Dunstable Town Council

Grove House, 76 High Street North, Dunstable, Beds, LU6 1NF

PUBLIC NOTICE OF MEETING

Community Services Committee

Thursday, 29 October 2026

Dear All,

Notice is hereby given of a public meeting of the Community Services Committee to be held at 7:00 PM on Monday, 9 November 2026 in the Council Chamber, Grove House, 76 High Street North.

To view the meeting live or afterwards use this link: livestream. Members of the public and press are also welcome to attend in person. Members of the public may ask a question during the public session, either in person or online via MS Teams. To submit a question, please contact the Council at democratic@dunstable.gov.uk or call 01582 513000 by 4 pm on the Friday immediately before the meeting.

This meeting will be filmed, livestreamed and will be made available for repeated public viewing. If you are seated in the Council Chamber it is likely that the cameras will capture your image. By your presence you are deemed to consent to be filmed, and to the use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting or training purposes.

If you address the committee in person or via Teams, your contribution will be recorded and broadcast, unless this is during a private session, as permitted by the Access to Information provisions.

Paul Hodson

Town Clerk and Chief Executive to Dunstable Town Council

Apologies for Absence

1. Declarations of Interest

2. Public Question Time

3. To agree the minutes of the meeting of 7 September 2026 as an accurate record

To resolve that the minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 7 September 2026, having been circulated, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair (LGA 1972 Schedule 12 para 41).

4. Town Centre Services

5. Christmas Lighting Scheme Decision Report

6. Events

7. Priory House

8. Grove Corner and Community Engagement

9. Older People's Services

10. Service Level Agreement Decision Report

11. Budget Proposals for 2027/28 Report

12. Reports from Outside Bodies

South Beds Dial-a-Ride Management Committee - Councillor Peter Hollick
Dunstable Town Band - Councillor Robert Blennerhassett
Men in Sheds - Councillor Richard Attwell
Dunstable Pride - Councillor Matthew Brennan

13. Exclusion of Public and Press

To RESOLVE that, under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 s.1(2), the public and press be excluded from the remainder of the meeting by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

14. Splash Pad Decision Report *(Exempt)*

15. Staffing Decision Report *(Exempt)*

16. Date of the Next Meeting

Monday 11 January 2027

APPENDIX I — Public Documents

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3. To agree the minutes of the meeting of 7 September 2026 as an accurate record

Community Services Committee-Draft-Minutes.pdf

4. Town Centre Services

4. Town Centre Services.pdf

5. Christmas Lighting Scheme Decision Report

5. Christmas Lighting Scheme Decision Report.pdf

6. Events

6. Events.pdf

7. Priory House

7. Priory House.pdf

8. Grove Corner and Community Engagement

8. Grove Corner and Community Engagement.pdf

9. Older People's Services

9. Older People's Services.pdf

10. Service Level Agreement Decision Report

10. Service Level Agreement Decision Report.pdf
10. Appendix 1 SLA report.pdf

Pending supporting documents

Item 11. Budget Proposals for 2027/28 Report — Report to Follow (no document supplied)

Dunstable Town Council — MINUTES

Community Services Committee — Monday, 7 September 2026

Published: Thursday, 29 October 2026

Attendance

Present: Councillors Gurney (Chair), Adams, Bater, Collins, Hollick (substitute for Blennerhassett), Tamara (substitute for Kimondo)

Apologies: Councillors Alderman, Attwell, Blennerhassett (substituted by Hollick), Davis, Kimondo (substituted by Tamara), Kotarski

Also present: Paul Hodson, Georgia Pearson, Becky Wisbey, Annette Clynes, Gill Peck, Kelley Hallam, Lisa Stephens

Public: None

Apologies for Absence

Councillors, Alderman, Attwell, Blennerhassett (substituted by Hollick), Davis, Kimondo (substituted by Tamara), Kotarski

223/26 Declarations of Interest

There were no specific declarations of interest.

224/26 Public Question Time

There were no questions from the public.

225/26 To agree the minutes of the meeting of the meeting of 1 June 2026 as an accurate record

It was raised that an amendment was required to minute 157/26, to read Bennetts Cafe in place of Priory House.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Community Services Committee held on 1 June 2026 were approved, subject to that amendment, and signed by the Chair.

226/26 Gateway Christmas Lighting Scheme Decision Report

The Town Centre Manager provided an update to members and outlined the options set out in the report for the town Gateway Christmas Lighting Scheme. Members discussed the options in detail.

It was proposed, seconded and,

RESOLVED: To extend the lighting scheme within the existing budget by relocating the additional lights to the entrances to the town centre.

227/26 Town Centre Services

Members were provided with the report and discussed all points in detail.

An update was provided on the Soapbox Derby market held on Saturday. Approximately 21 stalls attended, with traders remaining in the square throughout the event. The event was well attended and successful, with traders experiencing strong sales. Members noted the current booking numbers for forthcoming markets as follows:

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

Heritage Open Day: approximately 26 stalls booked.
United Charities Day: over 37 stalls booked.
10 October Market: approximately 20 stalls booked.
17 October Market: approximately 18 stalls booked.
24 October Halloween Market: approximately 37 stalls booked to date,

Members noted that the Town Ranger Team had undertaken extensive cleaning of the ceilings in the Ashton Square public toilets. Judging for the Loo of the Year was expected to take place before the end of September, with the final grading anticipated by the end of October.

An update was provided on the Young Traders Market. Skye of Country House Treats was recognised as the overall East of England winner.

The Committee noted a slight increase in town centre vacancy rates. Officers advised that this reflected ongoing work with landlords through the Premises of Concern Tasking Group to encourage suitable long-term tenants that would positively contribute to the town centre.

Members congratulated the team on the positivity and inclusivity of market events.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: To give a vote of thanks to Becky, Annette and the team for all they do.

