



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

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE TOWN COUNCIL

Date: **Monday, 13th May 2024** Time: **7.30 p.m.**

Place: **Town Hall, 61 Newland Street, Witham.**

Members are hereby summoned to attend the above Meeting to transact the following business. Members are respectfully reminded that each item on the Agenda should be carefully examined. If you have any interest, it must be duly declared.

To be present:

Councillors

S.	Ager (Retiring Town Mayor)	P.	Heath
L.	Barlow (Deputy Town Mayor)	T.	Hewitt
E.	Adelaja	J.	Martin
P.	Barlow	R.	Playle
J.C.	Coleman	R.	Ramage
J.M.	Coleman	A.	Sloma
B.	Fleet	B.	Taylor
L.	Headley	E.	Williams

Nikki Smith
Town Clerk
NS/GK/8.5.2024

1. ADDRESS FROM THE TOWN MAYOR

An opportunity for the outgoing Town Mayor for the Civic Year 2023/2024 to address the Council ahead of proceedings.

2. ELECTION OF TOWN MAYOR FOR 2024/2025

To elect a Town Mayor to serve for the Civic Year 2024/2025.

Order Note: A short presentation of Civic Regalia will follow the election of the Town Mayor.

3. DECLARATION OF ACCEPTANCE OF OFFICE

To receive the Declaration of Acceptance of Office duly signed by the Town Mayor.

4. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive apologies for absence.

5. INTERESTS

To receive any declarations of interests that Members may wish to give notice of on matters pertaining to any item on this Agenda.

6. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY TOWN MAYOR FOR 2024/2025

To appoint a Deputy Town Mayor to serve for the Civic Year 2024/2025.

Order Note: A short presentation of Civic Regalia will follow the election of the Deputy Town Mayor.

7. DISPOSAL OF TOWN MAYOR'S APPEAL 2023/2024

To authorise disposal of the Town Mayor's Appeal during her year of office, the final sum being £1,200.

8. TOWN MAYOR'S ALLOWANCE CIVIC YEAR 2024/2025

To authorise payment of the Town Mayor's Allowance set at £2,000 for the Civic Year 2024/2025.

9. MINUTES

To receive the Minutes of the Witham Town Council Meeting held 29th April 2024 (previously circulated).

10. APPOINTMENT OF LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

To consider appointing a Leader of the Council, if the Council so wishes (*under Standing Order 5J(xiii)*).

11. APPOINTMENT/ DISSOLUTION OF COMMITTEES

To consider the future of the following advisory committee-

11.1) Climate Working Group

12. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO COMMITTEES

Order Note: All committee appointments in items 12, 13 and 14 must be subject to formal resolution in respect of each committee membership. Motions to agree multiple committee membership under a single vote cannot be tabled (Standing Order 4d(iv) applies.

To receive nominations and vote to appoint Members to serve on the following Standing Committees –

- (a) Community Committee
- (b) Environment Committee
- (c) Policy and Resources Committee
- (d) Planning Applications and Transport Committee
- (e) Staffing Committee.

13. APPOINTMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS/VICES

Order Note: Standing Order 4d(v) requires the Council to appoint the Chairman and Vice Chairman of its Standing Committees.

To receive Chairman and Vice Chairman nominations and make appointment of such to each of the following:

- (a) Community Committee
- (b) Environment Committee
- (c) Policy and Resources Committee
- (d) Planning Applications and Transport Committee
- (e) Staffing Committee.

14. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO SUB-COMMITTEES

To appoint Members to serve on the following Sub-Committees –

- (a) Estimates Sub-Committee
- (b) Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee.

15. APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO ADVISORY COMMITTEES

To receive nominations and vote to appoint Members to the following Advisory Committees:

- (a) Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
- (b) Improving Healthcare Facilities Working Group
- (c) Section 106 Steering Group
- (d) Financial Scrutiny Review Group
- (e) Cycling Development Group
- (f) The Voice Editing Panel.

16. APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES AND REPRESENTATIVES

An opportunity for Members to express interest in outside roles, receive nominations and vote to appoint Members to the following representative positions:

- (a) Braintree Association of Local Councils

- (b) Chamber of Commerce
- (c) Citizens Advice
- (d) Witham Carnival Association
- (e) Passenger Transport Panel
- (f) LGBTQ+ Ambassador

17. SCHEME OF DELEGATION

To receive the current Scheme of Delegation attached at page 6.

18. ADOPTION OF STANDING ORDERS

To receive the Standing Orders (previously circulated) for adoption (*under Standing Order 5J(ix)*) attached at page 17

19. ADOPTION OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

To receive the Financial Regulations (previously circulated) and proposals for amendment attached at page 18 for adoption (*under Standing Order 5J(ix)*).

20. ADOPTION OF TOWN COUNCIL CODE OF CONDUCT

To receive the Code of Conduct (previously circulated) for adoption for the Civic Year 2024/2025.

21. APPOINTMENT OF AUTHORISED SIGNATORIES

To consider Member placements of Authorised Signatories.

22. ASSET REVIEW

To review the Council's assets (under Standing Order 5j(xiv)) attached at page 19

23. APPOINTMENT OF THE INTERNAL AUDITOR FOR 2024/2025

To confirm that Heelis and Lodge will continue to provide the Council's internal audit for the financial year 2024/2025

24. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STATEMENT

To receive and approve the Community Engagement Statement attached at page 20

25. TREASURY & INVESTMENT POLICY

To receive and renew the Town Council's Treasury Investment Policy attached at page 21

26. TIME AND PLACE OF ORDINARY MEETINGS

To adopt the updated Meeting Calendar (*under Standing Order 5J(xv)*) attached at page 23

27. YEAR END INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2023/2024

To receive and note the Internal Audit Report for the financial year ending 31st March 2024 attached at page 25

28. WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2023/2024

To receive the Draft Annual Accounts for the year ending 31st March 2024 for adoption attached at page 30

29. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) - SECTION 1 GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

To receive and approve the Town Council's Annual Governance Statement for the Year Ended 31st March 2024 attached at page 39

30. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) - SECTION 2 ACCOUNTING STATEMENTS

To receive and approve the Town Council's Section 2 Accounting Statements for the Year Ended 31st March 2024 attached at page 41

31. ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

To receive the Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting attached at page 42.

32. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

To receive a verbal report from the Town Clerk on matters arising.

Proposed Scheme of Delegation Revisions

- 1) Renumber document after 5 (Leader of the Council) as “The Council” has been left without a number reference
- 2) Community Committee bullet 8.3) “All matters relating to the management of allotment sites including the adoption of allotment policy, charges, rates and tenancies” moved to Environment Committee 9.3.
- 3) Financial Scrutiny Panel 15.1) – grammatical corrections “The purpose of the panel is to hold officers (instead of officer) to account on their management of the Council’s (instead of Councils) finances and compliance with internal control procedures, including implementing any points raised in (previously missing preposition) previous scrutiny reports, internal and external audit reports”
- 4) Under reserved matters for the Council to decide amending “Staffing & Accommodation Sub-Committee” to read “Staffing Committee”
- 5) Under reserved matters for the Council to decide add “Consider the council’s system of internal controls”.
- 6) Under 6.4) amend October to September
- 7) Under 13.1 amend January to December



Scheme of Delegation

1) Scope

Officers & Members

- 2) Proper Officer
- 3) Responsible Financial Officer
- 4) Town Clerk (General)
- 5) Leader of the Council

The Council

- 6) Committee Chairs

Council & Standing Committees

- 7) Planning & Transport Committee
- 8) Community Committee
- 9) Environment Committee
- 10) Policy & Resources Committee
- 11) Staffing Committee

Sub-Committees

- 12) Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee
- 13) Estimates Sub-Committee

**Advisory Committees, Panels &
Other Generic Functions of the Council**

- 14) Advisory Committees (General)
- 15) Financial Scrutiny Panel
- 16) Complaints Panel
- 17) Editing Panel

Agreed at: Annual Meeting 15th May 2023

Reviewed: Annual Meeting 13th May 2024

Review Date: Annual Meeting May 2025



Scope

- 1.1) The scheme of delegation authorises the Proper Officer, Responsible Financial Officer (Town Clerk) and committees to act with delegated authority in specific circumstances detailed. This Scheme of delegation is overseen by the Council and should be reviewed on an annual basis, taking into account the changing nature of the committee structure.
- 1.2) The Scheme of Delegation should be used to determine an officer's or committee remits and serves to codify the Council's decision-making process.

