

WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Wednesday 15 March 2017

At the Forty-fourth ANNUAL TOWN MEETING held in the Corn Exchange, Witney at 7.30pm on the above date

Present

Town Mayor: Councillor C Holliday

Councillors:	Dr S E Bartington	H B Eaglestone
	A K Beames	D S T Enright
	C Brown	T J Morris
	H W Chirgwin	L M Price
	Mrs B J Churchill	Mrs C E Reynolds
	P J Dorward	D Temple
	J Doughty	C K Woodward

Officers:	Town Clerk	Communications Officer
	Responsible Finance Officer	Bookings Administrator
	Operations and Estates Officer	Administrative Assistant
	Democratic Services Officer	Burial Administrator

Representing Thames Valley Police: Inspector Steve Hookham
P.C Chris Cochrane

Representing Healthwatch Oxfordshire Rosalind Pearce

Representatives from the following organisations:

Volunteer Link Up
Witney Woodland Volunteers
Lower Windrush Valley Project
Witney Model Club
Witney Community Transport
Citizens Advice Bureau

42 Members of the public/ 1 member of the press

1. INTRODUCTION

The Town Mayor welcomed the public to the meeting and thanked everyone for coming. He also thanked the Windrush Flower Arranging Group for the floral displays which would be raffled later, and the Burwell Community Gardeners for providing refreshments.

Each Councillor introduced himself and explained which committees they sat on.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for his absence was received from Cllr A D Harvey.

3. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2016, copies of which were available at the meeting, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 9th March 2016 to be discussed at the meeting.

5. **THAMES VALLEY POLICE**

Inspector Hookham introduced himself and explained that he had only been in post for a couple of weeks. West Oxfordshire and Witney was a nice place to be and crime was reducing. There were changes coming forward but neighbourhood policing would still be geographically sited. He handed over to PC Cochrane to deliver some statistics on crime.

P C Cochrane introduced himself and said that, originally from Milton Keynes, he had also had to learn about the town. He enjoyed working here and the police were working with the Council and other agencies. He presented some year to date crime figures for the Thames Valley as a whole and Witney as an independent town as follows:-

Thames Valley (Whole)	Witney (standing alone)
Overall crime up by 7%	Overall crime down by 9%
Violent crime up by 8%	Violent Crime down by 21%
Break ins in outbuildings up by 7%	Break ins in outbuildings down by 59%
Drugs down by 1%	Drugs down by 55%
Shoplifting up by 13%	Shoplifting down by 5%
Theft from a person down by 12%	Theft from a person up by 2%

The police invited questions from a member of the public.

Q1. What is the biggest problem that the police have to deal with in the town?

Inspector Hookham replied that non-crime issue took up a lot of police time. However, crime was going down in Witney. He understood that cycling on pavements was a concern and they did not want to take their eye off the ball on local issues.

P C Cochrane added that the police had carried out an afternoon check on cycling on the pavement that week and out of 34 cyclists, 4 were on the pavements and 3 of those were young children (the 4th being their mother). He did understand that when people saw a police uniform further down the road, they tended to dismount!

Q2. Was there any legal restriction on parking in Queen Emma's Dyke and could the police help?

PC Cochrane advised that as far as he knew there were no parking restrictions on that road so unless a parked car was blocking someone's driveway there was nothing the police could do.

Q3. What was happening to Neighbourhood watch? There had been no communication for the past 2 years.

Inspector Hookham replied that this was very much a part of his new role and he had just started reviewing the Neighbourhood Watch programmes. A change of personnel had not helped.

The Mayor thanked the police and invited the public to speak to them after the formal business of the meeting if they had anything else they wished to discuss.

6. **'HEALTHWATCH' – OXFORDSHIRE**

The Mayor welcomed Rosalind Pearce, representing Healthwatch Oxfordshire. She gave a presentation about the organisation which was an independent statutory consumer champion, dealing with health and social care in Oxfordshire.

They listened to the most vulnerable people and could influence those who had the power to make changes. Healthwatch had to receive answers and they scrutinized responses.