228/26 Service Level Agreement Decision Report

The Youth and Community Manager provided the report to members in detail, highlighting the reasons for supporting the Foodbank via a four year SLA Agreement.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: To enter into a four year Service Level Agreement from budget 4321/303 with Dunstable Foodbank; for £2,000 per year, totalling £8,000 over the four years.

229/26 Grove Corner and Community Engagement

The Youth and Community Manager summarised the report to members.

It was noted that Grove Corner recorded 252 visits by young people between May and August. Attendance at Pokémon and SEND-friendly sessions remained strong, generating 156 visits and six new registrations. The summer activities programme for children was reported to have been highly successful, with attendance exceeding previous years at several events. SEND-friendly sessions were introduced and received particularly positive feedback from families, highlighting the value of accessible provision.

Bennetts Splash Café and Community Hub's summer season was reported to be successful, with income between May and July exceeding the previous year by approximately £6,500, supported by favourable weather and strong social media promotion. Members noted ongoing efforts to increase community use of the café during the off-season, including discussions with local groups and potential new hirers.

Members were advised that the Action and Adventure Day had attracted 350 attendees, compared with 220 attendees in the previous year and the Art and STEM Day attracted 254 attendees.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: To give a vote of thanks to Gill and the team for all they do for the young people of Dunstable.

230/26 Older People's Services

The Youth and Community Manager summarised the report to members.

It was noted that the Good Companions Club currently had 20 registered members, with approximately 15 attending regularly. Due to the nature of the group and the impact of ill health and bereavements, attendance levels

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

fluctuated. To support future membership and reduce social isolation among older residents, officers had discussed lowering the minimum age for attendance from 75 to 70 years with Central Bedfordshire Council. Members were advised that this change would not affect existing funding arrangements.

An update was provided on the Rock and Roll event held in July, which featured live music from a local performer. Members were advised that the next event was scheduled for later in the month and ticket sales were progressing well.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: To change the age for the Good Companions Club to 70+

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: To give a vote of thanks to Gill and the team for the events put on for the older community

231/26 Events

The Cultural Services Manager summarised the report to members.

Members received a verbal update on the Soapbox Derby, which had taken place the previous weekend. The event attracted a larger audience than in the previous year and featured participation from local charities, schools, scouts and businesses. Feedback had been exceptionally positive and officers hoped to expand participation further in future years. 12 teams had entered, but unfortunately one kart failed scrutineering and could not participate.

The Classic Motor Rally was reported to have been extremely successful, attracting the highest number of vehicle applications to date and an estimated 6,000 attendees. Dunstable Live and Party in the Park were both very well attended despite hot weather conditions. Attendance at the Sunday Band Concerts exceeded expectations despite periods of exceptionally hot weather.

Councillor Bater advised members that the truck convoy would be returning next year with the hope that it would again coincide with the Classic Motor Rally.

It was further noted that consultation regarding the theme for Dunstable Live 2027 had been undertaken, with "Through the Decades" receiving the highest number of votes and therefore being adopted as the event theme.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: To give a vote of thanks to Gina and the team for a fantastic summer of events with more to come.

232/26 Priory House

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

Members and officers discussed updates regarding Priory House and the ongoing works currently being undertaken.

Visitor numbers and food and drink sales had increased over the summer period, with officers reporting growth in both repeat and new customers. Members heard that public interest in the refurbishment works had generated positive engagement and increased awareness of the venue.

An update was provided on recruitment for the reopening of Priory House. Key posts, including the Catering Manager, were being recruited, with remaining positions scheduled to be advertised later in the year. The aim was for all staff to be in post and trained by December.

Weddings at Grove House continue to perform strongly, with 21 bookings secured.

An update was provided on archaeological discoveries and historic wall paintings uncovered during the project. Members were advised that some features would need to be conserved and protected rather than placed on permanent display. However, opportunities are being explored to interpret and showcase these discoveries through exhibitions, audio-visual displays and guided heritage tours.

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It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: To give a vote of thanks to Lisa and the team for continuing efforts and success for Priory House.

233/26 Corporate Plan Update

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive summarised the report. Members acknowledged and accepted the information provided against the corporate plan as well as the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) provided within appendix 2 of the report.

Members noted that, with just over a year remaining in the current Corporate Plan, progress had been reviewed on projects within the Committee's remit. A number of objectives had already been delivered, including weddings at Grove House, improvements to events infrastructure, and additional services for older residents. Other projects remained on track, while some had not progressed due to factors outside the Council's control.

Members were reminded that KPIs are used to monitor and understand service performance and trends rather than as strict targets, with services continuing to be delivered according to community need.

Members noted that response rates to public surveys, particularly those promoted through social media, had fallen and that officers were exploring alternative ways of gathering resident feedback. Members also received an update on Bennetts Splash Park and Café. Although income had been lower than originally anticipated, the facility continued to provide significant benefits to the community through year-round opening and support for local groups. Officers advised that further opportunities to increase income would be explored while maintaining these community benefits.

234/26 Reports from Outside Bodies

South Beds Dial-a-Ride Management Committee:
Members noted the ongoing issue of Blue Badge eligibility for community transport vehicles. It was noted that differing interpretations exist between local authorities, with some councils permitting the use of Blue Badges on community transport vehicles while others do not. Concerns were raised regarding the practical implications for Dial-a-Ride users, particularly when transporting passengers with mobility issues to appointments, including hospitals outside the area.

Dunstable Town Band:
No update

Men In Sheds:
Dunstable Men In Sheds continued to do well as a group with healthy membership numbers and even a few new recruits. They had been very busy making and selling their items throughout the summer markets, shows and events and had also benefited from a few new commissions. They are extremely grateful to Dunstable Town Council for providing the vital outlet on their market stall to sell their items and promote the group, this had been especially helpful when various major Town Council events had brought them good footfall not only in their sale of goods but also in raising interest and recruiting new members.

