Witham town council

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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Community Committee**

Date: **Monday 24th August 2026**

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

Present:	Councillors	P.	Heath	(Vice Chair in the Chair)
		E.	Adelaja	
		L.	Barlow	
		L.	Headley	
		R.	Playle	
		J.	Robertson	
Also in attendance:	Cllrs	P.	Barlow	
		R.	Ramage	
Essex Police:	Sgt	A.	Christian	(Neighbourhood Policing)
	PC	J.	Pryce	
	PC	S.	Bright	
		L.	Clark	(Citizens Advice)
		N.	Smith	(Town Clerk)
		G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)
		J.	Brown	(PA to the Council)
		S.	Jesse	(Facilities & Community Support Officer)
		N.	Zaviazun	(Financial Officer)

And one member of the public

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J.C. Coleman and Fleet. Councillors Sloma and Williams were absent.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

29. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Committee held on 1st June 2026 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

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30. INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

31. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There was no comment from the member of the press and public present.

It was agreed to take the item on Essex Police next.

32. ESSEX POLICE

The Chair welcomed PS Christian and his colleagues to the meeting.

PS Christian advised that over the three wards in Witham crime was down by around 11% and theft offences down by 33%. Unfortunately, there had been an increase in business robberies but more weapons and drugs were being confiscated. It was positive but more had to be done. Their priority at the moment was to work on anti-social behaviour. There had been an increase specifically at the play area in Spa Road and the astro turf pitches off Spinks Lane but an assurance was given that they had been giving advice to both parents and children.

Members asked whether the police patrol the estates and if they still had a car based in Witham in the evenings. PS Christian confirmed that they do patrol the estates and that they now have a base at Witham Fire Station so when resources allow, they were stationed there but were generally deployed out of Braintree.

The Summer Fair had been very well received by the public and there had been no incidents. Comment was made that with low recruitment if police were called away there would be no police presence in the town. He was asked if there was a county lines drugs issue but advised that was more localised and dealt with predominantly by community intelligence.

The issue of e-scooters being used around the town with the potential to cause serious accidents was discussed. He urged anyone seeing an e-scooter being ridden to report it to the police immediately and if unable to do so give information to Special Sergeant Jesse who would pass it on.

The Chair thanked PS Christian and his colleagues for attending the Meeting.

33. GUEST SPEAKER

The Chair welcomed Liz Clark, Chief Executive from Citizens Advice Braintree and South Essex to the meeting to give an overview of what the organisation did.

She explained that they were part of an independent charity with 230 local branches in England and Wales and were members of the National Citizen Advice Network which is a brand recognised by the public. They offer free, impartial, non-judgemental and confidential advice which was available to everyone.

Liz recognised that their opening hours were not friendly for those working or were more rural but they were making improvements. She explained that there were two elements to the service, primarily information, advice, guidance and advocacy; and research and campaign. She cited the success of the removal of the £90 Debt Relief Order fee. She spoke of those residents in rural isolation and poverty that have the additional burden of no relief for heating oil,

The CA was trusted by the public to deliver high quality information but they cannot give legal advice. Liz advised that they were looking at setting up telephone hubs to give people more access

to information outside of normal hours. In the first instance it was best to go online and fill out a form so that CA could make contact.

Locally the CA was available in their Witham offices on a Thursday and on a Friday at the Foodbank. She mentioned that they now hold sessions in the Council offices in Halstead and were looking to work with partners. Statistics for Witham were given. It was said that the highest proportion of enquiries were debt related. The CA offers a holistic service as one problem leads to others which in turn roughly translates to 6.8 issues per client.

In Witham alone, 2,264 residents were seen which in turn resulted in 9,500 issues being assisted with before residents reached crisis point. Within Witham the majority of issues were benefits and child credit; debt and house finances; finance services and capability; housing and relationships. CA also helps with consumer issues and consumer law and would assist with passing information on to Consumer Complaints as this was not something the public were able to do directly.

The grant that is received from Witham Town Council helps keep the Public Hall offices open but also helps to pay towards specialists. Liz advised that they were looking to bring more face to face sessions and looking at increasing phone services. The CA has a £1.5 million turnover, they are looking to make it more efficient. Liz advised that she had no background knowledge of CA so was relying on staff to help with backlog issues. She was also trying to find where money could be saved for example sharing buildings that are already open to the public rather than hiring a separate space.

Members thanked Liz for attending and advised that they would like to see a more detailed breakdown and comparison of figures for the year before the merger and the services offered now. They felt that the figures would be better now but would like to see the figures to justify the request for funding. Liz advised that they were changing the way they report figures and capture information. Liz advised that the majority is spent here in CM8 but also spent as part of the whole process.

