

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Annual Town Meeting

held on Monday 24 March 2025 from 7:00 PM

Present: Councillors Louise O’Riordan (Town Mayor) (in the Chair); Sally Kimondo (Deputy Town Mayor); Mr P Hodson (Town Clerk and Chief Executive) and 43 electors of the Parish of Dunstable, 13 of whom were elected representatives of the Town Council

Apologies:

1 WELCOME

The Town Mayor welcomed electors to the 40th Dunstable Town Meeting and explained its purpose.

2 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence

3 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Town Meeting held on 25 March 2024 were approved as an accurate record and the Town Mayor signed the minutes as a correct record.

4 ADDITIONAL ITEM ON THE AGENDA

Thea Watts, regional manager for the South of England and Wales from Cash Access UK joined the meeting via Teams to provide electors of Dunstable with information regarding the closure of Santander Bank, the last remaining bank in Dunstable. She also explained the efforts of Cash Access UK to establish a Banking Hub within Dunstable. Electors were encouraged to ask questions and the following was advised:

It was confirmed that as Santander were the last bank within Dunstable, it would not be able to close until a banking hub had been established in its place to ensure the continuation of services. Cash Access UK get 12 months from the announcement to set up a hub for the residents of Dunstable and would need to find a suitable location. It was advised that Cash Access UK would reach out to the five largest market share banks in the local area to offer them a day in the hub. Given that Santander would be the last branch to close, it would be likely that a community banker from Santander, would be present on one of the five days, with the other four days allocated to the next largest market share banks locally. It was noted that Cash Access UK's current working hours are Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm. However, trials have been conducted for a Saturday morning banking hub shift in a few locations.

Thea mentioned that this need is recognised, but initially, the banking hub will operate Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm. The services provided within the banking hub would vary from bank to bank, on Cash Access UK's website, under the banking section, residents would be able to select their local bank to see exactly which services would be available at the banking hub for that specific bank.

Thea advised that Dunstable had been designated as requiring a 'Class A Hub', which would include an ATM machine. Cash Access UK would need to identify a suitable location on the high street that would be easily accessible to ensure inclusivity, ideally with nearby parking facilities. Following the announcement, a team from Cash Access UK would visit the local community to identify the most suitable property for the hub. It was noted that, unfortunately, some locations may not have a suitable site for the hub. In such cases, a temporary location would be considered to ensure that services are available for residents. It was advised that a banking hub whether this be permanent or temporary would be in within the year.

It was noted that visits to the local community to provide some community events would happen. Behind the scenes both temporary and permanent project managers would constantly be working with others to gain knowledge and information regarding the best location for the hub. It was also advised that any local information and recommendations at those community events would be extremely helpful to finding the best location.

It was advised that Cash Access UK must employ a member who would be postmaster trained in order to run a banking hub; however, the hub would not provide post office services such as parcels and foreign currency exchange. The postmaster would solely manage the banking hub, handling cash and cheques on site etc.

It was advised that cost could sometimes be a barrier to finding a location for a banking hub, as there was budgets allocated for each location.

It was advised that the banking hub would primarily be a walk-in service; however, bookings may be required for more complex cases that need a longer time with the banker. The average appointment would be around 15 minutes, allowing the walk-in service to be feasible with a small wait time.

5 BRIEFING FROM DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

Jack Adams-Rimmer from Dunstable Town Council's Community Services, Youth and Community team delivered a briefing on the Town Council's collaboration with voluntary organisations and the advantages those partnerships bring to the community.

Electors were encouraged to ask questions, and the following information was provided: The Youth and Community Team support Dunstable in Bloom in delivering Wheely Fantastic, a wheelbarrow competition where various businesses, schools, and individuals can plant a wheelbarrow. If a new group entered the competition, a wheelbarrow would be provided; however, reusing wheelbarrows is preferred.

The Detached Team of the Youth and Community Team attempt to engage with the young people who frequently hang about the local area. However, it was noted that engaging with youths on bikes could be challenging, as their identities are sometimes unknown, or they may be unwilling to engage. The team often provide the local police with information where they can.

Grant Max, the Community Inspector noted this increasing issue which unfortunately spikes during the nice weather months. It was advised that the police make every effort to identify these youths and address the matter appropriately where possible. It was also noted that the police had an operation in place called 'Operation Sky Tree', which involves using resources such as traffic cameras and drones to target those individuals however, Grant highlighted the importance on reporting these issues and the benefits it had for the police.

6 BRIEFING FROM DUNSTABLE FOODBANK

Esther Omotayo from Dunstable Foodbank delivered a presentation to the electors of Dunstable, emphasising the significance of the Foodbank to the local community and detailing how the community could offer support.

Electors asked questions regarding the presentation. Unfortunately, the Foodbank struggle to receive funding for very specific projects, as some funders prefer to support new initiatives rather than existing ones.

7 BRIEFING FROM BEDFORDSHIRE RURAL COMMUNITIES CHARITY

Katherine Brown from Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity highlighted the significance of the local charity to the community and detailed the services they provide throughout the Town.

8 BRIEFING FROM BEDS AND LUTON COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Karen Perkins from Beds and Luton Community Foundation detailed the significant contributions of the Community Foundation to local voluntary groups, highlighting how the Foundation provides essential funding to support the delivery of services and address the needs of residents in Dunstable.

Electors asked questions in relation to the presentation and the following was advised; Karen advised that the Beds and Luton Community Foundation would be there to help all foundations and charities to have a fair chance at securing successful funding. Regular meet the funders sessions are held to help foundations and charities to get the advice they would need. It was advised that one off events could be helped with the funding available so long as it brings the community together.

9 BRIEFING FROM COMMUNITY VOLUNTARY SERVICE

John Kane from Citizens Advice delivered a presentation to the electors of Dunstable outlining the services that Citizens Advice offer to the local community. It was advised they are not situated within the Central Bedfordshire Leisure Centre.

Electors asked questions in relation to the presentation and the following was advised; advisors within Citizens Advice had to undertake 6 months' worth of training before they become an official advisor. John advised that the main funding for Citizens Advice comes from Central Bedfordshire Council. A small amount of funding came from Dunstable Town Council and also a small amount came from the

FoodBank in order to provide their administrative services.

9 BRIEFING FROM OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Martin Trinder from Community Voluntary Service

10 QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS FROM ELECTORS AND BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES

Electors were encouraged to ask questions to the panel.

A resident would like to know what the latest situation is regarding Moore's and Tilley's former shops.

ACTION:

A resident asked:

1- How could working together, firstly, establish the true concerns and needs of the Town Centre, in a way that is led by data rather than the rather informal methods currently being drawn on?

2- If it was established that there was a need and commitment to support establishing a traders association, hopefully with the help and expertise of an organisation such as Save the High Street, how could everyone work together build a group that would work for the Town, where there are so many independent businesses, and to find a way to fund such activities?

ACTION:

11 BRIEFING FROM GATHERWELL

Carol O'Neill of Gatherwell presented electors with a brief introduction on how the Town Council will be launching the Dunstable Community Lottery, to commemorate their 40th anniversary, focusing on how community groups can participate.

The Town Mayor thanked everyone for their attendance and participation and closed the meeting at 20:25.

12 Date of the next meeting - Monday 23 March 2026 at 7.00 pm

The meeting closed at 9:00 PM

