media engagement and transparency
- Produce newsletters
- Publish all agendas, minutes, and policy documents on the website
- **Allocated Budget: £10,000**
- Objective: Improve resident awareness and engagement with Council work

## **3. Member Development and Support**

- Support continued professional development of elected members
- Provide training on governance, planning, and policy matters
- **Allocated Budget: £1,000**
- Objective: Enable effective member contribution to Council work

## **4. Strategic Acquisitions and Investments**

- Identify and develop outline business cases for strategic investment opportunities
- Advance Long-term devolution opportunities where business cases justify
- Assess opportunities for asset transfer from other agencies
- **Supported by EMRs: £65,000 other acquisition reserves**
- Objective: Enhance Council assets and service delivery capability

## **5. Policy Review and Development**

- Complete systematic review programme of all Council policies
- Update policies to ensure relevance, compliance, and effectiveness
- Maintain Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Risk Register, and Governance documentation
- Objective: Maintain robust, current policy framework

## **6. Civic Functions and Ceremonies**

- Support Mayor's civic activities and engagement (£2,237)
- Manage civic receptions and events (£2,500)
- Support Remembrance and ceremonial occasions
- Objective: Maintain civic traditions and community celebration

# 5. Central Services

## Responsibility and Mission

Central Services provides essential administrative, financial, and operational support to all committees and the Council as a whole. This includes payroll, finance, HR, IT, facilities management, and governance.

## Budget Allocation: £481,013

- Admin Salaries & Employer NI: £361,758
- Town Hall Facilities: £35,000
- Utilities (Gas, Electricity, Water, Heating): £18,000
- Health & Safety: £3,055
- Insurance: £14,700
- Office Equipment and IT: £8,100
- Telecommunications: £2,400
- Professional Services (Legal, Audit): £14,000
- Training and Development: £9,000
- Affiliation Fees: £5,500
- Other operational costs: £13,100

## Strategic Objectives 2026-2027

### 1. Staffing and Human Resources

- Maintain a trained, professional workforce capable of delivering all service areas
- Support continued professional development through training budget (£8,000)
- Maintain Investors in People accreditation
- **Allocated Budget: £361,758**
- Objective: Enable effective service delivery through a skilled workforce

### 2. Financial Administration and Governance

- Maintain robust internal controls and audit procedures
- Comply with Accounts and Audit Regulations
- Manage cashbooks, bank reconciliations, and financial reporting
- Undertake annual internal audit (twice yearly)
- **Allocated Budget: £14,000 (Legal & Audit)**

- Objective: Ensure transparency, compliance, and financial integrity

### 3. Facilities and Operations

- Maintain Town Hall as a functional, safe, accessible Council headquarters
- Continue energy efficiency improvements
- Manage health & safety compliance (£3,055 for new 3-year contract)
- **Allocated Budget: £35,000 + £18,000 utilities + £3,055 H&S**
- Objective: Provide fit-for-purpose facilities for staff and the public

### 4. IT and Digital Services

- Maintain IT infrastructure and systems
- Support digital service delivery
- Continue cyber security and data protection compliance
- **Allocated Budget: £4,600**
- Objective: Enable secure, efficient digital service provision

### 5. Information and Transparency

- Maintain public access to Council information
- Publish agendas, minutes, policies, and reports
- Provide FOI and data protection responses
- Objective: Ensure democratic accountability and public access

## 6. Witham Community Centre

### Responsibility and Mission

Witham Community Centre represents a strategic investment in community facilities, providing space for community activities, public meetings, and commercial hire. The facility is under active development with significant capital investment planned.

### Budget Allocation: £51,600

- Hall Bookings Income: £17,000
- Staffing and Operations: Funded through central services
- Building Maintenance and Improvement: £6,000
- Utilities (Electricity, Water, Gas, Heating): £19,000
- Business Rates: £12,000
- Insurance: £2,000
- Lift Servicing: £1,000

- IT and Communications: £2,500
- Licenses and Other: £1,300
- Waste and Cleaning: £700

## **Earmarked Reserves: £25,000 (Acquisitions/Witham Community Centre)**

**Total Witham Community Centre Investment: £76,600**

### **Strategic Objectives 2026-2027**

#### **1. Facility Development and Improvement**

- Continue strategic investment in Witham Community Centre as a community asset
- Complete facility improvements and enhancements
- Enhance booking systems and user experience
- **Capital Investment: £25,000 EMR**
- Objective: Develop a high-quality community facility