Proper Officer

- 2.1) The Proper Officer is the Town Clerk and is responsible for ensuring that the Council's records, assets and processes are kept in good order, regularly reviewed and reported to Council. Specifically, duties of the Proper Office include:
 - Receiving declarations of acceptance of office.
 - Receiving and recording notices disclosing interests.
 - Receiving and retaining plans and documents.
 - Signing notices and documents on behalf of the Council.
 - Receiving copies of bylaws made by a principal local authority.
 - Certifying copies of bylaws made by the Council
 - Drafting and publish agenda papers in consultation with the relevant chairperson.
 - Signing summons to attend ordinary meetings of the Council.
 - Retaining custody of the Council's seal for use by resolution.

Responsible Financial Officer

- 3.1) The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) is a statutory appointment under S151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and is the Town Clerk. The RFO is accountable to the Council and holds responsibility for determining the Council's form of accounts, ensuring that accounts are maintained in accordance with the Accounts & Audit Regulations in force at any given time. In addition, duties of the RFO include:
 - Accountability for the management of budgetary information, reporting and management of reserves.
 - Accountability for the timely and proper report of all cashbooks and reconciliations to the Council
 - Ensuring investments are carried out in accordance with the Council's Treasury & Investment Policy.
 - Maintaining a sound system of internal control and convening the Financial Scrutiny Panel, including implementing the recommendations of the panel.
 - Discharging all responsibilities in relation to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Town Clerk

- 4.1) The Role of the Town Clerk is that of 'chief executive' or 'head of paid service' and holds responsibility for presiding over administrative and operational matters, but not matters of policy approval which is reserved for the Council. The Town Clerk is responsible for issuing directions and orders to staff as the principal line manager and is accountable to the Council as a body corporate. The Town Clerk holds delegated authority to undertake the following matters on behalf of the Council:
- Day to day administration of services, together with routine inspection and control
 - Day to day supervision and control of all staff employed by the Council
 - Personnel matters including capability and disciplinary procedures as set out in the Staff Handbook.
 - Deployment of Council resources to discharge the statutory duties of the Council and agreed committee business plans.
 - Providing comments to local press and media on behalf of the Council in conjunction with all relevant Members to the subject matter.
 - Authorisation to respond immediately to any correspondence, requiring or requesting information or relating to previous decisions of the Council, but not correspondence requiring an opinion to be taken by the Council or its Committees
 - Authorisation of routine recurring expenditure within the agreed budget lines.
 - Authorisation of expenditure on any general works within the agreed budget lines.
 - Authorisation of emergency expenditure outside of an agreed budget in accordance with Financial Regulations, with any such emergency expenditure to be reported to the Council at the earliest opportunity.
 - Proposition of new policies and initiatives for consideration by the Council.
- 4.2) Delegated actions of the Clerk to the Council shall be in accordance with Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and this Scheme of Delegation and in line with directions given by the Council from time to time. Actions and general business being handled by the Clerk and staff should be regularly reported via the 'clerks report' items on each committee agenda.

Leader of the Council

- 5.1) The Leader of the Council is responsible for representing the majority political party's vision of service to delivery to the public.
- 5.2) The Council may appoint a Leader of the Council if it so wishes. Since no individual member may act alone in an executive capacity, the Clerk is delegated and directed to work with the Leader to undertake overall management of the business of the council. This includes:
 - Day to day decisions on the implementation of Council Policy
 - Overseeing work to implement Council Strategy
 - Managing Urgent Business
 - Liaising with political groups to propose a consensus on Council priorities.
- 5.3) In the event of any matter arising which requires an urgent decision, the Clerk to the Council shall forthwith consult with the Leader and Mayor and other relevant Committee Chairs and/or Vice Chairs before acting on behalf of the Council.

The Council

The following are reserved matters for the Council to decide, notwithstanding that the appropriate Committee(s) may make recommendations thereon for the Council's consideration.

- Setting the Precept
- Borrowing money
- Approval of the Council's Annual Accounts and the Annual Governance & Accountability Return
- Making, amending or revoking Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Code of Conduct or this Scheme of Delegation
- Making, amending or revoking bylaws
- Making of orders under any statutory powers
- Approving and adopting the Council's Corporate Strategy
- Discharge of completed corporate strategy items upon notification by the relevant committee.
- The appointment of the Town Clerk taking into account the advice of the Staffing & Accommodation Sub-Committee
- Matters of principle or policy
- All matters of capital expenditure in respect of items subject to the Uniform Project Management Process.
- Receiving all minutes approved by Committees
- Approval of application and renewal for the Local Council Award Scheme
- Nomination and appointment of representatives of the Council to any other authority, organisation or body
- Responses to legislative and other allied consultations excluding those dealt with by the Planning Committee
- Prosecution or defence in a Court of Law other than an Employment Tribunal
- Nomination or appointment of representatives of the Council at any inquiry on matters affecting the Town, excluding those matters specific to a Committee
- Decisions to adopt the General Power of Competence

Committee Chairs

- 6.1) Committee chairs are responsible for the direction and success of their committee's business. In addition to presiding over meetings and keeping order, committee chairs drive forwards business plans and help their fellow Members form a consensus on items of debate.
- 6.2) Committee chairs are empowered as the principal stakeholder of their committee and corporate strategy plans to undertake all necessary enquiries with officers on any matter relating to committee business. All officer communications relevant to committees should be considered in the first instance by its respective chair.
- 6.3) Committee chairs are entitled to a private meeting with the committee clerk to discuss and agree upcoming agenda papers for each committee meeting and may give direction as to the order of business and acceptance of written motions in accordance with standing orders, but may not exclude an item of business from a committee agenda that otherwise satisfies policy.
- 6.4) Committee chairs and vice chairs are entitled to attend the annual business planning meeting, (usually held in October) in accordance with the Council's adopted Business Planning Process and table early items of business for exploration ahead of committee adoption. Committee chairs and vice chairs are not obliged to partake in the business planning process.

Planning & Transport Committee

- 7.1) The Planning & Transport Committee serves to provide statutory consultation responses to the Local Planning Authority by reviewing all planning applications notified to it by the LPA. The Committee also shares in common with the Environment Committee an interest in all transport and traffic related matters where such matters relate to material infrastructure.
- 7.2) The Committee consists of 10 members appointed in accordance with political proportionality.
- 7.3) The Committee shall consider and determine the following matters:
 - All statutory consultation notices received in respect of full planning applications, listed building consent applications and change of use.
 - Plans and policy proposals received in relation to Minerals & Waste.
 - Matters relating to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
 - Matters relating to the Local Plan and its components.
 - Matters relating to the Conservation Areas in Witham.
 - Matters of national infrastructure including but not limited to the A12, A120 and Great Eastern Main Line (GEML).
 - Any principal matters and correspondence relating to Neighbourhood Plans and recommendations from the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.
 - Correspondence received from the Local Planning Authority in relation to administrative planning matters.
 - Notifications of Tree Preservation Orders made by the District Council.
 - Notifications of Traffic Regulation Orders.
 - Notifications of decisions taken by the Local Planning Authority.

Community Committee

- 8.1) The Community Committee serves to respect the interests of Witham's local citizens in respect of anything that directly impacts the local community, including matters of community safety, civil amenity and provision of local services. The Committee also presides over the management of events and key stakeholder relationships.
- 8.2) The Committee consists of 10 members appointed in accordance with political proportionality.
- 8.3) The Committee shall consider and determine the following matters:
 - Receive reports, recommendations and minutes from advisory committees and panels that may be appointed from time to time.
 - All matters relating to the Council's CCTV network and general community safety surveillance.
 - Management and oversight of the Council's Community Special Constable Scheme operated in partnership with Essex Police.
 - Promotion of community safety awareness and advice to local citizens.
 - Matters of public health.
 - Matters concerning provision of community transport and bus shelters, but not infrastructure matters.
 - Provision of Christmas decorations and celebrations, including Christmas Events.
 - Provision of all Town Council run events, but not mayoral events, which are reserved for notification at Full Council only.
 - Matters concerning youth engagement and opportunities.
 - Support and oversight of the locally led 'Silver Cinema'.
 - All matters relating to the management of allotment sites including the adoption of allotment policy, charges, rates, tenancies.
 - Management and authorisation of the Town Council's Grant Aid Scheme.
 - Oversight of the Witham Information Centre including managerial statistics, provision of services and profitability.
 - Matters relating to civic celebration, onetime events and Remembrance.