The Chair thanked Liz for attending the Meeting and advised that since the weekly Chatty Café had been running in the Town Hall he had sent several people to the CA for assistance.

34. GRANT AID SCHEME

(a) Project Reviews

(i) Citizens Advice

A project review form was received from Citizens Advice.

RESOLVED That the project review form be received and noted.

(ii) Witham Community Boxing Club

A project review form was received from Witham Community Boxing Club.

RESOLVED That the project review form be received and noted.

(iii) Action for Family Carers

A project review form was received from Action for Family Carers.

RESOLVED That the project review form be received and noted.

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(b) Grant Applications

(i) Citizens Advice

A grant application from Citizens Advice was received.

Members advised that this was a fantastic scheme and that more money would result in additional staff.

RESOLVED That the sum of £10,000 be awarded to the Citizens Advice towards providing services to the residents of Witham and that a more detailed breakdown and comparison of figures for the year before the merger and the services offered should be provided.

(ii) Witham Community Boxing Club

A grant application from Witham Community Boxing Club was received.

Members advised that this organisation was an asset to the town, getting young people off the streets, improving socialisation and exercise.

RESOLVED That the sum of £3,750.00 be awarded to Witham Community Boxing Club to go towards the purchase of boxing equipment, cardio and fitness equipment, strength and conditioning equipment, storage and safety equipment along with resources for the holiday activity programme.

(iii) Home Start Essex

A grant application from Home Start Essex was received.

Members were advised that they would not normally pay towards venue hire.

RESOLVED That the sum of £500 be awarded to Home Start Essex using £250 from Councillor Headley's Councillors' Grant Funding and £250 from Councillor Heath's District Councillor Grant Funding.

35. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk advised that there will be a joint meeting with the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner on Thursday, 24th September 2026 at 7pm at the new Community Centre.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

36. COMMUNITY COMMITTEE INCOME, EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET REPORT

The Community Committee Income and Expenditure report for the period up to 31st July 2026 was received.

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

37. EVENTS UPDATE

The Town Clerk gave an update on all recent events that had taken place i.e. Teddy Bear's Picnic, Green Space Games and Summer Fair. There had been really good feedback on all events,

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especially the recently held Summer Fair from both residents and stall holders. It was considered that may be every other year the music festival could be held at the Maldon Road end of the River Walk.

Members thanked all those who helped prepare and worked the events and the Town policing team for keeping everyone safe.

The Chair advised that the Green Space Games were attended by around 200 children and parents during the Summer holidays and that the feedback was very good. They felt that it broke up the holidays for those who could not otherwise afford to do something with their children. The Chair advised that the local shop was also selling ice lollies for £1 to assist with the cost of living so that all children could enjoy a little luxury.

The Town Clerk advised that she and the Town Mayor would be attending a meeting with BDC on Friday and would give them feedback on the Green Space Games and explain that this was what the Town Park should be used for.

RESOLVED That verbal report be received and noted.

38. SOCIAL MEDIA

The social media report was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

39. BROOMFIELD HOSPITAL BUS UPDATE

The Town Clerk gave an update on the Broomfield Hospital Bus. Two drivers had been employed, who both live locally. They had both been to look at the Community Centre to see where they and the bus would be located and were eager to start.

There would be a Digigo stall at Witham Street Festival which would give more information on the upcoming service which they hoped would begin around the 3rd or 4th week of September. The Town Clerk advised that nine stops in total around the town had been agreed and timings were awaited.

In answer to a question the Town Clerk advised that information would be shared once available. She added that people would be able to use their current bus pass on the Digigo buses.

RESOLVED That the update be received and noted.

40. CASH ACCESS REPORT

The Cash Access report was received.

The Town Clerk advised that the Cash Access form had once again been completed but upon assessment by Access to Cash they were not recommending the provision of any new or improved cash access services in Witham.

Members were disappointed and felt that Access to Cash had not looked at the bigger picture given the new housing communities being built, the local plan, and housing in surrounding villages. They asked what more could be done especially with the Post Office being unreliable as it was not always open and there were long queues. The Town Clerk advised that upon speaking to the banks who use the Town Hall, they are being pushed to encourage people to use facilities online rather than go to a branch/hub.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted and to wait

another 6 months to re-submit the report.

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.

Members congratulated the Information Centre Manager on her work and the comment was made about the services on offer.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

43. CCTV UPDATE

A report was received from the Facilities and Community Support Officer with regards to our current CCTV system.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting at 9.26 p.m.

Councillor P. Heath
Vice Chair
NS/GK/JB/3.9.2026

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