Dunstable Pride:
No update

235/26 Date of the Next Meeting

Monday 9 November 2026 at 7pm

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

The meeting closed at 20:57.

Signed: _____

Chair of the Community Services Committee

Date: _____

UNAPPROVED MINUTES

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MONDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2026

TOWN CENTRE SERVICES

Purpose of report: For information

1. MIDDLE ROW MARKETS

1.1. Middle Row Markets has scheduled 27 markets for the year, including 17 event markets. The event markets have consistently achieved high levels of bookings, averaging around 33 stalls, while the standard Middle Row Markets are smaller in scale, with an average of approximately 18 stalls. The Christmas markets are consistently the busiest events of the year, attracting an average of around 43 stalls. Due to the strong demand during the winter season, additional markets have also been added to accommodate increased trader interest and provide further opportunities for local businesses.

1.2. Market bookings to date:

Date	Booking	Event
10 October	24 booked	
17 October	18 booked	
24 October	42 booked	Halloween
14 November	20 booked	
21 November	20 booked	
28 November	18 booked	
10 December	35 booked	Twilight
11 December	42 booked	Twilight
12 December	50 booked	Twilight
19 December	20 booked	

1.3. Event markets are booked for Saturday 24 October - Halloween Market. Thursday 10 December – Twilight. Friday 11 December – Twilight, Saturday 12 December – Twilight. Middle Row Markets last market of the year is Saturday 19 December. Markets will start again on Saturday 6 March 2027 for Mother's Day and an Easter market on 20 March.

2. ASHTON SQUARE TOILETS

2.1. Dunstable Town Council has submitted an application for the Loo of the Year Awards 2026/27. Judging took place at an unannounced time during August and September. Notifications of the award are due at any time.

3. TOWN CENTRE

3.1. The Halloween Market was scheduled to take place on 24 October with 42 stalls booked. However, due to a Yellow Weather Warning and concerns over the forecast conditions, the event had to be significantly reduced, with only 12 traders attending in Middle Row. The free face painting was retained to provide some family entertainment, but the planned Halloween walk-through had to be cancelled due to the weather conditions. The significant reduction in trader numbers demonstrates the direct impact that extreme weather conditions can have on event markets, with both stall numbers and market income being significantly affected at short notice.

3.2. Bites on The Square on Wednesday 28 October has ten food traders booked, offering a varied selection of food and refreshments. The event forms part of the Half Term programme and will include free face painting and arts and crafts to encourage families to visit and enjoy the market. Following the cancellation of the Halloween walk-through at the 24 October market due to the weather, the walk-through will now be incorporated into the Bites on The Square event, creating a larger Halloween-themed family event and providing an additional reason for families to visit the town centre. This activity forms part of Year Three of the Town Centre Business Plan, supporting the continued development and promotion of Bites on The Square, with a focus on attracting new food traders, engaging new customers and increasing footfall.

3.3. Officers attended the DLDD Trust Job Fair on Wednesday 14 October to promote Middle Row Markets as a start-up business opportunity. The event provided an opportunity to engage with members of the public interested in turning their hobbies and skills into a small business, while highlighting the opportunities available through the markets. Officers also promoted next year's Young Traders initiative and encouraged new and emerging traders to get involved.

3.4. The Town Centre Manager attended the Vibrant Town meeting on Wednesday 21 October. The quarterly meeting brings together Town Centre Managers and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) from across Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire to discuss current town centre issues, share information and exchange best practice. It provides a valuable opportunity to learn from other areas and share experiences and initiatives from Dunstable.

3.5. Dunstable hosted the ATCM Regional Meeting on Tuesday 29 September, with the meeting focused on **"**Tackling Organised Crime on the High Street.**"** The day provided an opportunity for representatives from across the region to share experiences, discuss challenges and explore practical approaches to tackling issues affecting town centres. A key presentation highlighted Dunstable's approach to dealing with counterfeit vapes and cigarettes and the illicit use of commercial premises. The day highlighted the partnership working and the actions taken to address these concerns. The meeting also included updates from other towns and a town centre study tour, showcasing Dunstable's ongoing work to support a safe, vibrant and well-managed town centre. Dunstable Town

Council has also been elected by the ATCM Board to take on the role of East of England Chair and become part of the ATCM Board, providing an opportunity to contribute to discussions and help shape placemaking policies and approaches that influence town centres at a national level.

3.6. The Town Centre Manager will be attending the Place Pizzazz Conference on 12 November 2026 at Manchester Metropolitan University. The conference, delivered by thinkingplace in partnership with the Institute of Place Management, will bring together professionals to explore the challenges and opportunities facing towns and cities, with a focus on place management, devolution and collaborative working. This will be the Town Centre Manager's first conference attended as a member of the Institute of Place Management and will provide a valuable opportunity to learn, network and share best practice.

3.7. Twilight Bookings and payments for the Twilight Markets are progressing well, with payments being requested to confirm traders' attendance across all three evenings. The Community Stage has also confirmed community groups for each evening. Families will be able to enjoy a free children's carousel and UV face painting on all three nights. The Dunstable Rotary Club will once again support Santa's Grotto, with every child visiting Santa receiving a free sweet bag. Officers are continuing to seek sponsorship for the Community Stage and funding towards the cost of the sweet bags.

3.8. The Christmas Window Competition will return this year, providing local shops and businesses with an opportunity to showcase their creativity and contribute to the festive atmosphere in Dunstable town centre. The competition proved popular last year, with 47 shops and businesses taking part, and officers are hopeful of building on this success with a strong level of participation again this year. The Town Mayor will judge the windows on Tuesday 2 December, while the public vote will run on Facebook from 1 to 7 December. Officers will visit businesses across the town centre to encourage participation, supported by promotional reminders through Talk of the Town.

