

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

HELD ON MONDAY 10 JANUARY 2022

Present: Councillors Gloria Martin (Town Mayor), Liz Jones (Deputy Town Mayor), Peter Hollick (Chairman), Wendy Bater, Pam Ghent, John Gurney and Gladys Sanders

In Attendance: Councillor Lisa Bird (Remotely), David Ashlee (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), Becky Wisbey (Head of Community Services), Michelle Collings (HSHAZ Manager, 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 Sid Abbot, Greg George and Cameron Restall

Public: Nil

1. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Community Services Committee held on 1 November 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2. SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no specific declarations of interest.

3. DUNSTABLE TOWN CENTRE SERVICES

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

Middle Row Markets had been well attended in 2021 with full markets being a regular occurrence. The Committee was advised of the success of the December markets. It was noted the Middle Row Markets would begin again in 2022 with a Mother's Day Market on 26 March.

It was noted that Ashton Square Toilets had once again been entered in the national Loo of Year competition and had received a Platinum Award. It was noted that the toilets stayed open late for the Carols and Torchlight Procession and for the Twilight Market. For 2022 the toilets would be open on Remembrance Sunday. This service would be facilitated by the Ranger Service.

Town Centre

Twilight Christmas Markets took 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. Attendance was good throughout the days even though the weather on the Saturday was poor.

Partnership Working

The shop front scheme has supported 21 shops and there was funding for one more shop. Discussions had taken place with two pharmacies over the opportunity, however there had been very little interest shown by the two shops. It was further reported Olive Gardens had expressed an interest in the last shop front grant.

RESOLVED: (i) That the Olive Gardens in West Street be offered the last shop front grant if the two pharmacies continued to reject the offer of a grant.

(ii) That all staff involved be thanked for their efforts

Welcome Back Fund

An update report was received. It was also reported that additional monies could be released by Central Bedfordshire Council. Activities that could be funded included a land train, Valentine's Celebrations and Mother's Day activities.

Christmas Lights

Orders would be placed for new Christmas lights in Ashton Square and the High Street in April.

4. HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE (HSHAZ)

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

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

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 noted none of the applicants had taken their applications any further. In respect of number 4 High Street South, Historic England were keen to support the identified work at a higher rate subject to completion by 17 March 2022. In relation to Priory House the works were subject to delay; it was now hoped that a planning application would be submitted by end of January 2022. Therefore, it was anticipated site work would commence in May 2022. The Committee was aware that the Cultural Programme was led by the Consortium and it had had a very positive start. The first major activity was The Dunstable in Winter Art Trail, which had been launched by the Town Mayor.

5. 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 the postponed Christmas Lunch would be held as early as possible in 2022. The Creasey Park Community Football Centre lunch club continued to do well with a variety of events being held such as Hedgehog Rescue, music, quizzes and bingo.

Officers were working on the Big Lunch event to be held on Tuesday 31 May 2022, which would have a Platinum Jubilee theme.

6. GROVE CORNER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Grove Corner

Further to the last Committee report, Grove Corner had received 318 visits from young people between 18 October to 9 December. Pokémon was still popular and numbers continued to increase.

Youth Engagement

Junior Youth Group had received CPR training. The young people had also received presentations on sexual health and craft sessions. Also a silent disco Christmas Party had been held on Friday 3 December

School Engagement

Officers had been working in partnership with Central Bedfordshire College. Officers were also discussing introducing The Good, The Bad and The Ugly project at Priory Academy during the spring term. Following comments from Members of the Committee it was agreed all Members of the Council would be advised about the event.

Community Engagement

It was noted officers had worked with Friends of Dunstable Cemetery, which had seen an increase in numbers. Also arts, crafts and games had been organised at the Twilight Christmas market and a free family fun workshop on Friday 17 December at Creasey Park Community Football Centre with 20 children plus parents attending.

