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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Community Committee**

Date: **Monday, 19th August 2024**

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

Present:

Councillors	J.C.	Coleman	(Chairman)
	L.	Headley	
	R.	Ramage	
	J.	Robertson	
	E.	Williams	
Sergeant	S.	Jesse	(Community Special – Essex Police)
	N.	Smith	(Town Clerk)
	G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)
	J.	Reeve	(Finance Assistant)

And three members of the public

19. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

In the absence of both the Chairman and Vice Chairman, it was necessary to elect a Chairman for the Meeting.

RESOLVED That Councillor J.C. Coleman be elected to serve as Chairman for this Meeting.

20. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Barlow, B. Fleet, P. Heath and R. Playle. Councillor Adelaja was absent.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

21. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Committee held 28th May 2024 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

22. INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest although at Minute 27 (a) Councillor Ramage declared a non-pecuniary interest as he is providing Popcorn with funding through his Braintree District Councillor Grant Scheme.

23. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

The members of the public were concerned that there was no longer a bus service running from their part of the town on a Saturday. The number 39 serving the Powers Hall estate no longer ran on a Saturday meaning that the elderly and those without access to a car were unable to get into the town centre and they considered that they were being penalised. Also there was a two hour gap in the mid-week afternoon service. The Saturday service had been well-used early morning and they had complained to the MP. They also raised the question of lack of clothes and shoe shops in the town and that there were only three disabled car parking spaces in the town centre.

Members recognised their concerns regarding appropriate shops but this was a commercial decision taken by companies and the Town Council had no influence. It was pointed out that blue badge holders were able to park on double yellow lines where other motorists could not.

The suggestion was made that Item 13 on the Agenda – Bus Services, should be brought forward.

RESOLVED That Item 13 on the Agenda – Bus Services, be considered next.

24. BUS SERVICES

A report concerning the lost Saturday bus service 39 was received.

Members recognised that the importance of retaining a Saturday bus service and improving the weekday service. It was agreed that this matter should be referred to Essex County Council and contact made with the appropriate Essex County Councillor and the MP to ensure that the service was reinstated.

RESOLVED That contact be made with Essex County Councillor Louis and Priti Patel, MP to request that the Saturday bus service be reinstated and improvements made to the weekday afternoon service.

25. GUEST SPEAKER

The Town Clerk explained that the guest speaker had been unable to attend so they would be invited another time.

26. ESSEX POLICE

The Chairman welcomed S/Sergeant Simon Jesse to the Meeting.

Simon was pleased to announce that a new officer had joined the Town Team, PC Jack Trower who had started his police career as a Special before joining the Metropolitan Police and then moving to CID in Chelmsford. He reported that he had a good morning out with the street warden engaging positively with shop keepers. He said that during the summer holidays and there was a lot of antisocial behaviour, it was important to report crimes to police. He said that

five e-scooters had been seized from children and destroyed. Pedestrians had not only been hurt but the riders too could be injured. He stressed that there was still more work to be done and whilst at the moment they were focusing on the town centre they will eventually be able to work further afield.

He then spoke about antisocial behaviour with intimidating behaviour and verbal abuse. He said that this could be hate crime and public order offences encouraged by social media. He reported that there had been significant problems at the library with groups of six or seven young people running amok three or four times a day and staff unable to cope. A security guard had been employed and incidents were now being reported to police. The situation would improve when the schools were back.

He was concerned about incidents on the River Walk where young people were setting fires and using aerosol cans. He said that the fires in this dry weather could get out of hand and people could be hurt.

Simon said that he had been contacted about parking outside Churchills fish and chip shop on the zig-zag approach to the pedestrian crossing in Newland Street. He said that if police were aware, motorists would be moved on but it needed a traffic warden to give a ticket. If it was a persistent problem the North Essex Parking Partnership needed to be contacted. The other issue which had been reported to him was in relation to speeding in The Avenue with an incident of a motor cyclist travelling fast whilst doing a ‘wheelie’. He said that he was unable to undertake covert speed checks so motorists could see him. He considered that someone would know who the perpetrator was and if not an exact time and date to pinpoint the offence, along with an index number, would assist police.