Environment Committee

- 9.1) The Environment Committee serves to respect the interests of Witham's local citizens in respect of anything that directly impacts the local environment, including matters of green and open spaces, and commonly shared infrastructure interests with the Planning Committee.
- 9.2) The Committee consists of 10 members appointed in accordance with political proportionality.
- 9.3) The Committee shall consider and determine the following matters:
 - Receive reports, recommendations and minutes from advisory committees and panels that may be appointed from time to time.
 - All matters relating to the Council's managed assets including the River Walk, Whetmead Nature Reserve, Closed Churchyard and James Cooke Wood.
 - To receive and adopt management plans as recommended by the Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee.
 - To preside over general asset management of furniture, including the 'Commemorative Bench Scheme', and assets located on open spaces including waste management.
 - To consider matters in relation to climate change and pollution.
 - Management of all Town Council litter and dog waste bins, including overseeing the 'Dog Bin Sponsorship Scheme'
 - To consider all matters in relation to trees, tree planting and the Council's closed 'Commemorative Tree Scheme'.
 - To consider matters in relation to litter and any provisions included in the Environmental Protection Act 1990.
 - To preside over the Council's programme of floral displays.
 - To consider any matters in relation to the ongoing maintenance and management of the Council's fleet and equipment assets.
 - To preside over the management of the Council's public conveniences.
 - To preside over the management of the Council's street lighting inventory.
 - To consider and adopt any policies that directly affect the management of open spaces.

Policy & Resources Committee

- 10.1) The Policy & Resources Committee serves to oversee the Council's financial position including matters relating to the management of budgets, reserves and cashflow. The committee is responsible for scrutiny and oversight of policies and making recommendations to the Council for amendments in Standing Orders & Financial Regulations.
- 10.2) The Committee consists of 10 members appointed in accordance with political proportionality.
- 10.3) The Committee shall consider and determine the following matters:
- All matters of policy adoption, amendment and approval, save for where a policy area is delegated to another committee or presided over by Full Council.
 - Receipt of all budget reports for all standing committees.
 - Receipt of cashbooks and bank reconciliations.
 - Management and consideration of Town Council publications.
 - Matters relating to the Mayor's Appeal.
 - Receipt of relevant proposals for instructions and reports.
 - All matters concerning income and expenditure in general, including analysis of the Council's long-term financial picture.
 - Periodic review of the Council's 'Earmarked Reserves' and receipt of EMR reports.
 - Scrutiny of administrative practice and deployment of resource.
 - Matters relating to the Council's income including investment and hall hire returns.

Staffing Committee

- 11.1) The Staffing Committee serves to oversee matters relating to employment and staff member circumstances. Members who serve on this committee are party to sensitive, personal and confidential information and must take care to maintain confidence at all times.
- 11.2) The Committee consists of 6 members.
- 11.3) The Committee shall consider and determine the following matters:
- Receipt of a regular Performance & Monitoring Report from the Town Clerk as to staff morale, progress and project delivery.
 - Welfare and reasonable adjustments for staff.
 - Matters of long-term absence.
 - All matters of a recruitment nature in accordance with the Recruitment Practice Note.
 - Employment disputes and executive disciplinary measures as per the Staff Handbook.
 - Receipt of Town Clerk's recommendations from the Annual Appraisal Process.
 - Adoption of specific policies in relation to personnel matters.
 - Review of the Council's Pay Policy Statement.
 - Review of the Employer's LGPS Discretions policy.
 - Review of the Staff Handbook.
 - Scrutiny of the Town Clerk's performance and decision taking in relation to staff matters.

Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee

12.1) The Open Spaces Management Sub-Committee serves to oversee matters relating to the day-to-day management of all Council open spaces, and wider environment related issues to uncontrolled spaces. The group is also responsible for the creation and review of management plans. This Sub-committee reports to the Environment Committee. Duties include:

- Oversight of all key operations of Open Spaces under the control of the Town Council, including proposing new ideas and initiative.
- Considering wider projects and producing reports for consideration and endorsement by the Environment Committee.
- Composition and review of all management plans.
- Compliance with Green Flag Awards and government guidance.
- Review of the Council's open spaces strategies in general.
- Consideration of representations received from the public in relation to open spaces.
- Oversight of officer decisions and maintenance programme encompassing duties in relation to litter and general horticultural work including grass cutting regimes and street furniture maintenance (excluding highways street furniture and bus shelters).

12.2) The Committee consists of 6 members.

Estimates Sub-Committee

13.1) The Estimates Sub-Committee convenes once per year in January as part of the annual budgeting process to review all committee budget bids and perform a full oversight exercise of proposed draft budgets against assets, reserves and long-term financial forecasts and projections to ensure that the final budget recommendation to Full Council is evidenced, robust and fit for purpose. Duties include:

- Production and recommendation of a summary budget proposal to Full Council.
- Creation of a budget summary presentation and justification to be delivered to the Full Council budget-setting meeting.
- Recommendation of a precept level and band D calculation.
- Analysis of three-year financial forecasts against proposed business plans to ensure suggested finance levels are in accordance with business plan proposals.
- Review of all past committee expenditure to identify spending patterns, trends and areas for efficiency and improvements.
- Production of a three-year finance projection and projected reserve levels
- Review of the draft corporate strategy.

13.2) The Committee consists of 6 members.

Advisory Committees (General)

14.1) Advisory committees are non-decision-making entities established by the Council and its standing committees from time to time as required. Advisory committees may exist in one of four prescribed formats:

- Working Groups (Ongoing handling of delegated perpetual business)
- Review Groups (Specifically designated for the exploration of a single issue for report)
- Scrutiny Panels (Standing oversight panels of 3 members holding power of intervention)
- Steering Groups (Explorative, consultative and research bodies)

These committees exist to examine particular issues in depth in researching topics, informing itself of a particular issue and making recommendations to the Council by producing reports and suggestions to their parent committee or where appropriate, full council. Such committees have no set numbers **save for scrutiny panels, which consist of three Members only**, and need have no Members of the Council at all, but in all situations should be supported by a nominated officer of the Council as appointed by the Town Clerk. Advisory committees should be reviewed from time to time by their parent committee as to their effectiveness, purpose and scope of works, and each committee assigned terms of reference which are reviewed annually to ensure focus within their allocated remit.

14.2) Advisory committees are prohibited from making financial decisions under the Local Government Act 1972.

Financial Scrutiny Panel

15.1) The Financial Scrutiny panel meets twice a year and is led by a group of three Members. The purpose of the panel is to hold officer to account on their management of the Councils finances and compliance with internal control procedures, including implementing any points raised previous scrutiny reports, internal and external audit reports. The Scrutiny Panel holds the power of recommendation to the Policy & Resources Committee as to required changes in financial regulations or administrative procedures.

Complaints Panel

16.1) The complaints panel shall be made up of the Town Mayor, The Chair of the Environment Committee and the Chair of the Community Committee, to examine any complaints received under the Council's Complaints Procedure.

Editing Panel

17.1) The Editing Panel is an independent, non-meeting group of cross-party Members whose purpose is to examine draft copies of the Council's official newsletter, 'The Voice' for balance, content and form prior to being published. The editing panel is consulted by officers four times a year on each draft copy of The Voice.

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ITEM 18

Proposed Standing Orders Revisions

- 1) Under 3(v) change Planning Applications & Transport Sub-Committee to Planning and Transport Committee

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ITEM 19

Proposed Financial Regulation Revisions

- 1) Under 5.3) amend £4,000 to £5,000
- 2) Under 6.11) amend £4,000 to £5,000
- 3) Under 7.3) amend to Staffing Committee
- 4) Under 11.1(b) amend to £30,000
- 5) Under 11.1 (n) amend to £30,000
- 6) Under 15.1 remove (in consultation with the Clerk)

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ITEM 22

	2022/23	2023/24
Town Hall and assets	£850,379.77	£851,662.19
Open spaces facilities and equipment	£21,996.49	£26,128.50
Fleet and grass cutting vehicles	£74,094.77	£60,784.77
WTC open spaces assets - River Walk, James Cooke, Whetmead and Closed Churchyard	£41,229.12	£62,328.17
Allotments assets - Cut Throat Lane and Wright Grove	£5,650.00	£7,300.00
Other street furniture/miscellaneous outside assets	£158,495.70	£190,117.70
	£1,151,845.85	£1,198,321.33

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ITEM 24

Community Statement

Witham Town Council is the 'local' authority, and the Council places this ethos at the very heart of its work, defending local interests and positively promoting strong community cohesion.

Engagement with the Community

Witham Town Council operates an open-door policy for all public enquiries whether they be through correspondence, emails, telephone calls or visits. The Town Hall acts as a principal anchor for the Newland Street Conservation Area and the Council proudly runs the town's Information Centre, one of the last such centres to remain open in Essex. Following redevelopment of the centre during the pandemic, footfall continues to grow as key services are provided, from recycling and free dog waste bags to providing an emergency safe space for those fleeing domestic abuse or suffering mental health crises. The welcoming staff are able to answer most queries or signpost to another authority or organisation that can. The centre is being used for fortnightly 'drop-in' police surgeries where residents can report concerns or take advice face-to-face. Due to its central location the Town Hall is used by the NHS as a Diabetic Retinopathy Clinic and as a 'Barclays Banking Hub' on Mondays and Fridays.

