

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

HELD ON MONDAY 1 NOVEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors Gloria Martin (Town Mayor), Liz Jones (Deputy Town Mayor), Peter Hollick (Chairman), Sid Abbot, Wendy Bater, Greg George, and Gladys Sanders

In Attendance: Councillors Lisa Bird, Mark Cant with David Ashlee (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), Michelle Collings (HSHAZ Manager, remotely), Annette Clynes (Town Centre Services Officer, remotely), Lisa Stephens (Cultural Services Manager, remotely), Gill Peck (Youth and Community Manager, remotely), Gina Thanky (Events Officer, remotely) and Ian Reed (Democratic Services Manager)

Apologies: Councillors Pam Ghent and Cameron Restall

Public: Nil

161. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Community Services Committee held on 6 September 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

162. SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no specific declarations of interest

163. PRESENTATIONS

The Committee received presentations from the following bodies on the services they provide to the town of Dunstable.

- (i) Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC) – Cliff Andrews (remotely)
- (ii) Town Guides – Kay Kempster (remotely)

After the presentations, members of the Committee had the opportunity to ask the presenters questions about their services and how they benefitted the residents of Dunstable.

The Chairman thanked the two representatives for their presentations

164. DUNSTABLE TOWN CENTRE SERVICES

The Town Centre Services Officer updated the Committee on Town Centre Services including, vacancy rates, Middle Row Markets and partnership working.

It was noted that Ashton Square Toilets had once again been entered in the national Loo of Year competition and for the second year had received a Platinum Award. The Ranger Service was praised for the high level of service provided.

Town Centre Vacancy Rate

It was noted that the vacancy rate count had been undertaken in July 2021. There were 28 vacant units; a vacancy rate of 11.07% was recorded compared with the previous count of 13.04%. Members requested that this achievement be promoted on the Council's social media pages.

Town Centre

Twilight Christmas Markets will take place on Friday 10 December, Saturday 11 December, and Sunday 12 December with the market building on the success of last years with additional Christmas lights, stalls, a free Carousel ride for children and entertainers.

Middle Row Markets were being used to hold small family activities to promote HSHAZ community engagement.

Partnership Working

The shop front scheme has supported 21 shops and there was funding for one more shop. After the success of the Festival of Archaeology Officers continued to work closely with the Quadrant Shopping Centre and Central Bedfordshire Libraries

Welcome Back Fund

An update report was received. It was noted Welcome Back Wardens were working to support Middle Row markets up to Christmas 2021.

Christmas Lights

Orders had been placed for new Christmas lights in Ashton Square and Church Street. The Committee noted this was part of a scheme to add lights each year to the lighting scheme along High Street, West Street and Queensway. It was further noted that some of the lights were of a bespoke design and orders were having to be imported so they might not arrive to the end of the month. All other decorations had been fitted including the new tree decorations in Ashton Square and Church Street. The Ashton Square tree would arrive on 17 November with new lights and would be dressed ready for the Torchlight event on 26 November.

Members asked questions on the following:

- Location of planters in Ashton Square – the Committee was advised their siting had not affected the markets.
- Market rubbish collection and disposal.
- The potential life of the artificial grass bear and squirrel – It was reported they had a guarantee from the manufacturers to last for ten years.

165. OLDER PEOPLE'S SERVICES

The Good Companions Club continued to do well. The Committee received a report on its activities and noted that arrangements for Christmas were being worked on. At the request of the users the club times had been reviewed but they had decided to keep the existing hours of opening.

The Creasey Park Community Football Centre lunch club re-opened on 1 July with 21 members returning. From 8 September the lunch club would be held on a Wednesday. The Creasey Park Community Football Centre Lunch Club had an average of 24 users attending each week. Activities had been arranged in late summer and autumn. Plans for Christmas activities were well underway.

The arrangements for Coffee mornings at Grove Corner were doing well. Creasey Park Community Football Centre had arranged a Rock and Roll event on 3 November with almost all tickets sold.

The Mayor expressed her wish to be invited to some or all of the Christmas activities being organised. It was confirmed this would be organised.

All the officers involved in the service were thanked for their work by the Committee.

