

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

MEETING OF FULL COUNCIL

MONDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2023

OLD PALACE LODGE

Purpose of Report: For Members to consider two motions submitted.
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1 Motion From Councillor John Gurney

1.1 *In light of a town centre hotel recently preventing any member of the general public from booking or casually using any of its rooms or other facilities for at least the next 6 months; please will this Council contact all hotels and guest houses in Dunstable to ask they do not accept a block booking for all of their rooms for a period lasting more than 3 months, nor prevent the general public from using any of their facilities such as a bar, restaurant or meeting rooms.*

1.2 *If hotels prevent the general public from using their facilities, it has a knock-on effect for all the other businesses and trade in Dunstable because visiting travellers, whether on business or to see friends or family, who stay at hotels, often visit nearby restaurants, pubs, shops and sports facilities.*

2 Motion from Councillor Liz Jones

2.1 *I propose that the Council agree the following statement:*

2.2 *Being located on the crossing of two main historic routes, Dunstable has a proud history of welcoming people from far and wide. This Council values all of its residents. We welcome all new residents and will encourage and support them to become active members of the community wherever possible.*

2.3 *The Council is committed to supporting local businesses and developing a thriving high street. The Council hopes that the Old Palace Lodge will be returned to its normal use once it is economically viable to do so.*

3 Background

3.1 The Home Office are intending to use the Old Palace Lodge in Dunstable as temporary accommodation for asylum seekers. At present no residents have arrived at the Old Palace Lodge. No information has so far been provided as to who will be placed there or what arrangements will be put in place to support them.

3.2 The Town Council was not consulted about the placement and has no statutory role in the decision-making process.

3.3 Officers are only aware of two remaining hotels within Dunstable. Guest Houses do not fall in the category being used by the Home Office.

3.4 Officers are exploring ways of working with the contractor managing the site to identify opportunities to engage with residents and to identify projects which would

be of mutual benefit once information is available about when residents will arrive and what their needs may be.

4 Public Engagement

- 4.1 The Home Office are responsible for the decision to use the Old Palace Lodge, and for any public engagement. Andrew Selous MP is holding a public meeting in the Priory Church from 19:30 on Thursday 16 February 2023. The meeting will be chaired by the Mayor Councillor Liz Jones, with representatives attending from Bedfordshire Police and the Old Palace Lodge. This meeting will provide the opportunity for any questions about the use of the Old Palace Lodge to be asked.

5 Legal Considerations

- 5.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force in 2010 requires Members to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 because of any of the protected characteristics (of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation). The Duty also requires members to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a characteristic and those who don't, and to foster good relations between people who share a characteristic and those who don't.
- 5.2 In making decisions and in its other day-to-day activities (the Council) should consciously consider the need to do the things set out in the general equality duty: eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.
- 5.3 The Act says that fostering good relations involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to tackle prejudice, and promote understanding (**s.149(5)**).
- 5.4 To 'have due regard' means that in making decisions and in its other day-to-day activities the Council must consciously consider the need to do the things set out in the general equality duty: eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.¹

6 AUTHOR

- 6.1 Paul Hodson – Town Clerk and Chief Executive
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¹: Equality and Human Rights Commission, (Updated February 2021), *Technical guidance on the public sector equality duty England*