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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Community Committee**

Date: **Monday, 11th November 2024**

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

Present: Councillors

L.	Barlow	(Chairman)
P.	Heath	(Vice Chairman)
J.C.	Coleman	
L.	Headley	
R.	Playle	(arrived at 8.08 p.m.)
R.	Ramage	
J.	Robertson	

Also in attendance: Cllr. P. Barlow

Inspector	P.	Jackson	(Essex Police)
S/Sergeant	S.	Jessie	(Community Special – Essex Police)
	K.	Kentish	(Citizens Advice)
	N.	Smith	(Town Clerk)
	G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)
	L.	Bamigbele	(P.A. to the Council)
	J.	Reeve	(Finance Assistant)

And one member of the public.

37. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fleet and Councillor Playle who would be late. Councillors Adelaja and Williams were absent.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

38. **MINUTES**

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Committee held 19th August 2024 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

39. INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

40. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No comment was made by the member of the public present.

41. ESSEX POLICE

The Chairman welcomed Police Inspector Phil Jackson and Special Sergeant Simon Jesse to the Meeting.

S/Sergeant Jesse gave a short report including their attendance at the recent Halloween Trail organised by the Town Council which gave them the opportunity to engage with children and families. He said that there had been sporadic pockets of anti-social behaviour in the town but the main problem was that people do not report crime. He spoke of a stop and search at ASDA car park and hi-vis patrols. They had known that there would be problems at Halloween which had been organised by youths. He had engaged with youths and following several incidents a number of perpetrators had been identified and returned home but there had been a number of serious incidents outside of Witham which had required urgent attention. He stressed the importance of reporting incidents to police rather than posting on Social Media.

Inspector Jackson said that the policing of Halloween had been more successful this year. A dispersal order had been put in place and was used nine times, allowing taking children home or parents collecting them. It was unfortunate that there had been several serious incidents in Braintree so that police had been called away from Witham. He said that they would be working with Trading Standards next year to prevent under-age sales of fireworks.

He said that Police were working with Braintree District Council and Eastlight regarding Acceptable Behaviour Contracts. He explained that this was a first step towards Parenting Orders but they were difficult to achieve. He was happy to work with the Town Council and wondered if a graffiti wall could assist the situation.

Inspector Jackson stressed that anti-social behaviour figures had fallen but this could be due to a decrease in reporting. Police would be going out into the community so that everyone would have the opportunity to talk to them and he would share these dates with the Town Council. He was concerned that victims of crime were having their cases closed within a short time of reporting their incidents but explained that a new system was being trialled in Chelmsford and if successful would be expanded throughout the county.

Members commented that there had been huge problems in the town during the school holidays and whilst there had been an improvement the situation was not perfect. The suggestion was made that it might be appropriate to arrange a public meeting for those who complain through social media and to invite social services.

Councillor Playle arrived at this point in the Meeting.

Inspector Jackson considered that it was a parental problem which would be difficult to solve but resolutions would start early with those who caused the main problems and those vulnerable to gangs. He said that plans were currently being formatted for next year. He said that the Community Policing Team was fully staffed and all officers well trained. The population in Essex had increased massively and he emphasised the need to report all crime so that police numbers could be increased accordingly.

Members understood that anti-social behaviour was considered low level crime but it would badly affect people's lives. A page from a book compiled by ASDA staff which listed anti-social behaviour which occurred in their store was shared. Members agreed that it was not the responsibility of staff to deal with this behaviour. The problem of scramble bikes was also mentioned, with riders not wearing helmets. Inspector Jackson said that it was unsafe to chase perpetrators but a Section 59 order would result in the vehicle being destroyed.

Members then spoke about issues at Witham Football Club which police were not aware of.

Members then referred to problems at Halloween which had been reported to police but videos had still to be requested. It was agreed that these issues could be discussed outside of the Meeting.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Jackson and Special Sergeant Jesse for their attendance.

Councillor J.C. Coleman then left the Council Chamber.

42. **GUEST SPEAKER**

The Chairman welcomed Kathy Kentish, Chief Executive Officer of Citizens Advice Braintree and South Essex, to the Meeting.