The Council has been able to provide a number of free events for children. The popular Easter Egg Hunt in April was followed in the Autumn with a Halloween Spooktacular. In the summer there was a music event for the King's Coronation, all these events were on the River Walk, owned by the Town Council. In December the Town Hall doors were open to Father Christmas and his elf once again providing free gifts for the children. Witham Christmas Fayre was also open with a street market in Newland Street with hundreds of residents and visitors attending, sampling food and mulled wine while enjoying the entertainment on offer. The United Reformed Church was a partner, hosting craft stalls and a warm place to eat whilst listening to carols.

Leadership in Planning for the Future of the community

The Council actively engages with the public via its growing social media presence including publishing all committee papers via its website and social media channels for maximum exposure of local issues taking place. Residents are encouraged to attend all Council and Committee Meetings to raise their concerns or comment on proposals. The Annual Town Meeting is called annually to enable local clubs and associations to showcase their work in the community as part of the councils reaching out strategy.

Following residents' concerns regarding the proposed closure of St Peter's Hospital in Maldon and lack of healthcare facilities in Witham the council held a public consultation and will continue to work with the NHS to ensure resident's voices are heard. The Council also took an active role in opposing the abolition of free parking spaces in Newland Street. In addition to writing to the Braintree District Council Scrutiny Committee querying its agreement with the North Essex Parking Partnership, having heard residents' concerns, the Town Council launched an online and physical petition, which combined generated nearly 2000 signatures.

The Council has also commenced the process of adopting a Neighbourhood Plan to protect the local community against speculative and irresponsible development and ensure that new development is of net benefit to Witham.

To be reviewed at AGM 2025

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ITEM 25

Witham Town Council: Treasury & Investment Policy

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Financial Regulations.

Policy Overview

This policy explains the protocol in which the Town Council manages its investments, reserves and deposits.

Investment Strategy & Objectives

1. This policy is created in accordance with the Local Government Act 2003 and advice issued by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on the management of local authority investments.
2. The Council's investment priorities are the security of reserves followed by the liquidity of investments.
3. Town Council investments are managed by the Responsible Financial Officer and all investments must be approved by the Policy & Resources Committee or Full Council.
4. All investments are made in sterling with UK-registered institutions only.
5. No investment will exceed a term of 12 months.
6. The Town Council shall only invest with banks & building societies which it defines as "High Credit Quality", in accordance with departmental guidance on Local Authority investments. **This being those with a credit rating of A with Moody's Investors Service or BBB with Standard and Poor's or Fitch Ratings Ltd.**
7. **The Town Council may also invest in the CCLA Public Sector Deposit fund subject to it maintaining a credit rating as required in 6.**

Investment of Current Year Funds

8. **The Town Clerk may transfer a portion of the current year funds into the Unity Savings Instant Access Interest-bearing account and transfer funds from such interest-bearing accounts on a routine basis as required, subject to oversight from the Policy and Resources Committee.**
9. **The Town Clerk shall determine and routinely review the minimum balance to be held in the current account in consultation with the Banking and Investments working group and shall ensure this is maintained.**

Balances & Earmarked Reserves

10. The Town Council will ' earmark ' reserve funds as part of the annual budgeting process.
11. The Town Council's current account/instant access balance shall be maintained at approximately one-half of the annual precept, with all other funds held in fixed deposits or notice accounts of varying lengths.
12. The balances of the Mayor's Appeal Account are exempt from this policy.

Reporting of Investments

13. The RFO will provide regular reports to the Policy & Resources Committee on the expenditure and movement of earmarked reserves and maturity of investments with a range of reinvestment options and advice.

Borrowing

14. The Town Council may borrow money upon resolution by Full Council from the Debt Management Office as it sees fit or the Council's own bank overdraft.
15. No other source of borrowing is permitted.

Revision

16. Any revisions to the Council's Treasury & Investment Policy can only be approved by Full Council.
17. The Policy & Resources Committee shall be responsible for the annual review of this policy prior to the commencement of the new financial year and propose any recommended changes to Full Council for adoption.

Forecasting

18. The Estimates Sub-Committee will produce as part of its annual budgetary recommendations, a three-year forecast of anticipated expenditure including the planning of future reserves.

Agreed last at: Annual Meeting held 15th May 2023

Last reviewed: 13th May 2024 (AM)

Review date: May 2025 (AM)

POLICY NO: WTC/003 - FULL COUNCIL

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Schedule of Meetings for Civic Year 2024 - 2025

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FULL COUNCIL & STANDING COMMITTEES

	2024								2025				
	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APRIL	MAY
TOWN COUNCIL	AM Mon 13th	Tues 11th	Mon 8th	Mon 5th	Mon 2nd Mon 30th	Tues 29th	Mon 25th		Tues 7th	Mon 3rd	Mon 3rd Mon 31st	Tues 29th	AM Mon 12th
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE			Mon 22nd			Mon 14th			Mon 20th			Mon 14th	
COMMUNITY COMMITTEE	Tues 28th			Mon 19th			Mon 11th			Tues 18th			
POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE		Mon 24th			Mon 16th			Tues 10th			Mon 17th		
PLANNING & TRANSPORT COMMITTEE <i>(Commences 6:30pm)</i>	Mon 13th Tues 28th	Tues 11th Mon 24th	Mon 8th Mon 22nd	Mon 5th Mon 19th	Mon 2nd Mon 16th Mon 30th	Mon 14th Tues 29th	Mon 11th Mon 25th	Tues 10th	Tues 7th Mon 20th	Mon 3rd Tues 18th	Mon 3rd Mon 17th Mon 31st	Mon 14th Tues 29th	Mon 12th
STAFFING COMMITTEE <i>(Commences 7:30pm)</i>		Mon 3rd			Tue 24th				Mon 13th			Mon 7 th	

Schedule of Meetings for Civic Year 2024 - 2025

SUB-COMMITTEES & SCRUTINY FUNCTIONS

	2024								2025				
	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APRIL	MAY
ESTIMATES								Tues 17th					
OPEN SPACES MANAGEMENT SUB-COMMITTEE <i>(Commences 2:00pm)</i>		Tues 4th			Tues 3rd			Tues 3rd			Tues 4th		
FINANCE SCRUTINY PANEL <i>(Commences 10:00am)</i>					Thurs 5th						Thurs 6th		

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HEELIS & LODGE

Local Council Services • Internal Audit

Year End Internal Audit Report for Witham Town Council – 2023/2024

The following Internal Audit was carried out on the adequacy of systems of control in accordance with the requirements of the Audit and Accounts Regulations 2015 and the guidance and instruction in the Practitioners Guide 2023 and should be read in conjunction with the Interim Internal Audit report dated 17/10/2023. The following recommendations/comments have been made:

Income: £1,115,968 Expenditure: £1,048,548 Reserves: £646,063

AGAR Completion:

Section One: [Yes - unsigned](#)

Section Two: [Yes – RFO signed](#)

Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/2024: [Yes](#)

Certificate of Exemption: [No](#)

Financial regulations

Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

Tenders

Appropriate payment controls including acting within the legal framework with reference to council minutes

Identifying VAT payments and reclamation

Cheque books, paying in books and other relevant documents

VAT reclaimed during the year: [Yes](#) 1/4/2023 – 31/3/2024 [£63,558.11](#)

Registered: [No](#)

The Council adopted the following at the meeting held on 30/10/2023:

Dignity at Work Policy (Ref: 126)

Member/Officer Relationships at Work Policy (Ref: 127)

The Council reviewed and approved the following documents:

Grant Awarding Policy - 20/2/2024 (Ref: 69)

Environmental Policy – 22/1/2024 (Ref: 29)

Anonymous Communications Policy – 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.a)

Data and Document Retention Policy – 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.b)

Equality Policy – 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.c)

Extended Procurement Process Policy – 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.d)

Freedom of Information Policy - 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.e)

Press and Media Policy - 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.f)

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Lynne Lodge Dip HE Local Policy

General Privacy Notice - 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.g)
Public Complaints Procedure - 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.h)
Publication Scheme - 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.i)
Registration of Gifts and Hospitality Policy - 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.j)
Training Policy - 19/3/2024 (Ref: 45.k)
Body Worn Camera Policy – 12/12/2023 (Ref: 31.a)
Lone Worker Policy - 12/12/2023 (Ref: 31.b)
Public Artefact Donation Scheme - 12/12/2023 (Ref: 31.c)
Public CCTV Policy - 12/12/2023 (Ref: 31.d)
Vexatious Complaints Policy - 12/12/2023 (Ref: 31.e)

Risk Assessment

Appropriate procedures in place for the activities of the council
Compliance with Data Protection regulations

Risk Assessment document in place: **Yes**

Data Protection

The General Data Protection Regulations have changed and the new Regulations came into force on 25 May 2018. It is likely that this will affect the way in which the Council handles its data. Due to the financial risk associated with the General Data Protection Regulations, the Council have included this in their Risk Assessment.

