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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Community Committee**

Date: **Monday, 10th November 2025**

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

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

Also in attendance: Cllrs P. Barlow
B. Fleet

Essex Police Sgt S. Jesse (Community Special)
PC C. Penrose (Community Special)
P. Wiseman (Street Warden)
N. Smith (Town Clerk)
G. Kennedy (Committee Clerk)
N. Zaviazun (Assistant Financial Officer)

And one member of the public.

28. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

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

29. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Committee held 19th August 2025 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

30. INTERESTS

Later in the Meeting at Minute 35(a) – Grant Aid – Popcorn, Councillor Ramage declared a non-pecuniary interest as he had previously supported Popcorn through his Braintree District Council’s Members’ Grant Scheme.

31. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

The member of the public did not want to speak.

32. GUEST SPEAKER

Witham Town Council’s Street Warden, Paul Wiseman was welcomed to the Meeting.

Paul explained that he had been employed to uphold community safety on the streets of Witham, the Industrial Estates and River Walk. He had been in post for two years and found the role very fulfilling and different to what he expected. He had originally been employed through the Safer Streets Initiative.

He said that in response to shop lifting problems he had set up a WhatsApp group for retailers so they could communicate amongst themselves about potential thefts. He said that as police were not available to attend, these thefts were not reported.

He said that anti-social behaviour had been a major issue outside schools but he had spoken to the students and teachers and the situation had improved.

Paul explained that homelessness was a major problem in Witham and he had struggled to get timely help from the District Council even when temperatures were below zero. He said that the URC, Bethel and The Well were very proactive and would provide tents, sleeping bags and food. Unfortunately at one time the District Council had instructed its staff to remove tents, including any documentation within, but had recently changed its policy and a team from CHESS was now required to investigate first.

He said that the URC ran the House of Grace for homeless men, for which he volunteered as a support worker. He cited two men, one living under the shelter by the GPs off Mayland Road and another in a ditch, who had moved into the House and been helped to set up a gardening business together but there was nowhere else they could move into. The church was now proposing to buy two single flats for two homeless women.

He said that lots of people came for food vouchers for the Foodbank, he considered that people of all ages were struggling. He also attended Witham Industrial Watch meetings and assisted when he could. He was a volunteer first responder just finishing training and would attend incidents when necessary. His job had allowed him the opportunity to learn new skills and he had been pleased to work with the Community Specials and had support from the Town Clerk.

In answer to a question, Paul explained that he currently knew of eleven rough sleepers in the town. He said that drugs generally were a problem and he did liaise with police but they were not available to assist. He reiterated that anti-social behaviour had improved. Members felt that Paul’s presence had made a considerable difference in the town. He stated that if crime was not reported to police, it became a vicious circle as they thought there was no crime in the town and hence less police.

Members recognised that Paul’s actions had saved the life of one homeless man and his success as a street warden had resulted in Braintree getting funding for one. Following the homelessness issues the matter had been raised at Braintree District Council and it had been accepted that there had been false accounting of numbers and as Paul had stated they no longer

removed tents without investigation. Members did raise Paul's safety and he explained that whilst he engaged with people there would always be a percentage who would cause a problem but he had a body cam and he did feel safe. The suggestion was made that funding should be made available for another street warden.

The Chairman in thanking Paul for his presentation, was grateful to the positive difference he had made to the town and the success he had brought to the role.

33. ESSEX POLICE

The Chairman welcomed PS Jesse and PC Penrose to the Meeting.

PS Jesse explained that PC Penrose had now been awarded 'independence status' so could patrol by himself and they would be able to cover more areas during their shifts. Members welcomed PC Penrose as part of Witham's Community Specials and the Chairman gave him his pin badge.

PS Jesse wanted to praise Paul Wiseman who as a Street Warden had cut crime in the town, engaged with the homeless to stop them shoplifting and recognised that he was doing the police job for them. He wanted to give his appreciation to Paul.

Paul Wiseman then left the Meeting.

PS Jesse said that speeding was always mentioned at beat surgeries and he would be happy for Members and residents to be shown how to carry out speed checks. Community Speed Watch was no longer part of police remit but was now under the auspices of the Fire Service. He said that anti-social behaviour had improved and Halloween was much better. Last year young teens had invited their friends from out of town with over 200 youths congregating which was unmanageable. There had been a lot of pre-engagement this year and police had targeted groups and split them up. There had been 100 stop searches and 20 dispersal orders so that parents had to attend to pick up their children, most were from out of town. It had been disappointing that a 15 year old and an adult had been found to be carrying weapons. He said that over 18s would get a five year prison sentence. There had been incidents with fireworks in the area of Newlands Drive but the Fire Service had been in attendance and the District Council's Youth Team were also in the town.