3.9. Street Food Heroes will return Thursday 18 March 2027, continuing as a monthly event on the third Thursday of each month through to September 2027

3.10. Officers attended Court on 2 October as a follow up from the July hearing. The Judge determined that the conditions had been breached. Adam Bates was given a further suspended sentence, and the injunction was extended to October 2027.

4. VACANCY RATES

4.1. The vacancy rates to the end of October 2026 are provided below. The count will be undertaken again at the start of January 2027.

4.2. The town centre area used for the survey includes properties in High Street North up to Regent Street, High Street South to Friars Walk (excluding Thames Industrial Estate), Church Street up to and including Aldi and West Street up to the Police Station/St Mary's Gate.

4.3. Eleanor's Cross, Ashton Square, Albion Street, The Quadrant and Grove Park (including Asda) have been included but rates can be calculated with or without these properties.

4.4. These figures have been shared with Central Bedfordshire Council officers:

No. Units	No. Vacant Units	% Vacant Units	Previous %
253	**35 vacant**	**13.83%**	13.04% count end of July 26.

4.5. The following figures relate to the High Street (including Grove Park, Albion Street, Eleanor's Cross and Ashton Square but excluding the Quadrant Shopping Centre):

No. Units	No. Vacant Units	% Vacant Units	Previous %
210	**31 vacant**	**14.76%**	13.80% count end of July 26.

4.6. The following figures relate to the Quadrant Shopping Centre only:

No. Units	No. Vacant Units	% Vacant Units	Previous %
43	**4 vacant**	**9.03%**	9.03% count end of July 26

4.7. Units in Grove Park area and Asda:

No. Units	No. Vacant Units	% Vacant Units	Previous %
6	**0 vacant**	**0%**	0% count end of July 26

5. TOWN CENTRE BUSINESS PLAN

5.1. Year Three of the Business Plan is being implemented, with continued progress in increasing trader participation and strengthening the offer at both Bites on The Square and Middle Row Markets. Bites on The Square has seen a positive development in its Wednesday food offer, with Eastpoint Fish and The Cheese and Pie Man joining the market, alongside the return of the popular hot jacket potato stall. In October, Brown Bread Bakery joined Bites on The Square for the first time, providing a further addition to the range of food and refreshments available on The Square. The new and returning traders have added greater variety to the Wednesday offer, with positive customer feedback and engagement. Traders are also actively encouraging other food traders to join them on The Square, which is a positive indication of the growing confidence in the Wednesday Bites on The Square offer. Officers are also looking forward to welcoming Boxfood in November, a new hot food trader offering Jamaican street food, further expanding the choice available to visitors.

5.2. Officers continue to work towards increasing trader numbers across Middle Row Markets and event markets. There has been a positive increase in stall bookings compared with 2025. In September 2025, the market had 53 stalls booked, compared with 75 stalls across the additional market programme in September 2026. In October 2025, three markets attracted a combined 67 stall bookings, while the three October 2026 markets have currently secured 80 bookings, representing an increase of approximately 19.4%. Event markets continue to prove particularly successful in attracting traders, and officers are working to build on this momentum as part of Year Three of the Business Plan, with the aim of achieving an average of 35 stalls at event markets, increasing trader participation, enhancing the visitor experience and supporting the continued vitality of Dunstable town centre.

6. THE PREMISES OF CONCERN TASKING GROUP

6.1. Officers continue to work closely with Trading Standards and the Police, gathering and sharing intelligence to support ongoing enforcement activity against illicit trading within Dunstable town centre. This partnership working contributed to a significant multi-agency operation on 15 October 2026, targeting two commercial premises suspected of distributing illicit cigarettes and tobacco. The operation involved CBC Trading Standards, ERSOU, Community Policing and a specialist tobacco detection dog, resulting in the seizure of approximately 3,160 packets of illicit cigarettes across 21 brands and 195 pouches of hand-rolling tobacco, with an estimated value of £70,000. Following the investigation, Trading Standards successfully applied for a Section 80 Closure Order, resulting in the Corner Shop being closed for three months from 16 October 2026 to 15 January 2027. The successful outcome demonstrates the value of continued partnership working, with intelligence gathered and shared by officers helping to support enforcement agencies in tackling illicit activity and addressing issues affecting the town centre.

7. CHRISTMAS LIGHTING SCHEME

7.1 The town Christmas tree, kindly sponsored by Penrose Estate Agents, will arrive during the week commencing 9 November. Once the tree has been left to settle for a few days, Lamps and Tubes will be at site to decorate the Christmas tree, along with the tree in Priory Gardens. Both trees will be ready for the Christmas Tree Light Switch-On on Friday 27 November, which will form part of the Torchlight event and mark the start of the town's Christmas celebrations.

8. AUTHOR

8.1 Annette Clynes – Town Centre Manager
Annette.clynes@dunstable.gov.uk

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MONDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2026

CHRISTMAS LIGHTING SCHEME DECISION REPORT

Purpose of report: For members to consider the allocation of £5,000 from the Christmas lighting reserves to cover the shortfall of the 2026/2027 budget and provide a contingency for any further repairs during the winter season

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 To allocate £5,000 from the Christmas lighting reserve to fund urgent repairs to the tree lights and provide a small contingency for any further repairs that may be required during the winter season.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. The Christmas lighting revenue budget for 2026/2027 was agreed in 2025/2026 at £19,000. This budget was set before the outcome of the new Christmas lighting tender was known and therefore did not take into account the revised contract cost for the next five years.

2.2. The new tender amount is £16,365 per year. In addition, the Christmas tree for The Square is expected to cost approximately £2,000 per year. Together, these commitments amount to approximately £18,365, leaving very little remaining within the existing £19,000 budget for repairs, replacement parts or any unforeseen works to decorations and lamp columns.