The Chairman said that Simon had recently attended the Hang Out to speak to the young people which was very useful.

In answer to a question, he said that the Morrisons Daily, opposite the Town Hall, was robbed last Tuesday evening. He explained that if there was a crime in progress, 999 should be rung. He considered that reporting incidents online was quicker than through the 101 system.

Members spoke about vehicles not stopping for pedestrians on the Maldon Road crossing. Simon said that he had seen it too with motorists braking at the last moment or not at all. He considered that the crossing needed to be repainted and the lighting improved.

The Chairman thanked Simon for his report.

27. GRANT AID

(a) Popcorn

A grant aid application was received from Popcorn for £5,000 to cover its activities.

It was explained that the number of people from Witham attending Popcorn had not been specified and there was no guarantee that the grant could only be spent on Witham residents. Despite requesting a response regarding these figures Popcorn had not yet replied.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that there was just £6,000 left in the budget.

Members agreed to defer a decision until the next Meeting to give Popcorn a further chance to supply the requested details.

RESOLVED That the grant aid application be received and a decision taken at the next Meeting.

(b) Witham Allstars

A grant aid application was received from Witham Allstars for £3,000 to fund hall hire and equipment.

The Town Clerk explained that last year's grant aid application had been turned down because no business plan had been provided as to how they would be able to continue the extra free classes once the grant had run out. This application was the same with limited information supplied.

Members agreed that they could not grant funding but it was mentioned that other organisations might be able to assist.

RESOLVED That the application be refused as there was insufficient information and the group had not given detailed enough answers to requests regarding and how future funding could be achieved.

28. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk's report on matters arising was received.

She said that there had been a number of fires set on the River Walk. There had been posts on social media about the camera in the park toilet. This had been in place for over a year and installed after receiving advice from the Information Commissioner's Office. The camera was facing the door and was not monitored. It was installed after there had been a spate of vandalism and there was no risk to privacy. Since installation there had only been two incidents of vandalism.

She said that mobile cameras were being trialled on the River Walk near where the fire was set, James Cooke Wood to prevent fly tipping and near Ebenezer Close.

RESOLVED That the report be received and information noted.

29. COMMUNITY COMMITTEE INCOME, EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET REPORT

The Community Committee Income and Expenditure report for the period up to 31st May 2024 was received.

The Town Clerk, in answer to a question, explained that there was sufficient funding for six or seven special constables.

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

Councillor Ramage left the Council Chamber.

30. EVENTS UPDATE

A report on Events was received.

Members were reminded of Music on the Brain this weekend. Members and Officers had attended Braintree Pride and contacts made should there be a similar event in Witham in the future. There would be a VE80 event next year when the beacon would be lit.

RESOLVED That the report be received and information noted.

Councillor Ramage returned to the Council Chamber.

31. INVITATION TO WALDBROL

An invitation was received for the Town Mayor to attend the Day of German Unity in Waldβrol on 3rd October 2024.

The Town Clerk said that the Town Mayor and Leader of the Council would be attending.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

32. ONLINE MUSEUM

A report was received about the proposed online museum.

The Town Clerk explained that there were a number of artefacts stored in the basement. It was proposed that every week there would be a Facebook post referring to the website where there would be an article about different items. The Information Centre Manager would be the archivist.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the online museum approved.

33. STREET WARDEN'S REPORTS

The Street Warden's Reports for April, May, June and July 2024 were received.

Members agreed that the Street Warden was doing a fantastic job.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

34. SOCIAL MEDIA

The social media statistics were received.

RESOLVED That the statistics be received and noted.

35. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting for the consideration of the remaining items of business on the grounds they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information falling within Schedule 12A (S3) of the Local Government Act 1972.

36. INFORMATION CENTRE

A report was received from the Information Centre Manager.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.52 p.m.

Councillor J.C. Coleman
Chairman

NS/GK/21.8.2024

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