A discussion then took place about the positive impact of visible policing and that new officers had been recruited for the Neighbourhood Policing team but they had been utilised elsewhere. It was understood that there was a focused team in Maldon that was very successful. Problems with shop lifting was also discussed and it was understood that large stores had an acceptable loss policy which small shops could not afford.

34. POLICE RESPONSE TO HALLOWEEN

A report was received concerning the carrying of knives that was identified during stop searches at Halloween.

Members agreed that it was worrying that there were weapons on the streets of Witham. It was known that this issue had been discussed at schools and Members asked if the Town Council could support Police in any way. PS Jesse said that the knife arch would be going to Rickstones Academy to demonstrate the equipment but youths would carry weapons for protection not realising they could be a victim themselves. More education was needed but a balance was required so that residents did not get fearful of knife crime. Members asked about an amnesty bin for knives but it was mainly elderly who wished to dispose of kitchen knives.

Members then spoke about the recent knife attack on a train and PS Jesse said that they work closely with the Transport Police colleagues who have good CCTV and facial recognition facilities.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the District Commander be asked how Essex Police plans to maintain and improve the safety of Witham's residents in a proactive but sympathetic way to ensure residents were not fearful of perceived crime.

The Chairman thanked PS Jesse and PC Penrose for attending the Meeting.

35. **GRANT APPLICATIONS**

(a) **Popcorn**

A grant application from Popcorn was received.

Councillor Ramage declared a non-pecuniary interest as he had supported Popcorn through the Braintree District Council's Members' Grant Scheme.

It was explained that Popcorn had now provided all the required documentation. They had requested a grant of £5,000 but had only raised 22% rather than the required 25%.

Members who had been to Popcorn recognised the value of their work and understood that as it was now a bigger group more participants were from Witham.

Members agreed to support Popcorn but to award them a tapered grant.

RESOLVED That a reduced grant be given to Popcorn to recognise that only 22% of the project cost had been raised.¹

(b) **Allstars Majorettes**

A grant application from Allstars Majorettes was received.

Members were informed that the majorettes had once again been unable to provide the required documentation and therefore the application was not acceptable. It was agreed that until the required information was available the application would not be brought to Committee.

RESOLVED That the application be received but no consideration would be given until the required documentation was available.

(c) **Mill Lane Bowls Club**

The project review report from the Mill Lane Bowls Club was received.

Members agreed that the pavilion looked much better following refurbishment and that there was an invitation to attend next season.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

36. **TOWN CLERK'S REPORT**

The Town Clerk said that she had nothing to report.

¹ A grant of £4,164 would be awarded to Popcorn.

37. COMMUNITY COMMITTEE INCOME, EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET REPORT

The Community Committee Income and Expenditure report for the period up to 30th September 2025 was received.

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

38. EVENTS UPDATE

An events update was received.

The Chairman hoped that Members would assist on the Mulled Wine stall at the Christmas Market.

In answer to a question concerning a public vote, the Town Clerk said that it was proposed to go into schools with a list of acts and the budget for the Witham Festival to let students choose.

RESOLVED That the update be received and noted.

39. SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media statistics were received.

RESOLVED That the statistics be received and noted.

40. COMMUNITY COMMITTEE BUDGET 2026/2027

The proposed Community Committee Budget for 2026/2027 was received.

The Chairman explained that the proposed budget had been discussed at the Estimates Sub-Committee Meeting. It was noted that budgets for D Day, VE and VJ Days as well as Rail Memorial had been removed; also Witham Pride as there was an element of inclusivity at the Music Event. It was noted that the street warden's salary was included.

RESOLVED That the proposed Community Committee Budget for 2026/2027 be received and approved.

41. 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.

42. INFORMATION CENTRE

A report from the Information Centre Manager was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

43. **IMPROVING HEALTHCARE FACILITIES IN WITHAM WORKING GROUP**

The Minutes of the Improving Healthcare Facilities in Witham Working Group held 9th September 2025 were received.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 9.07p.m.

Councillor J.C. Coleman
Chairman

NS/GK/12.11.2025