This month Healthwatch Oxfordshire was appending the month in Witney – in various locations gathering a snapshot of health and social care. On 30 March they would be running a Voluntary Sector Information Fair, with 23 organisations having stands.

They were also carrying out a survey – there were forms available at the back of the hall for completion.

Questions were invited.

Q1. Please would you make sure that this is well advertised?

Rosalind Pearce gave assurance that both Healthwatch and the events would be advertised.

Q2. What was Healthwatch Oxfordshire's biggest achievement in the last 12 months?

Ms Pearce replied that there was nothing specific to Witney but they had produced 2 reports on discharge and dignity in care and this had changed the way things were done in the NHS.

Q3. What could Healthwatch Oxfordshire do about issues around access to parking at hospitals?

Rosalind Pearce had met with the Oxford University Hospitals Trust and Oxford Health NHS Trust and they were doing their best to try to improve the situation, primarily by trying to arrange services locally.

The Mayor thanked Rosalind for coming to the meeting.

7. SUMMARY REPORT FROM THE TOWN MAYOR ON THE WORK OF THE TOWN COUNCIL SINCE THE LAST ANNUAL TOWN MEETING AND PROJECTS PLANNED FOR THE FUTURE

The Mayor gave a report of the Council's work over the last year and a little about each committee in particular. Reports from the Chairman of each Committee had been circulated to the public attending the meeting.

The Mayor also explained a little about the Neighbourhood led plan and Witney Vision. The next meeting would be held on 22 March in the Corn Exchange and he encouraged everyone to come along.

He invited questions from the public.

Q1. How had the meeting been advertised?

The Mayor replied that it had been in the Letterbox Magazine which was delivered to every household, it had been in the press 3 times and on Council noticeboards as well as social media.

Q2. Could the new noticeboard go outside of the old post office?

This wasn't Town Council land but the District Council could be asked for permission.

Q3. How much input was sought and provided by Witney Town Council towards the formulation of proposals regarding a unitary local authority for Oxfordshire as explained in the document "A New Council for a Better Oxfordshire"? What was the input provided by Witney Town Council? Does Witney Town Council support the "Better Oxfordshire" proposals (please explain the reasons behind the answer)?

The Leader responded to this question, saying that probably every member had a different view on the proposed unitary council and the Council did not support or oppose this.

Q4. How would a local Area Executive Board, as mentioned in the "Better Oxfordshire" proposals, work with Witney Town Council and how will it be ensured that there is no duplication?

The Leader explained that the Council could not explain how local boards would work. They might never happen as any new authority might decide to do things a different way.

Q5. If the “Better Oxfordshire” changes were implemented as proposed, what would be the future purpose of Witney Town Council? Will Witney Town Council be seeking greater devolution of powers, an option mentioned in “Better Oxfordshire” and, if so, what powers would be sought?

The Leader explained that the unitary proposal was merging the county and district levels – the parishes were the grass roots and there would be possible devolution down to parish level. Unfortunately funding did not follow the devolution meaning that council tax would have to be increased. All councillors were volunteers so additional resources would be needed to take on more services.

Mr Thomas thanked the Leader for his responses but he was surprised that the Town Council had not got a plan to come to a view on the unitary proposal. The Leader replied that the formal consultation had closed but he was happy to take this forward to Council for a debate. Another member of the public commented that by the time the Town Council had formed a view, it would be too late. The Leader replied that the Council would form a corporate view before any real decisions were made.

A member of the public suggested that the fact that there were less people at the meeting than last year meant that the meeting had not been well publicised. The Leader replied that it had been well publicised.

A member of the public asked why the schools had not been invited to the meeting. Cllr Woodward replied that the Town Council was in the process of setting up a Youth Council and was keen to have young people’s input.

The Town Clerk advised that this meeting was a meeting of registered electors, meaning that only those over 18 years old could participate.

The Mayor added that Witney Vision was keen to engage young people.

Mr Mark Churchill said that he would like to defend the Council. He said that this year there were no contentious issues and this is why the attendance was down. People came to meetings to complain about things.

The Mayor thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and also the Council’s staff. He said that there would be a short break and then invited people to go to speak with the councillors at the Committee tables that would be set up.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.

Chairman