Privacy Policy published: **Yes**

Insurance was in place for the year of audit. The Financial Risk Assessment was reviewed at a meeting held on 2/4/2024 (Ref: 202) and the Risk Register on 12/12/2023 (Ref: 34).

The Council have robust and effective internal financial controls in place. The Clerk provides financial reports to council meetings. Councillors are provided with information to enable them to make informed decisions.

It is noted that the credit card limit has been increased to £6,000 (Ref: 19/3/2024 – 47).

The Council resolved to increase the sum requiring 3 signatories to £5,000 at a meeting held on 19/3/2024 (Ref: 48).

It is noted that since the Interim Audit the Financial Scrutiny Panel have undertaken the End of Year Assessment on 22/3/2024 covering the following areas:

- *Budget Management*
- *Administration*
- *Policy and Internal Control*
- *Tenders*

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Budgetary controls
supporting documents

Verifying the budgetary process with reference to council minutes and

Precept: £797,941 (2023-2024) Date: 23/1/2023 (Ref: 170)
Precept: £942,473.57 (2024-2025) Date: 8/1/2024 (Ref: 157)

Effective budgetary procedures are in place. The precept was agreed in full council and the precept decision and amount has been clearly minuted. The Clerk ensures the council are aware of responsibilities, commitments, forward planning and the need for adequate reserves. Budget papers are prepared to ensure councillors have sufficient information to make informed decisions. Budgets are monitored during the year.

Income controls

Precept and other income, including credit control mechanisms

All were found to be in order. Income controls were checked and a sample of income received and banked cross referenced with the Cash Book and bank statements. Supporting paperwork for event income is in place with clear terms and conditions for hirers.

Petty Cash

Associated books and established system in place

A satisfactory petty cash system is in place with supporting paperwork. A sample of receipts were examined from November 2023 to March 2024 and cross referenced with vouchers and the cash book.

Payroll controls

PAYE and NIC in place where necessary.
Compliance with Inland Revenue procedures
Records relating to contracts of employment

PAYE System in place: Yes
Employer's Reference: 245/WW723
P60s issued: Yes

The Council continue to operate RTI in accordance with HMRC regulations.. Supporting paperwork is in place and P60s have been produced as part of the year end process. Eligible employees have joined the nominated pension scheme.

Audit trails were carried out on a sample for each month for the period November 2023 to March 2024 and all was found to be in order. Timesheets are completed and overtime claim forms are in place when required.

Asset control

Inspection of asset register and checks on existence of assets
Cross checking on insurance cover

A separate asset register is in place. Values are recorded at cost value/insurance value. The total value of assets are recorded at £1,198,321.33. The figure in the asset register corresponds with the figure in Section 2, Box 9 of the AGAR.

Bank Reconciliation

Regularly completed and cash books reconcile with bank statements

All were in order. Bank Reconciliations are carried out regularly. A sample of bank reconciliations from all accounts were examined for accuracy. The bank statements reconciled with the end of year accounts and bank reconciliations for all accounts.

Bank Balances at 31 March were confirmed as:

<i>Lloyds Business</i>	<i>xxxx2286</i>	<i>£203,413.65</i>
<i>Lloyds Deposit</i>	<i>95 Day</i>	<i>£193,137.78</i>
<i>Unity Trust</i>	<i>xxxx4430</i>	<i>£8,849.72</i>
<i>Unity Trust</i>	<i>xxxx5851</i>	<i>£188,886.29</i>
<i>Petty Cash</i>		<i>£41.53</i>

Reserves

General Reserves are reasonable for the activities of the Council
Earmarked Reserves are identified

The Council have adequate general reserves (£365,845) and have identified earmarked reserves (£280,218) in their year end accounts.

It is noted that the Council have reviewed their Treasury and Investment plan to maximise return (Ref: 12/12/2023 – 33). It was resolved to open a PSDF for 6 months.

Year-end procedures

Appropriate accounting procedures are used and can be followed through from working papers to final documents
Verifying sample payments and income
Checking creditors and debtors where appropriate.

End of year accounts are prepared on an Income & Expenditure basis. Creditors and Debtors are identified within the year end accounts.

Internal Audit Procedures

The 2023-2024 Interim Internal Audit report was considered by the Council at a meeting held on 30/10/2023 (Ref: 125).

A review of the effectiveness of the Internal Audit was carried out on 5/3/2024 (Ref: 194).

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Lynne Lodge Dip HE Local Policy

Heelis & Lodge were appointed as Internal Auditor for the next 3 years at a meeting held on 5/3/2024 (Ref: 194).

Additional Comments/Recommendations

- There are no additional comments/recommendations to make in relation to this audit.
- I would like to record my appreciation to the Clerk to the Council for her assistance during the course of the audit work and the exceptional quality of documentation presented for the audit.



Heather Heelis
Heelis & Lodge
2 May 2024

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Witham
town council

ITEM 28

Annual Accounts

Financial Year 2023/2024



Supporting Statement of Responsibilities

Witham Town Council is required to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and ensure that it appoints a Responsible Financial Officer with direct accountability for its overall administrative functions in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 (S151). In addition to this, Members and Officers of the Council are under a duty to:

- Ensure that value for money is obtained for all business transactions.
- Ensure that public money is under appropriate safeguarding measures.
- Ensure that an appropriate system of internal control is in force and monitored for effectiveness.

In preparing these accounts in conjunction with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return, the Council confirms that it has adhered to the Accounts & Audit Regulations and:

- Put in place effective arrangements for financial management.
- Maintained an adequate system of internal control.
- Took all reasonable steps to assure that there were no matters of actual or potential noncompliance with laws, regulations or proper practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.
- Provided proper opportunity in the year for the exercise of electors rights in accordance with the Accounts & Audit Regulations.
- Carried out an assessment of risks faced by the authority.
- Took all appropriate steps to action any matters raised on audit reports.
- Considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions occurring either during or after the year end have a financial impact on the authority and where appropriate, included them in the accounting statements.



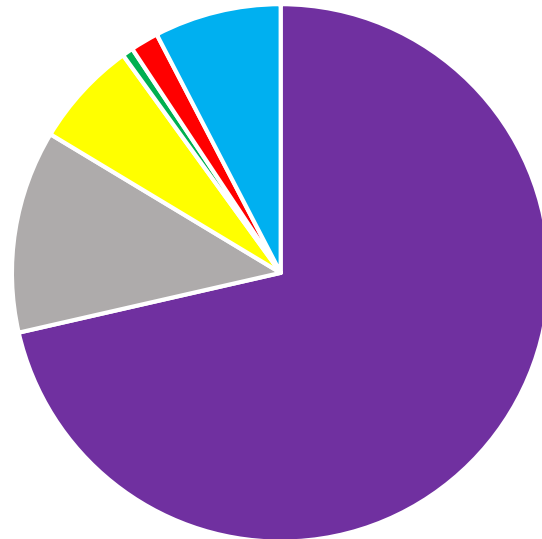
Nikki Smith

Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer

Contents

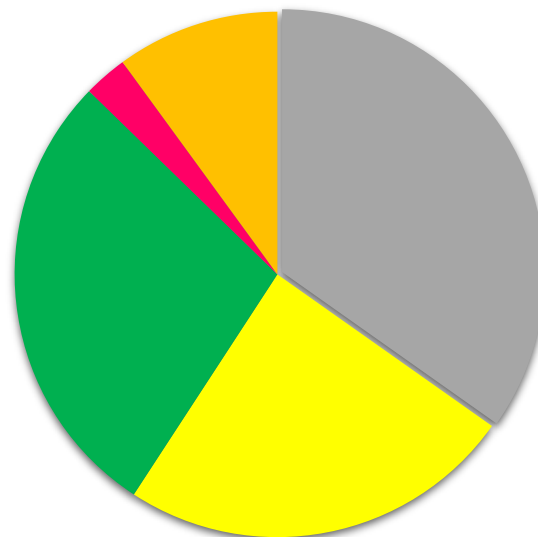
1. Balance Sheet
2. Cash & Reserves Reconciliation
3. Reserves Reconciliation
4. Total Income & Expenditure Charts
5. Total Income & Expenditure Report

Total Income



- Precept
- Admin
- Community
- Environment
- Policy and Resources
- EMR Movement