2.3. This year, due to the prolonged heat, repairs have been required to the tree lights at a cost of £3,068.40. This cost cannot be met from the remaining budget without creating a shortfall. Officers are also seeking a further £1,500 to provide a contingency for any additional repairs that may arise during the winter season, particularly as a result of high winds, electrical column issues or other weather-related damage. The budget and reserve are set taking account of likely costs such as these for repairs to lights each year.

3. OPTIONS

3.1. Members are asked to consider two options:

3.2. **Option 1** – Approve the allocation of £5,000 from the Christmas lighting reserves for 2026/2027. This would cover the £3,068.40 repair cost for the tree lights and provide a contingency of approximately £1,500 for any further repairs required during the winter season.

3.3. **Option 2** – Do nothing. This would leave the Christmas lighting budget unable to fully meet the cost of the repairs already required and would provide no contingency for further repairs during the winter season.

3.4. It is recommended that Members adopt Option 1.

4. FINANCIAL IMPACT

4.1 The 2026/27 Christmas lighting revenue budget is £19,000. The new tender amount for the Christmas lighting contract is £16,365 per year, and the Christmas tree for The Square is expected to cost approximately £2,000 per year. These two costs total approximately £18,365, leaving only £635 within the budget for any repairs or unforeseen works.

4.2 Repairs to the tree lights have been required this year at a cost of £3,068.40. This creates an immediate shortfall in the budget. A further contingency of £1,500 is requested to cover any additional repairs that may be required during the winter season due to weather, wind damage or issues with electrical columns.

4.3 The total top-up requested from Christmas lighting reserves is £5,000. This amount would enable the Council to complete the 2026/27 Christmas lighting scheme, meet the known repair cost, and provide a contingency for further essential repairs during the season.

5. POLICY AND COROPRATE PLAN IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The provision of Christmas lighting supports the Council's priority to preserve and enhance the history and identity of the town, creating a sense of pride in Dunstable. The additional funding would ensure that the existing scheme can be delivered safely and to the expected standard for residents, visitors and local businesses.

6. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS - None

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The requested funding would support necessary repairs to the Christmas lighting scheme and help ensure that decorations, tree lights and associated electrical infrastructure remain safe throughout the winter season. Any works would be undertaken by the Council's appointed Christmas lighting contractor.

7.2 If members were not to agree to the recommendations then in order to ensure that there were no health and safety implications for the council the lighting scheme would have to be reduced.

8. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS - None

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS - None

10. ENVIRONMENTAL AND BIODIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no additional environmental or biodiversity implications arising from this request. The funding relates to maintaining and repairing the existing Christmas lighting scheme, which operates on LED lamps.

11. CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IMPLICATIONS – None

12. APPENDICES - None

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1 Christmas Light Tender - Finance and General Purposes Committee, 26 January 2026

14. AUTHOR

14.1 Annette Clynes – Town Centre Manager
Annette.clynes@dunstable.gov.uk

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MONDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2026

EVENTS

Purpose of report: For information only.

1. PAST EVENTS

1.1 Soapbox Derby

The Soapbox Derby took place on Saturday 5 September and was very successful attracting an estimated 2,500 visitors throughout the day. 11 teams participated in the race, with positive feedback received from competitors on their experience and enjoyment of the event.

The scrutineering session held on the day before the event proved particularly valuable, allowing teams additional time to make any necessary modifications to their karts to ensure compliance with the competition rules and regulations. Stallholders and caterers also reported a successful day. Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service attended with their Vision VR Road Safety Vehicle, engaging with members of the public to promote road safety.

A total of six sponsors were secured for the event: GT Trax acted as the main event sponsor and supplied, installed and dismantled the race track. Caddington Grove Care Home provided silver-level sponsorship, while Hardings Arc, Chiltern Vehicles and Tyres, Juuls Ltd and Milehams supported the event through banner sponsorship.

1.2 Priory Proms in the Park

Proms in the Park took place on Saturday 12 September, with an estimated 340 visitors attending throughout the event. The programme included an afternoon screening of *Elvis*, followed by a live evening broadcast, with musical performances from Dunstable Town Band and Emily Yarrow. Light projections on the church enhanced the evening's programme**.**

Although attendance was lower than in previous years, feedback received through SurveyMonkey and Facebook was positive, with visitors commenting favourably on the quality of the event on the day and their overall experience. The fireworks display was cancelled following advice from Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service due to the prolonged period of extremely dry weather. This decision was taken in the interests of safety, including animal welfare.

2. EVENTS PROGRAMME 2026 - FORTHCOMING

2.1 Christmas Carols and Torchlight Procession - Friday 27 November (From 7 pm)

Planning arrangements for this year's Christmas Carols and Torchlight Procession are progressing well. To date, eight local schools and the Priory Church Choir have confirmed their participation with approximately 246 children expected to take part. The closing date for school confirmation has yet to pass at time of writing.

Operational preparations are also underway. The road closure request has been submitted to enable the A5183 to be closed for the duration of the event and affected businesses and residents will be notified in advance. Dunstable Town Council vehicles will be positioned as additional roadblocks along High Street South and at the junction of West Street and Church Street, providing additional security for spectators gathering in the road. A large screen will be provided for the first time to improve visibility for the audience.

The Grove Theatre panto stars from this year's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* production will be participating in this year's event alongside Father Christmas. BBB Group will provide the light show finale, with Penrose Estate Agents sponsoring both the event and the Christmas tree on The Square.

3. PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR 2026

3.1 Event-specific surveys were promoted online through SurveyMonkey and Facebook, with QR codes also displayed on posters to encourage public participation. To help increase response rates, an incentive was introduced offering respondents the chance to win a £50 voucher, alongside a 10% discount voucher for Priory House as a thank you for completing the survey. To date, 364 responses have been received, with one event remaining to take place this year.

3.2 Below are the results from a couple of key questions from the survey:

a) How satisfied were you with your visit?

2026 (364 responses collected)	**2025 (468 responses collected)**
68% Very Satisfied	65% Very Satisfied
26% Satisfied	27% Satisfied
1% Dissatisfied	1% Dissatisfied

b) How would you rate Dunstable Town Council's events?