7. PRIORY HOUSE

Tourist Information Centre and Retail Outlet

The Committee received an update report on promotion of the gift shop. The Christmas stock sold very well. The Christmas pet stock had been very popular as well. To increase trade the gift shop was open late on Fridays in December.

The Jacobean Room

There were 12 confirmed weddings for 2022. Officers expected the numbers to increase. The wedding fayres had been successful in promoting the wedding arrangements.

Events

The Committee noted the wreath workshops were extremely successful. All tickets sold for both events. More workshops were planned all year round. The next one planned was for Mother's Day. The other craft events and Elf workshop were very successful.

8. EVENTS

Past Events

The Committee considered a report on the following events:

(i) Christmas Carols and Torchlight Procession - it was agreed this was a very successful event with attendances estimated at 1,500. The event was enhanced with the Christmas Market down Middle Row.

(ii) Winter Lights Festival - The feedback on social media had included a number of negative

comments. However, in evaluating the festival the Committee noted the requirements of the performances meant the bandstand and temporary staging would not have been appropriate. Also, since the launch event officers in Grove House have seen many members of the public visiting the Grove House Gardens to see the lights.

Event Review Committee

At the November Committee meeting it was agreed by the Committee that a Working Group be setup to review the events programme. The Working Group would evaluate the success and viability of the current events programme.

9. PERFORMANCE AREA REFURBISHMENT

The Committee considered a report on the possible refurbishment of the performance area in Grove House Gardens. It was noted the refurbishment plans were included in the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-2023 as a key objective. It was estimated the cost of works would be in the region of £34,000 with up to £29,000 being required from the General Reserve.

Following a discussion on the works required to refurbish the performance area it was noted that the proposed works was a key objective of the Corporate Plan to be completed by March 2022. However, it was also pointed out that while the condition of the structure could be better it was still in functional order and there were no health and safety implications that would make it a priority project at this time.

RESOLVED: That at this time no further action be taken to progress the refurbishment of the performance area in Grove House Gardens.

10. WELCOME SIGNS

The Committee considered a report inviting it to agree a design to replace the 'Welcome to Dunstable' gateway signs. It was noted there were four signs that had been repaired in 2015 at a cost of over £4,000. The signs were once again showing significant damage and disrepair. The Committee was presented with proposals to replace the signs with metal posts and a sheet metal sign. They were being recommended by officers as they were cost effective to purchase, durable and easy to clean. The Committee was presented with a number of design options. The Committee was in favour of the silhouette art of landmarks of the town. The Committee then discussed the symbols to be included on the signs.

RESOLVED: That the welcome signs be replaced as discussed by the Committee at a cost of approximately £2,308 and the final silhouette artwork be approved by the Chairman of the Committee in conjunction with the Head of Community Services.

11. BUDGET REPORT

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive presented the budget proposals for 2022/23. He explained that this had not changed significantly since the draft budget had been presented to Members and if the Community Services budget, as presented in the report, was adopted, it could be accommodated within the anticipated proposed increase in council tax charge.

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee recommend the draft Community Services budget as presented with no amendments or further recommendations to the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

12. 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 under a Memorandum of Agreement with the Sea Cadets. Dial- a - ride had now received notice to quit because the Cadets had plans for the site. Although Dial-a Ride was not now required to move until April, there was still an immediacy to find suitable premises including secure parking for nine minibuses.

Dunstable Town Band:

No report.

Men in Sheds (MiS)

Councillor John Gurney made the following report;

Men in Sheds is in a state of transition because of the sudden resignation of Martin Young the founding chairman and a trustee. A week later he left as member altogether. I have been appointed Chairman by the remaining trustees because the Dunstable MiS constitution requires the three main officers to be trustees. The Trustees have set an immediate plan into action, which includes involving more members in the training on the various tools. Ideally, by the time of the AGM in the Spring a new chairman will be elected. There are currently 29 members. I am especially looking forward to the shed being refurbished in 2022. The bulk of the shed's funds, just over £10,000, will be spent on the refurbishment. The Christmas Market brought in £177.95.

The meeting closed at 20.36