Total Expenditure



- Admin
- Community
- Environment
- Policy & Resources
- EMR Movement

Balance Sheet

31st March 2023

31st March 2024

31st March 2023		31st March 2024	
Current Assets			
1,469	Debtors	4,007	
9,683	VAT Control Account	63,558	
8,928	Prepayments	8,365	
11,718	Stock	10,480	
17,877	Lloyds Bank Account	203,414	
106	Petty Cash	42	
248,466	Unity Trust Account	8,850	
299,722	95 Day Notice	193,138	
0	Unity Trust Instant Access	188,886	
597,969		680,739	
597,969	Total Assets	680,739	
Current Liabilities			
5,522	Creditors	23,978	
5,640	Accruals	4,868	
685	Mayors Appeal	735	
7,480	Receipts in Advance	5,095	
19,326		34,676	
578,643	Total Assets Less Current Liabilities	646,063	
Represented By			
292,210	General Reserves	365,845	
2,000	EMR- Streetlighting Sinking Fu	4,000	
0	EMR- Tree Maintenance	3,268	
60,000	EMR - Riverwalk Cycleways	45,442	
0	EMR - Neighbourhood Plan	3,000	
20,000	EMR - Community Safety /CCTV	10,000	
27,773	EMR - Highways Devolution	27,773	
40,000	EMR - Land Improvement	40,000	
30,000	EMR - Equipment Replacement	20,000	
20,000	EMR - Street Furniture Renew	0	
4,370	EMR - Major Repairs & Renewals	15,000	
50,000	EMR - J C Wood Imp Plan	10,000	
12,150	EMR - Whetmead Imp Plan	0	
3,744	EMR - Election Expenses	2,813	
11,440	Allotment Control Account	10,284	
0	EMR - Safer Streets	77,853	
0	Charter Market Control Account	813	
4,956	Events Control Account	9,972	
578,643		646,063	

Cash & Reserves Reconciliation

<u>Confirmed Bank & Investment Balances</u>		
<u>Bank Statement Balances</u>		
31/03/2024	Lloyds Current Account	203,413.65
31/03/2024	Petty Cash	41.53
31/03/2024	Unity Trust Bank Account	8,849.72
31/03/2024	95 Day Notice	193,137.78
31/03/2024	Unity Trust Bk Instant Access	188,886.29
		594,328.97
<u>Receipts not on Bank Statement</u>		
		0.00
Closing Balance		594,328.97
<u>All Cash & Bank Accounts</u>		
1	Lloyds Bank Account	203,413.65
5	Petty Cash	41.53
6	Unity Trust Account	8,849.72
7	95 Day Notice	193,137.78
8	Unity Trust Instant Access	188,886.29
	Other Cash & Bank Balances	0.00
	Total Cash & Bank Balances	594,328.97

Reserves Reconciliation

<u>Description</u>	<u>Last Year £</u>	<u>This Year £</u>
Total Reserves	578,642.63	646,062.66
Debtors	1,468.95	4,006.69
VAT Control Account	9,682.88	63,558.11
Prepayments	8,927.53	8,365.36
Stock	11,718.27	10,479.50
Less Total Debtors	31,797.63	86,409.66
Creditors	5,521.61	23,977.63
Accruals	5,640.00	4,868.00
Mayors Appeal	684.71	734.85
Receipts in Advance	7,479.85	5,095.49
Plus Total Creditors	19,326.17	34,675.97
Equals Total Cash and Bank Accounts	566,171.17	594,328.97
Lloyds Bank Account	17,877.03	203,413.65
Petty Cash	105.76	41.53
Unity Trust Account	248,465.96	8,849.72
95 Day Notice	299,722.42	193,137.78
Unity Trust Instant Access	0.00	188,886.29
Total Cash and Bank Accounts	566,171.17	594,328.97

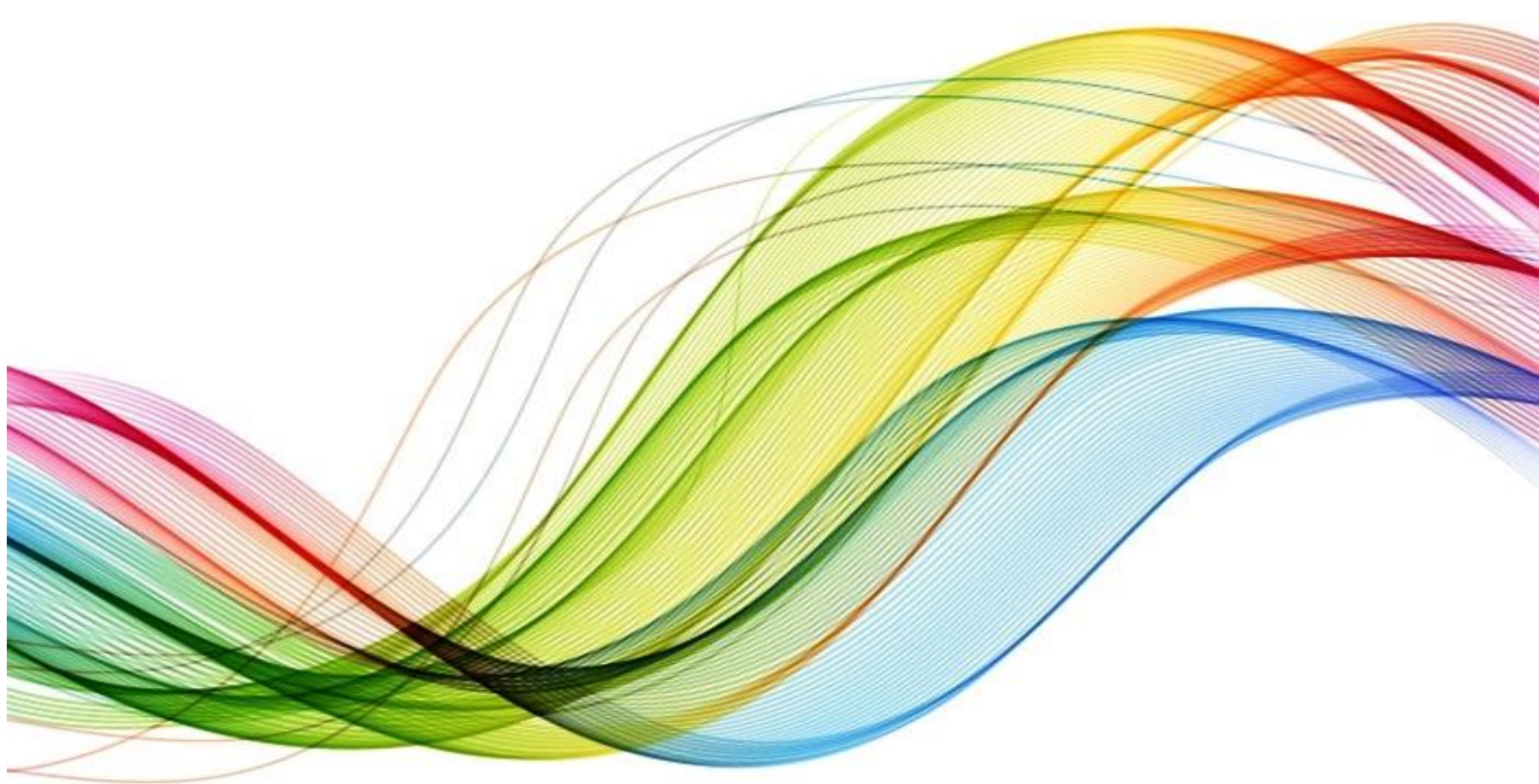
Total Income & Expenditure Report

31st March 2023		31st March 2024
	Income Summary	
704,406	Precept	797,141
704,406	Sub Total	797,141
	Operating Income	
39,526	Administration	136,097
67,637	Community	71,438
4,650	Environment	7,360
3,243	Policy & Resources	18,791
5,067	EMR Movement	85,141
824,529	Total Income	1,115,968
	Running Costs	
311,382	Administration	363,596
9,362	Planning & Transport	3,388
214,153	Community	255,129
212,895	Environment	293,549
21,011	Policy & Resources	28,072
19,042	EMR Movement	104,815
787,845	Total Expenditure	1,048,548
	General Fund Analysis	
301,699	Opening Balance	292,210
824,529	Plus : Income for Year	1,115,968
1,126,228		1,408,179
787,845	Less : Expenditure for Year	1,048,548
338,383		359,630
46,173	Transfers TO / FROM Reserves	(6,215)
292,210	Closing Balance	365,845

Witham Town Council Annual Accounts 2023/2024

Copies of this document are available online and can be obtained from the Town Hall by request by emailing assistantrfo@witham.gov.uk

For all queries concerning accounting statements, please email townclerk@witham.gov.uk



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Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24

ITEM 29

WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL

WWW.WITHAM.GOV.UK

During the financial year ended 31 March 2024, this authority's internal auditor acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carried out a selective assessment of compliance with the relevant procedures and controls in operation and obtained appropriate evidence from the authority.

The internal audit for 2023/24 has been carried out in accordance with this authority's needs and planned coverage. On the basis of the findings in the areas examined, the internal audit conclusions are summarised in this table. Set out below are the objectives of internal control and alongside are the internal audit conclusions on whether, in all significant respects, the control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of this authority.