2026 (364 responses collected)	**2025 (468 responses collected)**
60% Extremely Good	56% Extremely Good
26% Very Good	25% Very Good
8% Good	11% Good
2% Neither good nor bad	4% Neither good nor bad

c) How likely are you to recommend Dunstable Events to a friend?

2026 (364 responses collected)	**2025 (468 responses collected)**

59%	Extremely Likely	59%	Extremely Likely
25%	Very likely	22%	Very likely
11%	Likely	13%	Likely
1%	Not Likely	3%	Not Likely

3.3 The survey results collected to date for 2026 remain consistently positive, demonstrating strong public satisfaction with Dunstable Town Council's events. Although 364 responses have been received compared to 468 in 2025, footfall across this year's events has been exceptionally high, despite the lower number of survey responses received.

Overall satisfaction increased to 94%, compared to 92% last year, while 86% rated the Council's events as either 'extremely good' or 'very good', up from 81%. Similarly, 84% of respondents were 'extremely likely' or 'very likely' to recommend Dunstable events to a friend, compared to 81% in 2025. These results indicate continued strong public support, with improvements across all three key measures. The complete questionnaire results will be available for the January Committee.

4. AUTHOR

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DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MONDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2026

PRIORY HOUSE

Purpose of report: For information only

1. UPDATE

1.1 Restoration works at Priory House continue to progress well, with the building currently on schedule to be handed back to the Council by the end of November. Following handover, Creative Core Group will begin installing the new heritage exhibition, servery and bespoke seating. The refurbishment of the basement toilets is also planned for December and January. Officers continue to work closely with contractors to coordinate the remaining works and ensure the building is ready for its next phase.

1.2 Recruitment continues to progress positively, with the new Catering Manager, Gemma Duffin, settling into her role and already contributing ideas for the future catering offer. The successful candidate for the Senior Priory House Assistant position is due to commence employment in November.

1.3 The Catering Manager is reviewing menu options, including homemade cakes, light lunches, deli style sandwiches and speciality drinks and afternoon teas. Officers are also working through the practical arrangements for the new servery, including equipment, layout and operational requirements, to ensure an efficient and effective service. New uniforms are also being sourced.

1.4 The new Priory House branding and logo were officially launched on social media in October and have received a positive initial response, with increased public interest and excitement surrounding the reopening. The refreshed identity aims to create a modern and welcoming image while retaining the building's important heritage and connection to the Undercroft. Further marketing activity will continue over the coming months to build anticipation and promote the new facilities and visitor experience.

1.5 Preparations for the new exhibition continue to progress well, with officers working alongside Creative Core Group to finalise the exhibition graphics, and AV elements that include the co-production with the young people at Grove Corner. Opportunities are also being explored to develop educational visits for local schools, with the Friends of Priory House and Gardens invited to consider how they could support these activities.

1.6 The Christmas programme is proving popular, with workshops and seasonal activities selling well through the online booking system. Further promotion is planned through the Christmas edition of Talk of the Town and social media to maximise attendance. Officers are also considering opportunities into 2027 to expand the future events and activities programme, encouraging greater use of Priory House throughout the year and supporting additional income generation.

2. WEDDINGS

2.1 A total of 26 wedding bookings have been booked since opening Grove House for weddings. There are currently seven weddings confirmed until the end of the financial year, with the remainder confirmed for the following financial year. Four bookings currently include canapés and prosecco.

2.2 The Functions and Operations Manager has now passed the course to be a professional Celebrant and is now devising packages to promote Celebrant led services to be held at Grove House and Priory House. Packages will include Weddings, Vow Renewals and Naming Ceremonies.

2.3 A wedding open evening is planned for 10 November; the open evening will be aimed at promoting the Twilight and Winter weddings packages. This will give prospective couples a view of the venue dressed for twilight weddings with fairy lights and lanterns.

2.4 Looking ahead to when Priory House reopens at the beginning of next year, officers are in the process of ensuring all plans and licences from Central Bedfordshire Council are in place ready to start taking bookings for 2027 at Priory House.

3. PRIORY HOUSE REFURBISHMENT.

3.1 The restoration of Priory House continues to make significant progress, with several key milestones now being reached as the project moves towards completion. New flooring has been laid in the Jacobean Room and upstairs offices, while the original oak flooring from the Undercroft has been carefully restored and repurposed for use on the first-floor landing. The new stone flooring in the Undercroft has also been installed, with the limewashing of the walls now nearing completion. Restoration work has also commenced on the main staircase.

3.2 Externally, the drainage works at the front of Priory House are also entering their final stages, with preparations underway for the installation of the bund wall and railings over the coming weeks. These works represent another significant step towards completing the restoration and reduces the risk of flooding in Priory House in the future.

4. FINANCIAL

SHOP TAKINGS (EX VAT)

	2025/26	2026/27	Variation 2025/26 to 2026/27
April	£267.05	£1,929.07	£1,662.02
May	£180.48	£2,774.81	£2,594.33
June	£174.70	£1,860.13	£1,685.43
Total 1st quarter	**£622.23**	**£6,564.02**	**£5,941.79**
July	£121.12	£1,477.98	£1,356.86
August	£134.69	£1,675.61	£1,540.92
September	£580.97	£2,628.00	£2,047.03
Total 2nd quarter	**£836.78**	**£5,781.59**	**£4,944.81**
Totals	**£1,459.01**	**£12,345.60**	**£10,886.59**

4.1 Takings within the Priory House Gift Shop have increased by approximately £1,000, supported by the additional footfall generated by the Soapbox Derby event and the introduction of new stock ranges.

4.2 The newly introduced Dunstable-themed gift range has proved particularly popular with customers, generating positive sales and demonstrating a strong interest in locally inspired products. Following this success, officers are exploring opportunities to further expand the collection, introducing additional products that celebrate Dunstable's heritage.

