

## **DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL**

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**HELD ON MONDAY 3 MARCH 2025 FROM 7:00 PM**

**Present:** Councillors Matthew Neall (Vice-Chair) (in the chair), Louise O’Riordan (Town Mayor), Sally Kimondo (Deputy Town Mayor), Robert Blennerhassett, Wendy Bater, Gregory Alderman and Nicholas Kotarski.

**In Attendance:** Councillor Richard Attwell, Paul Hodson (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), Georgia Pearson (Democratic Services Manager), Gill Peck (Youth and Community Manager) and Lisa Stephens (Cultural Services Manager).

**In Attendance (Remotely):** Councillors Liz Jones (Chair) and Peter Hollick, Annette Clynes (Town Centre Manager) and Becky Wisbey (Head of Community Services).

**Public:** Nil

#### **057/25 - Apologies for Absence**

Councillors Trevor Adams and Mark Davis and Gina Thanky (Events Officer).

Councillor Jones gave apologies for not being able to attend and chair her last Community Services Committee of the municipal year in person. Councillor Jones expressed her gratitude to all councillors and officers for their support, valued contributions and collaborative approach in ensuring that the town and its residents continue to receive excellent service across the various events, programmes, and services provided by the Council.

#### **058/25 - Declarations of Interest**

There were no specific declarations of interest.

#### **059/25 - Public Question Time**

There were no questions from the public.

#### **060/25 - To agree the minutes of the meeting of the meeting of 6 January 2025 as an accurate record**

The minutes of the meetings of the Community Services Committee held on 6 January 2025 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chair.

#### **061/25 - Town Centre Services**

The Town Centre Manager highlighted the key points of the report to members.

The Town Ranger and Town Centre team were proud to have achieved multiple

awards at the Loo of the Year Awards 2025 including Platinum Award, Period Dignity Award, Washroom Technician Award, Roll of Honour and the Premier League Award.

It was noted that since the report was written 30 stalls had been booked for the first market of the year on 29 March 2025, with the hope that this number would increase to approximately 35 stalls over the coming weeks.

The Town Centre Manager and the Events Officer had successfully secured the support of Howdens Insurance for the Young Traders Market. Howdens Insurance has generously agreed to sponsor 20 traders by providing them with free stalls on 5 July 2025.

Members were informed that the next Shop Watch would take place on 25 March 2025, which would be the 25<sup>th</sup> meeting after restarting after Covid.

The bunting for Middle Row had been ordered, featuring the same design as seen on the High Street. The installation was scheduled to take place in mid-March.

There was significant effort put into planning the art display for the festoons. Unfortunately, due to sudden illness the commissioned artists had to pull out, giving the Town Centre Manager only a few weeks to arrange another installation. The Town Centre Manager had been collaborating with Lamps and Tubes, and it was confirmed that the installation would take place on Middle Row in March 2025.

Councillor Hollick inquired about the vacancy rates for Ashton Square and Middle Row, noting that the empty units were owned by Central Bedfordshire Council. There had been no updates. However, Councillor Jones advised that the Dunstable Joint Committee was scheduled to provide an update at the next meeting at the end of March.

## **062/25 - Events**

The Cultural Services Manager summarised the key points in the report.

Members were informed that the lineup for Dunstable Live had been finalised, and the headliner for Party in the Park had been booked. The announcement of this act would be made in the April edition of Talk of the Town.

It was previously requested that officers investigate the possibility of charging an entry fee for the exhibitors at the Classic Motor Rally. A questionnaire had been sent to exhibitors and the results indicated that 40% would not pay to attend and show their cars. After reviewing the comments from the 40% who said no, it was found that if the Council made this a chargeable event, the event would lose around 100 cars based on the 40% who would no longer attend.

On Saturday 15 February, an 'Open Door/Meet the Manager' event was held at Grove Theatre as part of the UKSPF Calling Dunstable project. The event was attended by representatives from Grove Theatre, Dunstable Town Council, Calling Dunstable, NGYT and the BBB group. The aim was to foster more positive

relationships between Grove Theatre and local performers and groups. Officers reported that the event was highly successful, featuring a tour of the building followed by an open and honest conversation. The event was expected to continue in the future, building on the relationships established.

Members were informed that Calling Dunstable would be hosting a Community Arts Day on Sunday 9 March 2025, at Grove Theatre. The event was to feature a variety of workshops, including dance, puppetry, singing, and piano lessons, finishing with a finale performance. Members were encouraged to attend, and seats had been allocated for all members.