Internal control objective	Yes	No*	Not covered**
A. Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year.	✓		
B. This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	✓		
C. This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.	✓		
D. The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.	✓		
E. Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	✓		
F. Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.	✓		
G. Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.	✓		
H. Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.	✓		
I. Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.	✓		
J. Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.	✓		
K. If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2022/23, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2022/23 AGAR tick "not covered")			✓
L. The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation.	✓		
M. In the year covered by this AGAR, the authority correctly provided for a period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (during the 2023-24 AGAR period, were public rights in relation to the 2022-23 AGAR evidenced by a notice on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).	✓		
N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2022/23 AGAR (see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).	✓		
O. (For local councils only) Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.			✓

For any other risk areas identified by this authority adequate controls existed (list any other risk areas on separate sheets if needed).

Date(s) internal audit undertaken

17/10/2023 02/05/2024

Name of person who carried out the internal audit

H. HEELIS (HEELIS & LODGE)

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit

Date

02/05/2024

*If the response is 'no' please state the implications and action being taken to address any weakness in control identified (add separate sheets if needed).

**Note: If the response is 'not covered' please state when the most recent internal audit work was done in this area and when it is next planned; or, if coverage is not required, the annual internal audit report must explain why not (add separate sheets if needed).

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

We acknowledge as the members of:

WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL

our responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control, including arrangements for the preparation of the Accounting Statements. We confirm, to the best of our knowledge and belief, with respect to the Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024, that:

	Agreed		'Yes' means that this authority:	
	Yes	No*		
1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	✓		prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	
2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	✓		made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.	
3. We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.	✓		has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.	
4. We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	✓		during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.	
5. We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.	✓		considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.	
6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	✓		arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.	
7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	✓		responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.	
8. We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.	✓		disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.	
9. (For local councils only) Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.	Yes	No	N/A	has met all of its responsibilities where, as a body corporate, it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.
			✓	

***Please provide explanations to the external auditor on a separate sheet for each 'No' response and describe how the authority will address the weaknesses identified. These sheets must be published with the Annual Governance Statement.**

This Annual Governance Statement was approved at a meeting of the authority on:

DD/MM/YY

and recorded as minute reference:

MINUTE REFERENCE

Signed by the Chair and Clerk of the meeting where approval was given:

Chair

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

Clerk

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

FOR PUBLISHING AVAILABLE WEBSITE/WEBPAGE ADDRESS

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Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2023/24 for

ITEM 30

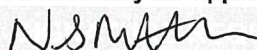
WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2023 £	31 March 2024 £	
1. Balances brought forward	541,959	578,643	Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year.
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	704,406	797,141	Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.
3. (+) Total other receipts	120,123	318,827	Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.
4. (-) Staff costs	441,400	531,585	Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments.
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments			Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).
6. (-) All other payments	346,445	516,963	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).
7. (=) Balances carried forward	578,643	646,063	Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	566,171	594,329	The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – To agree with bank reconciliation.
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	1,151,846	1,198,321	The value of all the property the authority owns – it is made up of all its fixed assets and long term investments as at 31 March.
10. Total borrowings	0		The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).

For Local Councils Only	Yes	No	N/A	
11a. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)		✓		The Council, as a body corporate, acts as sole trustee and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets.
11b. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)			✓	The figures in the accounting statements above exclude any Trust transactions.

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2024 the Accounting Statements in this Annual Governance and Accountability Return have been prepared on either a receipts and payments or income and expenditure basis following the guidance in Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices and present fairly the financial position of this authority.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer before being presented to the authority for approval



Date

01/05/2024

I confirm that these Accounting Statements were approved by this authority on this date:

DD/MM/YYYY

as recorded in minute reference:

MINUTE REFERENCE

Signed by Chair of the meeting where the Accounting Statements were approved

REQUIRE

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ITEM 31

Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE
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witham.gov.uk

MINUTES

Meeting of: **Annual Town Meeting**

Date: **Monday, 8th April 2024**

Place: **The Royal British Legion Memorial Hall, Newland St, Witham, CM8 2AZ.**

Present: Councillors

S.	Ager	(Town Mayor)
L.	Barlow	(Deputy Town Mayor)
P.	Barlow	
J.	Coleman	
L.	Headley	
P.	Heath	
T.	Hewitt	
R.	Ramage	

Police Inspector P Jackson (Essex Police)
Community Special Sergeant S. Jesse (Essex Police)

N.	Smith	(Town Clerk)
H.	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)
S.	Smith	(PA to the Council)

And 20 members of the public including representatives from Action for Family Carers, Witham BB, Witham Carnival Association, The Witham Hub and the 295 (Witham & Rivenhall) Squadron ATC.

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the Annual Town Meeting. She explained that there would be an opportunity for reports detailing achievements and then a time at the end for questions.

1. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting held 13th March 2023 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Town Mayor.

2. **REPORTS ON THE TOWN COUNCIL**

Planning and Transport Committee

Councillor Phil Barlow, Chairman of the Planning and Transport Committee, gave his report. He explained that the committee makes recommendations for developments and extensions and was pleased that they were mainly in accord with the District Council's decisions. He said that

they had recently commented on the Minerals Local Plan giving preferred sites for future quarries. There had also been a lot of involvement with the National Highways with regard to the A12 widening which would affect Whetmead Nature Reserve. They had supported the merger of the number 39 and 40 bus services and were now involved with the National Grid consultation for the proposed link between Norwich and Tilbury. The committee works closely with the Tree Group which advised on tree applications and in particular with the Lynfield Elm which is a veteran tree resistant to Dutch Elm disease. There was also a Cycling Development Group which had been working with the District Council. This year a budget had been put in place to reduce speeding. A petition had been started by the Town Council against the proposals to abolish the one-hour free parking in the High Street.

Environment Committee

Councillor Susan Ager, Chairman of the Environment Committee, gave her report. She said that more projects are now underway with trees being felled in James Cooke Wood to allow more light for wildlife and a boardwalk being installed to allow year-round access. A new Nature Trail had been introduced at Whetmead and line marking on the River Walk pathways with the hope of repairs in due course. Advice had been sought regarding the Closed Churchyard as it was not suitable for re-wilding. There were some new allotments at Rivenhall Park which would be allocated shortly. The Climate Change Working Group considered projects and was proactive in encouraging recycling at the Town Hall. She thanked the Tree Group for tree planting and looking after trees for two years after planting. The Environment Committee ensures that green spaces are protected and improved.

Policy and Resources Committee

Councillor Phil Barlow, Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee, gave his report. He explained that the committee was responsible for policies and finances. The Town Council was governed by statute and policies including GDPR and Health and Safety; and Standing Orders. Every month Members have to sign off reconciliations to monitor that money was being spent wisely. He said that the flyer on the chairs gave a precis of the accounts. The committee was responsible for the development of a Corporate Strategy. The Finance Scrutiny Panel would ensure that everything had been set up correctly, legal and financially responsible.

Community Committee

Councillor Lucy Barlow, Chairman of the Community Committee, said it had been a privilege to lead the committee. There had been lots of events throughout the year, reaching out to the public and involving as many people as possible. All the events are free at source. She then listed Easter Trail, Halloween, the Street Festival, Music Festival, Teddy Bears' Picnic and Coronation event. This year the Town Council had organised an event to mark the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day landings with a parade and lighting the beacon; and in the summer holidays there would be Story Telling and book swap on the River Walk. She explained that the committee also was responsible for awarding grants to organisations such as the Citizens Advice, Carnival, The Hub and Friends of St John. Grants were available for the forthcoming year along with a new Members' Grant Scheme awarding small sums of money to those organisations which would not normally meet the criteria of the Council's scheme. She said that the committee also received an update from the police.

The Town Mayor thanked Members for their reports.

3. ESSEX POLICE

The Town Mayor welcomed Inspector Phil Jackson and S/Sergeant Simon Jesse to the Meeting.

Inspector Phil Jackson said that he had been part of the Community Policing Team for Braintree and Uttlesford for the past three months and found the role challenging. They had been undertaking a lot of work but the police are not good at promoting their successes. It was important that the public report crime to the police so they can target issues as they arise. He spoke about the Safer Streets Initiative and new CCTV cameras which give a lot of information. He praised the work of the Special Constables. He spoke about recent problems with defibrillator damage and graffiti on the River Walk mural. Local officers had recently detained two people for criminal damage and another two following a spate of burglaries. Police have a finite resource so they have to target priorities.

Special Sergeant Simon Jesse explained that special constables volunteer to spend 16 hours a month on police work. They have the same powers as police officers and provide a visible presence in the town. They have a fortnightly session outside The Hub in The Grove, which allows the public to meet them and report concerns, receive advice and have reassurance. He spoke about speeding and the challenges of undertaking speed checks as he had to wear hi-vis clothing and be visible from a long distance. He stressed the importance of reporting issues to the police. At present there was a team of three specials and two more needed to be recruited. He would promote the role of a special constable.