166. GROVE CORNER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Grove Corner

Further to the last Committee report Grove Corner had received 335 visits from young people between 17 May and 20 August. Pokémon had received 1,076 visits from young people in the same time period.

Youth Engagement

Junior Youth Group had received CPR training. The gaming suite was proving to be very popular.

School Engagement

Officers had been working in partnership with Ringcraft Boxing to deliver a project called Wellbeing Warriors.

Community Engagement

It was noted officers had organised two litter picks in the Beecroft and Downside area and more litter picking events would be held in other wards in Dunstable.

All officers involved in the services were thanked for their work by the Committee

167. PRIORY HOUSE

Customers had responded well to changes in Covid safety measures at Priory House. The staff felt safe in their working environment. A comment was made that the removal of screens around the till areas in the Tea Rooms and Gift Shop was a premature move because Covid - 19 levels were still high. Officers assured members that the ongoing Covid-19 situation was being carefully monitored.

Events

The Committee noted the introduction of a number of new workshop style events for Christmas both for adults and children. Members made comments on the cost and the range of the activities. It was confirmed that the Christmas events at Priory House would feature Father Christmas in 2023.

The Committee was provided with a comparison of Priory House takings as of 30 September 2021. Income was only 6% down against the first two quarters of 2019/2020. Additional income was due to sale of chutneys and jams and catering income from functions. It was also noted the income from the shop was 20% up against the first two quarters of 2019/2020. This was due to new stock ranges such as Frenchic Paint, more regular sales, and improved marketing.

168. EVENTS AND MARKETING

Events Programme 2021 - Review

Further to the report made at the last Committee meeting (Minute 130 refers), the Committee received a report on the following events: Around the World, Priory Pictures, and Priory Proms in the Park.

Future Events – Planning and Development

Winter Lights Festival – from 24 November

Members were given details about the launch of the Winter Light Festival which would be launched on Wednesday 24 November at 6pm. The lights installation would be in place from Wednesday 24 November to Friday 7 January 2022 and would be on every day from dusk until 11 pm.

Christmas Carols and Torchlight Procession - 29 November

It was reported that nine schools were taking part. The Grove Theatre's pantomime cast from Aladdin would be attending the event and the BBB Group would be providing the lights show finale.

Planning and Development for 2022 Onwards

The Committee considered a table that set out the proposed dates and events for 2022. There was an extensive discussion on the events organised by the Town Council. The majority of the Committee was in favour of a review of events and welcomed the opportunity to look at what events both national and local that the Council would feature. It was noted that for planning and organisational reasons it was too late to significantly change the events for 2022. However, an opportunity to have a review of events for 2023 was welcomed.

- RESOLVED:**
- (i) That the events programme for 2022 as set out in the report be approved
 - (ii) That the Committee supports the setting up of a Working Group to review the events programme for 2023 with its first meeting to be held in January 2022. Its membership to be made up of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and Councillors Wendy Bater, Greg George, and Peter Hollick

169. HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE (HSHAZ)

The Committee was reminded that there were three strands to the HAHAZ scheme as follows:

- Physical interventions
- Cultural Programme/Cultural Consortium
- Community engagement

The High Street Heritage Action Zone Programme Manager reported on key developments' occurring under all the headings. The Committee was advised that the grant applications discussed at the Council meeting on 4 October had been supported pending Historic England's approval. It was now reported that none of the applicants wished to take their applications any further. In relation to Priory House the project team approaches to the repair work and the delivery phase was focused on discussing the results of the investigations. On community engagement the Committee was advised that since May 2021 the Cultural Consortium had been working with Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity (BRCC). Katherine Browne had now been appointed as a co-ordinator for BRCC as it was

the lead responsible body for the Consortium and held the Consortium's funds for the main bid.

170. REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

South Bedfordshire Dial-a-Ride:

Councillor Gloria Martin reported that the organisation was in good health financially. However, it was operationally under threat because its premises and hardstanding facilities at the Old Mill, Dunstable was in the ownership of the Sea Cadets. Dial - a - Ride had received notice to quit because the Cadets had plans for the site. Therefore, unless a suitable site for offices and bus parking could be found the charity could fold.

Dunstable Town Band:

No report

Men in Sheds (MiS)

No report.

The meeting closed at 20.59