4.3 TEAROOM TAKINGS (EX VAT)

	2025/26	2026/27	Variation 2025/26 to 2026/27
April	£665.59	£856.29	£190.70
May	£792.88	£998.38	£205.50
June	£558.21	£1,063.86	£505.65
Total 1st quarter	**£2,016.68**	**£2,918.53**	**£901.84**
July	£178.00	£1,327.09	£1,149.09
August	£19.20	£1,248.97	£1,229.77
September	£343.58	£1,207.41	£863.83
Total 2nd quarter	**£540.78**	**£3,783.46**	**£3,242.68**
Totals	**£2,557.46**	**£6,701.99**	**£4,144.53**

4.1 A new autumn menu has recently been launched within the Gift Shop, introducing a selection of seasonal food and drink options to refresh the current offer and encourage repeat visits and increase sales. Work is also underway to develop a Christmas-themed menu, featuring festive food, drinks, and seasonal treats. This will complement the Christmas workshops and activities taking place at Priory House, helping to enhance the visitor experience, attract additional customers and maximise income opportunities throughout the festive period.

5. AUTHOR

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DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MONDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2026

GROVE CORNER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Purpose of report: For information

1. GROVE CORNER

1.1. Grove Corner received 168 visits from young people between 4 August 2026 and 8 October 2026. Three new young people have signed up over this time.

1.2. Grove Corner received 254 visits from young people between 14 August and 13 October 2025.

1.3. Pokémon and SEND Friendly have received 89 visits from young people between 8 September 2026 and 6 October, with no new signups.

1.4. Pokémon received 112 visits from young people between 2 September 2025 and 14 October 2025.

1.5. Grove Corner now has 1,601 Facebook followers and Grove Corner's Instagram has 533 followers.

2. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

2.1. Officers have begun to see the Wednesday session increase in popularity. This is a slow process; however, more young people are beginning to access the drop-in session and therefore, officers are going to continue with the time of 3.45 pm to 5.15 pm for 13- to 18-year-olds (up to 25 SEND).

2.2. Officers worked with young people as part of Youth Mental Health Day to create a mental health garden, which is displayed in Grove Corner. Young people thought about their roots, and what grounds them, they thought about the sun, and what makes them happy, they thought about the leaves and stem and what helps them, and then thought about the clouds, and things they want help with or upset them. As a result of this, youth workers plan to invite some different organisations in, to facilitate workshops on self-worth and resilience to support young people with some of the things they identified on the clouds.

2.3. Officers are currently working with young people who attend Grove Corner to continue to plan for the Halloween Party, taking place on Friday 30 October. Young people have been decorating items to display, have thought about the music they would like, the snacks they would like, and how they would like the evening to run.

This has been a brilliant, coproduced session, that both officers and young people are looking forward to taking place.

2.4. Officers have worked with Creative Core Group, who are co-producing the exhibition Audio Visual at Priory House with young people. Over four sessions, young people who attend Grove Corner have taken part in both voiceover workshops and art workshops. The feedback has been positive, and young people enjoyed having professionals deliver workshops of such a high standard. Officers and young people are looking forward to seeing the finished results once the exhibition space is complete.

2.5. Officers have contacted the local secondary schools, to see if this term they could attend informally to promote both centre based youth work and detached. In previous years, officers have conducted a number of assemblies but this year, want to try a different approach to engage with young people and talk with them about the services the town council provide.

2.6. Officers have met with Perfect Personalised Parties and The Dunstable Conference Centre to discuss the next under 18s night. After the success of the event in March, officers are planning to host the party on 31 March 2026. Perfect Personalised Parties are partially sponsoring the event this year, providing a photobooth.

2.7. Officers have begun to gauge interest from young people about the podcast project, with several young people expressing enthusiasm and excitement for this new innovative. It is hoped that the first episode will launch by Youth Work Week.

2.8. Officers are currently preparing for Youth Work Week. Several different videos are being created for social media, to explore how ‘futures begin’ and the difference youth work makes to young people, and some of the team. Building on the National Youth Agencies theme of ‘where futures begin’, officers have been doing some activities with young people, to understand the impact accessing youth provision has on them, and their lives.

2.9. On Thursday 15 October, the youth team took part in free Ygam training – learning about the link between gaming and possible gambling. Some of the team are also booked onto attend free training around gaining a better understanding of the impact of trauma and exploring practical ways to create a safer, more supportive environment for young people. Some of the team are also booked onto an Understanding masculinity and tackling misogyny training.

2.10. The Youth and Community Manager has been invited to return to the University of Bedfordshire as a guest lecturer for the MA Youth Work students, to deliver a talk on professional values.

2.11. Members should note that the external painting at Grove Corner will take approximately one week and will take place before Christmas. The internal works at Grove Corner will also take approximately one week and to provide minimal impact on the service, officers have arranged for this to take place when the centre is closed between Christmas and New Year. There is a chance this will run into Monday 4 January, and if so, the drop-in session on this evening may need to be cancelled.

3. DETACHED YOUTH WORK

3.1. Between 4 August 2026 and 8 October 2026, officers delivered 27 detached activities across Dunstable. The team visit different areas of the town, three times per week to engage with young people.

3.2. Between 4 August 2026 and 8 October, officers engaged with 358 young people by headcount. 200 of these young people have been new young people.

3.3. Therefore, there has been a total of 615 interactions with young people between 4 August 2026 and 8 October, through centre-based youth work and detached youth work. 203 of these interactions have been new interactions with young people.