Kathy Kentish gave a presentation¹ which included the area covered by her CA and how they give free and confidential advice to all. She stressed that they are registered with the Financial Conduct Authority. She shared the details of the local website and Freephone numbers which are open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays but to 8 p.m. on a Wednesday. They have a face to face drop in session on a Thursday at their offices between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. and at the Foodbank on a Friday between 10 a.m. and noon. There was a Pension Credit and Winter Fuel Allowance session at the Public Hall on 12th November. She detailed the number of Witham clients helped for the first half of this financial year (247) which were comparable to the whole of last year (266) and gave the top issues which included benefits and tax credits, debt and household finances. There had been an increased need for support for debt advice and benefit applications as more people seek financial help. She said that the core service in Witham had recorded over £132,000 of benefit income for their clients.

During the presentation Councillor J.C. Coleman returned to the Council Chamber.

Members understood the importance of a trusted service and how the problems could be complex. Kathy explained that she would like to get another face to face drop in session in Witham and hoped to expand the Law Clinic which had been set up in the south of the county. In answer to a question she explained that bereavement was challenging and raised lots of issues.

The Chairman then suggested that the item on CA grant aid be brought forward.

RESOLVED That the item of Citizens Advice grant aid be considered next.

43. **GRANT AID REQUEST – CITIZENS ADVICE**

Members were asked to reconsider the Citizens Advice grant application and to consider awarding the remaining £5,000.

¹ The presentation has been sent to all Members of the Town Council for information.

Members agreed to support and award the remaining grant.

RESOLVED That the remaining £5,000 be awarded to Citizens Advice to give debt advice to the people of Witham.

The Chairman thanked Kathy Kentish for her attending the Meeting and her presentation.

Councillor P. Barlow left the Council Chamber.

44. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk explained that the Councillor Grant Scheme was now in place with £500 for each Member to award and that the first application had been approved.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

45. BUS SERVICE

Correspondence was received from Dame Priti Patel, MP and an email from Essex County Council.

RESOLVED That the correspondence be received and noted.

46. WITHAM TRAIN CRASH

A Motion Request Form was received from Councillor Jack Robertson concerning a memorial for the anniversary of the Witham Train Crash. He said that there was no commemoration of the disaster at the railway station.

Members fully endorsed the idea and the Town Clerk said that she had approached Greater Anglia but no response had been received. Members thought a suitable plaque could be installed on the history board at the station.

RESOLVED That the viability of placing a memorial plaque to the 1905 Witham rail disaster be investigated and a small ceremony/unveiling on the 120th anniversary on 1st September 2025.

RESOLVED That a sum of £500 be put into next year's budget to cover the cost of a suitable plaque.

47. GRANT AID REQUESTS

(a) **Tiny Treble Events**

A grant aid request was received from Tiny Treble Event.

Members noted that the grant would pay for a Father Christmas but it was understood that each child would have to pay £5 to see him. It was understood that any profits from the event would be donated to charity.

Members were concerned that this application did not meet the Town Council's criteria and noted that the not for profit organisation had only just been set up.

RESOLVED That the Town Council declined to give a grant at this time as the application did not meet its criteria but once Tiny Treble Events was more established a future grant would be considered.

(b) **Popcorn**

Members noted that despite requests no further information has been received from Popcorn regarding the number of Witham residents who attended their events.

RESOLVED That the lack of response be noted.

In view of the time it was agreed that the following items on the Agenda would be considered at the next Community Committee Meeting – Agenda Items 12 – Events Update, 13 – Street Warden’s Report, 15 - Social Media, 16 - Exclusion of the Press and Public, and 17 – Information Centre.

48. COMMUNITY COMMITTEE INCOME, EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET REPORT

The Community Committee Income and Expenditure report for the period up to 30th September 2024 was received.

In answer to a question the Town Clerk explained that she was confident that the projected spend would meet the budget spend.

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

In view of the time it was agreed to suspend Standing Orders.

RESOLVED That Standing Order 3x be suspended so that business could continue.

49. COMMUNITY COMMITTEE BUDGET 2025/2026

A draft Community Committee Budget for 2025/2026 was received.

It was explained that there had been a Business Planning Meeting where all the budgets had been considered for the next financial year. Members needed to consider this budget and raise any issues. Once all the budgets were considered by their Committees they would be taken to the Estimates Meeting on 17th December 2024 and to be finally agreed by Town Council on 7th January 2025.

Members commented on the large budgets for certain events yet there had been no discussion regarding dates or ideas, citing in particular the Music Event/VE Day. It was agreed that proper thought should be given as to how events could be linked into major historical events and this should be discussed.

The Chairman said that these were draft proposals which would go to Estimates.

It was agreed that £500 be put into the budget for the proposed plaque at the railway station.

RESOLVED That the amended budget be approved.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 9.48 p.m.

Councillor L. Barlow
Chairman

NS/GK/14.11.2024