Members received a verbal update regarding the Street Party Grant application to celebrate the 80th anniversary of VE Day. Central Bedfordshire Council had agreed to grant free road closures for anyone in Dunstable wishing to apply and host a street party in celebration of VE Day.

It was proposed, seconded and

**RESOLVED:** To recommend to the Finance and General Purposes Committee to allocate £1,000 from the 2025/26 civic hospitality budget for ten street parties to mark the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE Day within Dunstable.

### **063/25 - Cultural Services Project UKSPF - Phase 2 Report**

The Cultural Services Manager covered this report within the previous Agenda item.

### **064/25 - Priory House**

The Cultural Services Manager summarised the report provided to members and highlighted key information.

Councillor Hollick raised concerns about the delay in the works at Priory House, expressing disappointment over the postponed opening times and potential additional costs. The Head of Community Services informed members that Historic England was currently engaged in serious internal discussions regarding the delays presented by Central Bedfordshire Council's planning processes. The Town Council was working to arrange a meeting with Central Bedfordshire Council's planning officers and Historic England by the end of the month to find a solution to the current hold ups affecting the works at Priory House.

The Town Mayor inquired about the demographic profile of shop item sales and how these sales might be impacted by moving online. It was noted that the demographic has changed significantly and become more diverse. The Cultural Services Manager regularly consults with frequent customers about the shop stock, asking if there are items that are not selling well or things they would like to see more of. Consideration is also given to what stock might appeal to the audience they are not currently reaching. Regarding the transition to online sales, a telephone sales option was being offered, which should not significantly affect sales. Promotions were currently in place to inform regular customers that stock would be moving to Grove House and

online, ensuring they were aware that items would still be available.

### **065/25 - Grove Corner and Community Engagement**

Members noted the report provided which was summarised by the Youth and Community Manager.

Members noted that since the report was written, the attendance figures for the February Half Term Activities were as follows: the swim party was attended by 23 young people, a movie afternoon attended by 10 young people, bowling attended by seven young people, and a games and sports session attended by 16 young people.

Since Monday 17 February, Bennetts Splash Café and Community Hub had been integrated into the Community Services Department. This change provided the service with broader team support and access to expertise in delivering community services within a community development framework and approach. Members were informed that a more detailed report would be presented at the next committee meeting.

Officers had submitted the license application for the Community Lottery and were looking to Launch this at the Annual Council Meeting in May 2025. Working with the project planning guidance from Gatherwell, the Community Engagement Team was compiling a list of good causes to invite to sign up.

### **066/25 - Older Peoples' Services**

The Youth and Community Manager summarised the report provided to members.

It was agreed that the discussion on item 2 would be deferred to a confidential session at the end of the meeting.

Members noted that the over 55s Breakfast Club at Bennetts Café aimed to encourage attendees to become members. The membership fee was £5 per week, which covers food and any speakers or games that may be organised. This project targeted a different group of older individuals who were unable to participate in other services offered.

Due to the increasing popularity of the Rock and Roll event, it was noted that this event would now be held four times a year instead of the current three.

### **067/25 - Reports from Outside Bodies**

#### **South Beds Dial-a-Ride Management Committee - Cllr Peter Hollick**

Councillor Hollick advised members that a new bus had been acquired which was hoped to reduce maintenance costs in the future.

#### **Dunstable Town Band - Cllr Robert Blennerhassett**

Nothing to report.

### Men in Sheds - Cllr Richard Attwell

Councillor Attwell informed members of the Shed were working on a range of items and commissions.

Several new members had joined the shed in recent weeks, including the first female member.

Dunstable Men in Sheds was now a selectable option under the Co-Op Community scheme where loyalty club members can elect a local charity to benefit from shopping there.

It was proposed, seconded and

**RESOLVED:** in terms of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, the following items will be likely to disclose exempt information relating to establishment and contractual matters and therefore, pursuant to the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 the public and press be excluded.

### **066/25.1 - Older Peoples' Services**

Members were provided with a verbal update progress with efforts to ensure the ongoing provision of the Creasey Park Community Football Centre Lunch Club.

**068/25 - Date of the next meeting - Monday 2 June 2025 at 7.00 pm**

**The meeting closed at 8:35 PM**