#### **2. Financial Sustainability**

- Increase hall bookings revenue through marketing and programming
- Projected income: £17,000
- Demonstrate value for money through commercial operation
- Objective: Achieve financial sustainability of the facility

#### **3. Community Accessibility**

- Ensure facility is accessible to diverse community groups
- Support local organisations through reasonable booking rates
- Promote the facility as an asset available for community use
- Objective: Maximise community benefit from investment

## **Governance and Financial Framework**

### **Value for Money Commitment**

Witham Town Council is committed to ensuring every pound spent delivers tangible benefits for our community. Our approach includes:

- **Transparency:** All budgets, policies, and procedures are publicly available
- **Competitive Procurement:** Annual review of supplier costs and competitive tendering

- **Local Suppliers:** Preference for local providers where value for money is achieved
- **Efficiency:** Continuous review of service delivery and cost control
- **Accountability:** Monthly financial reports to Committees and Full Council

## Audit and Compliance

- Two internal audits per year reviewing governance, financial controls, and policy compliance
- Annual External Audit through Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA)
- Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) published
- All decisions subject to Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
- Risk Register reviewed and updated annually

## Documentation and Compliance

All of the following are publicly available and reviewed annually by resolution:

- Standing Orders
- Financial Regulations
- Code of Conduct
- Risk Register
- Asset Register
- Complaints Policy
- Privacy Policy
- Accessibility Statement
- Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)
- Internal and External Audit Reports
- Council Agendas and Minutes (last five years)

## Risk Management and Mitigation

### Key Risks Identified

1. **Cost Inflation:** Utility, staffing, and supply costs continue to rise
  - *Mitigation: Efficiency reviews, energy conservation measures, phased spending approvals*
2. **Staffing Capacity:** Service demands are increasing while maintaining a sustainable workforce
  - *Mitigation: Prioritisation framework, partnership working, regular capacity reviews*
3. **Income Volatility:** Rental income is subject to market conditions

- *Mitigation: Diverse revenue streams, financial reserves, contingency planning*
4. **Project Delays:** Capital projects may experience delays or cost overruns
- *Mitigation: Phased approvals, qualified project management, regular monitoring*
5. **Partnership Changes:** Reliance on external partners (ECC, BDC, Essex Police)
- *Mitigation: Strong relationship management, service level agreements where appropriate, alternative planning*

## Mitigation Measures

- **Financial Planning:** Conservative forecasting, regular budget monitoring via Policy and Resources Committee
- **Project Management:** Qualified officers' oversight, phased reporting to committees where appropriate
- **Reserves:** Maintained at appropriate levels to manage contingencies
- **Performance Monitoring:** Monthly reports to Full Council, quarterly to committees
- **Review Cycle:** Annual budget setting (September-December), mid-year reviews

## Monitoring and Review

### Performance Management

- **Monthly:** Financial reports to Policy and Resources Committee
- **Monthly:** Clerk's report to Full Council
- **Quarterly:** Committee performance updates against objectives
- **Annually:** Comprehensive review of all policy areas
- **Annually:** Strategic plan review and update

### Key Performance Indicators

Each committee will monitor progress against stated objectives through:

- Completion of planned projects and initiatives
- Budget performance against allocation
- Community feedback and satisfaction
- Service uptake and participation rates
- Achievement of stated outcomes

### Review Cycle

- **September to December:** Annual budget setting and planning cycle

- **Quarterly:** Performance updates to committees
- **Mid-year (January-February):** Strategic review and adjustment as needed
- **March:** Final review ahead of annual cycle recommencement

## Conclusion

This Corporate Strategy 2026-2027 demonstrates Witham Town Council's commitment to delivering high-quality services, maintaining financial resilience, and investing meaningfully in our community. Through clear objectives, transparent budget allocation, and robust governance, we aim to make Witham a greener, fairer, and safer town for all residents.

The allocation of £1.2 million in revenue spending and £342,404 in earmarked reserves reflects our priorities: supporting our community, maintaining and improving our environment, delivering effective planning and transport scrutiny, and maintaining strong governance.

**Approved by Witham Town Council at Policy and Resources Meeting 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2026**

**Review Date:** March 2027