The Town Mayor thanked Inspector Jackson and Sergeant Jesse for their report.

4. COMMUNITY PRESENTATIONS

Action for Family Carers

The representative from Action for Family Carers said that they support carers of all ages but she leads the Young Carers section for Mid-Essex supporting 101 school children. In Witham, they meet every fortnight in Parkside giving children the opportunity to have respite from their caring roles. Meeting others in similar situations makes them realise that they are not alone. They have games and activities but have to rely on funding to provide these sessions.

She then introduced one of her young carers. He said that his mother had cerebral palsy which affected not just her mobility. He said that the two hours he spent at the Young Carers Club gave him a break and he particularly liked going to Jump Street. He really appreciated all the work that the charity gave.

The representative hoped that this report gave everyone an insight into what the Young Carers Club did.

Witham BB

The Witham BB representative said that Witham's BB had been running since 1972. BB is open to both boys and girls, of all backgrounds, disabilities and challenging behaviour, from the ages of 5 to 18. Ex-members volunteer in leadership roles and they meet on three week-day evenings. He said that BB provided outreach into the community. During the school holidays they meet for four hours a day and give free hot meals providing support. BB gave a unique opportunity to its members, challenging them physically and mentally. There were opportunities for water activities, camping and other outdoor activities. He commended the dedicated staff.

The Witham Hub

The representative from The Hub, spoke about the launch of a whole programme of activities preventing crisis and isolation. They hold regular youth group activities at the weekends and Well Days. They hope to recruit more teenagers and volunteers to attend. The other activities include Tea and Tech for those needing help with mobile phones, ipads and sending emails. She had set up a yearly programme of events, during summer holidays there will be a weekly family focused, affordable event. They work with local businesses, schools and churches. In schools they concentrated on activities such as recycling, community litter picks and enjoying the local wildlife. The youth had been collecting crisp packets to make into blankets for the homeless. They go into schools and offer an opportunity to reflect after assemblies and give them the opportunity to volunteer at The Hub. They also have Lego construction events and meet ups for home-schooled children giving them an opportunity to develop social skills.

Witham Carnival Association

The Treasurer of the Witham Carnival Association said that last year had been particularly successful with more floats, bigger street collection, which was given to charities, and more visiting courts. She said that whilst carnivals in Essex were disappearing, the numbers are increasing in Kent. The association was set up 48 years ago and they now have new members. The carnival starts from the Witham Football Club to the Town Park where there are lots of activities along with singing and dance shows. There was a community feel to the carnival, old fashioned delivered in a modern way. There were seven in the court, with the selection evening being held at Easter. During the year the youngsters blossom and gain confidence. She said that they could not run the event without both the financial support of the Town Council and staff putting up road closure signs and helping with the road closure itself.

295 (Witham and Rivenhall) Squadron ATC

The representative in attendance informed attendees that the ATC squadron was part of the RAF. Their mission statement was to give training to be useful in both military and civilian life. He said that the young people undertake the Duke of Edinburgh award and volunteer work was needed for them. The squadron would be celebrating its 20th anniversary in January and was thriving with 58 cadets, 4 staff members and 6 civilians. They meet every Monday, with band practice on a Wednesday and activities at the weekend, including weapon training and an opportunity for gliding. One cadet had gained his private pilot's licence. One cadet would be going to the Air Leadership Camp with two weeks in Australia and a further week in New Zealand.

Templars Residents' Association

Phil Barlow gave a short report about the association, explaining that it was the oldest in the town celebrating forty years. Town Council Ward Members sit on the committee as well as residents. Templars was a challenging area and the association was proactive and wanted to do its best for the estate and its residents. He closed by talking about the groups that work together with the Town Council to make the town a better place.

5. OPEN FORUM

The Town Mayor then opened the floor for suggestions, comments, questions or concerns about any matter affecting Witham.

The Chairman of the Town Luncheon Club explained that they provide a hot meal on a Tuesday for 30 people for a small cost. She spoke about the disadvantages of using the RBL hall. She then said that she was also the Chairman of the History Group. She suggested that members of the ATC squadron might wish to clear the weeds from around the RBL building. She asked why the Town Council had less income in the financial year ending 2022/2023. The Town Clerk explained that in the previous year, the Town Council had received more grants and additional income such as easements. Mrs Kilmartin then asked the police about where would it be better to concentrate resources. In answer, it was explained that there had been a government grant of £60,000 to improve CCTV equipment and the cost of a street warden was likewise funded as part of the Safer Street initiative. S/Sgt Jesse explained that at holiday times there would be a spike in anti-social behaviour. He commended the work of the street warden who was a presence in the town on weekdays. He said that there were no hot spots in town, but some low-level crime was mentioned through social media. Incidents need to be reported directly to the police. He said that the Community Specials would be working more on the housing estates.

Comment was made that residents like to see a policeman on the beat. S/Sgt Jesse explained that the Community Specials were part funded by the Town Council. They were on the beat along with the regular Town Team officers and the street warden so there are more officers patrolling now. A further comment was made that when she had rung the police at 11 p.m. they had come from Braintree, a twenty minute drive. In answer it was explained that in an emergency mobile units can be called. Inspector Jackson said that the Town Team work from the Town Hall during some mornings whilst doing paperwork so can be quickly available in Witham but traffic units can be called in too. It had been necessary to cut costs but the number of officers were gradually increasing. He stressed the importance of telling the police if there was a problem.

A resident asked a number of questions relating to planning. In answer, it was explained that the verge along Hatfield Road was still an ongoing issue but a meeting with the Essex County Councillor was to be arranged for May, when parking at Holy Family school would also be discussed; the hoarding was still up at Ivy Chimneys but a close eye would be kept to ensure that the hedging was replaced. He asked too about signage to James Cooke Wood and it was explained that Essex County Council had been reminded of the need for a sign. He was delighted to hear about the D-Day Parade. He asked police about e-scooters and it was explained that some people do use them to commute to the Industrial Estates. A sensible approach was needed and the owners were at risk of seizure of the scooter if it was not registered or insured. He said that he had recently confiscated two scooters ridden by children.

The President of Witham Rotary, said that it was not just e-scooters that posed a risk for pedestrians but cyclists on pavements. Inspector Jackson explained that under Section 59, anyone riding on the pavement causing anti-social behaviour could have their bike seized and destroyed. The Rotary Club representative commented that charities do need bikes. He said that the Rotary Club had funded cooking classes for young carers. There would be a 'Day of Service' on the 18th May when residents are being urged to litter pick. He was grateful for the ATC squadron's assistance with the Christmas Santa's collection and urged people to use them if they can. He spoke about the Wilderness Foundation which helped schools, children with Special Education Needs and broken families. He was grateful for the Town Council accessing whips for him that he was nurturing before being planted at the Chatten School. He said that the Rotary Club still had some funds available for grants.

Comment was made by Councillor Ramage that he felt proud of the Witham's volunteers working in the community and the work of the police and street warden to make people feel safe.

Councillor Jack Coleman echoed this comment. He explained that he volunteered at the Witham Hang-out on a Wednesday evening. He spoke of outreach into the town so young people knew of these facilities and the need for more volunteers and suggested a quick meeting to share resources and ideas.

Councillor Heath said that he had raised with the Braintree District Council CEO and Leader about the parking issues at Holy Family School and the hedges along Hatfield Road. Once the schools are back after the Easter holidays a site visit will be carried out to look at these issues and interested parties are invited to attend.

A member of the public queried Section 106 funding from developers and whether it was coming through quickly enough. He said that Braintree District Council had had £7m for the new Community Centre on Maltings Lane since 2000. He said that it had taken 24 years to make the application although residents were consulted in 2018. He had asked Braintree District Council for Section 106 figures but this had not been forthcoming. The member of the public was concerned that Section 106 money was not getting spent in Witham.

It was explained that the Town Council had now a better working relationship with the District Council and these figures had been made available. Developers had not withheld the funding which had been banked. The Town Council could now access Section 106 funding for projects which recently included erection of the board walk in James Cooke wood and the Bee Friendly planting near River View.

Comment was made that Rivenhall Park was being built to the north of Witham where there were no doctors or medical facilities. The suggestion was made that the site in Laburnum Way would have made a perfect site for a GPs surgery.

It was explained that for the past forty years the Town Council had lobbied for better health facilities. The impact on Witham's residents of the closure of St Peter's Hospital in Maldon had been considered at the recent public consultation. The Rivenhall Park development had been allowed to be built piecemeal with a loss of Section 106 monies.

As there were no further comments made, the Town Mayor thanked everyone for attending and closed the Meeting at 8.50 p.m. to allow people the chance to chat about the issues raised.

Councillor S. Ager
Town Mayor

NS/GK/17.4.2024

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