3.4. After the October half term, officers will continue to engage with young people on Monday, Wednesday and Thursdays from 3.30 pm to 5.30 pm. On a Monday, they will be going to Downside, using the new Best Start Family Hub, as a base, which has been kitted out and refurbished. Officers are anticipating a good engagement and will be providing a variety of activities for young people to engage with. Officers will be using this opportunity whilst in Downside to continue to promote local services that operate from the estate for young people, such as the badminton club and Ringcraft boxing, as well as town wide activities such as Grove Corner. On a Wednesday officers will continue an engagement walk in different locations weekly and on a Thursday will focus on Dunstable East, using the leisure centre for one hour to host basketball/football and provide young people access to youth workers, along with visiting Grove Skate Park, and surrounding areas.

3.5. After the successful hygiene project last year, officers are also currently collecting items so that they can distribute winter hygiene bags for young people in the town.

4. SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

4.1. Officers have contacted the secondary schools to see if they can visit informally, to promote the youth provision that the town council delivers. This approach should mean that officers can engage with more young people, and by informally running some activities over a lunchtime or after-school, would allow young people to ask questions, learn more about the service, and hopefully begin to attend sessions.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

5.1. Officers will be facilitating the first Brunch Club meet up on 21 October. Currently this new project only has three people signed up, however, officers still plan to run it, with the hope that the popularity of the group will grow over time. Officers will review the project at the end of the year and again at the end of March. The aim of this project is only to have officer involvement for a short period of time, until the group becomes established and can then meet on its own, without officer support.

5.2. Officers continue to develop a better understanding of the needs of the voluntary and community sector and how the Council can support it. Officers have met with the umbrella organisations in the area and from the findings from these interviews officers have created a survey for those in the Voluntary and Community Sector to complete. The aim from this is to better understand further their needs and next

stages of how the council can support. The deadline for returns is 9 November, providing officers with the chance to pull together the finds, seek further clarification if need be and then present the results of this research at the January committee meeting, for this to then inform the future corporate plan.

5.3. Officers have been developing a partnership with Natwest, who have attended lunch clubs to talk about keeping safe. Officers will also be working with Natwest on 22 October, to facilitate a community litter pick. Officers were approached by Natwest who wanted to use their volunteer staff day to benefit the town and therefore will be taking part in a community litter pick. Finally, Officers plan to link Natwest into the wider group and will invite them to deliver talks to the community groups that hire Grove Corner.

5.4. Officers are currently planning for the Twilight Market. Officers will attend the Friday market, to promote different community opportunities that people can get involved in and use it as an opportunity to do some consultation for Friends of Bennetts. Officers will have a free activity that children can take part in, but the aim of this stall will be to use it as an opportunity to do engagement and consultation. On the Saturday, the detached team will visit the market in the evening and informally engage with those in the Square and Middle Row.

6. BENNETT'S SPLASH, CAFÉ AND COMMUNITY HUB

6.1. Between 1 August 2026 and 8 October 2026, there have been several events organised. The activities that have been facilitated included:

Over 55s Breakfast Club – 10 sessions
Friday Craft Club – 9 sessions
Knit and Natter – 9 sessions
Home Education - 9 sessions

6.2. Between 1 August 2026 and 8 October 2026, there have been 6 hirers. The current hirers are:

Canopy hire x 4
Party hire x1
Parents/Carers and Tots venue hire – x 3 (this is currently a weekly booking)

6.3. The summer season concluded. This year has been a successful summer, with the income being higher than previous years. Officers will be implanting the cool menu again in 2027/2028 when needed, as it only had a minimal negative impact on income on the days it was implanted, but meant that staff were able to operate safely. The communication and working relationship with the Town Rangers were good this summer, and officers found a more streamlined menu helped to manage customer satisfaction regarding waiting times. Moving forward, officers will review popular items again and explore retail stock, as a trial run this year, proved popular.

6.4. Officers continue to work with Sprout and Swap, who have been meeting with people to swap plants, and trade gardening tips. Sprout and Swap hosted a session on 29 August. This was attended by 7 people. The next session is currently being planned, and the time and day is to be confirmed.

6.5. Home Ed has begun to meet twice a week again. The group work with the Centre Manager to create session themes for the upcoming term. The more interactive sessions garner greater interest and attendance, and this will be utilised moving forwards. The café is running autumnal and Halloween based sessions during October.

6.6. Officers have launched a new autumn/winter menu. This year new items have been added, based on customer feedback and to encourage customers to sit in the café space.

6.7. The plant room has had some operational issues, and officers have identified improvements to help reduce the risk of problems recurring. This includes investing in a COSHH cabinet to hold water-testing chemicals, spare probes, probe cleaners and filters, as well as COSHH information and procedures. To allow a more comprehensive handover and record of issues, the plant room maintenance sheets will be adapted to allow for this in the upcoming season. In the decommission report, it has been advised that the Granados needs replacing to improve the reliability of the system. This is estimated to cost £16,000 and would be something to consider before the 2028 season.

6.8. Officers have been working in partnership with Chatty Café. There is a new volunteer for Chatty Café who is facilitating sessions and officers are promoting this service when members of the public come into the café. Officers are also going to distribute more information flyers about the scheme, at key locations within the town.

6.9. The table below shows a comparison between takings excluding VAT comparing 2025 to 2026 covering August, September and up until 7 October.

Month	Dates	2025	2026	+/-
July	27 – 2	1489.17	2975.55	+1486.38
	Total			**+1486.38**
August	3 - 9	1716.13	2457.60	+741.47
	10 - 16	4489.13	3008.69	-1480.44
	17 – 23	1483.23	1362.16	-121.07
	24 – 30	1690.65	817.71	-872.94
	31 – 6	402.42	770.23	+367.81
	Monthly total			**-1365.17**

September	07 - 13	272.64	281.83	+9.19
	14 - 20	305.15	320.13	+14.98
	21-27	260.92	215.50	-45.42
	28 - 4	305.84	372.42	+66.58
	Monthly total			**+45.33**
October	5-11	345.69	121.84	-223.85
	Monthly total			**-223.85**
Overall	**Total**			**-57.31**

6.10. The reduced menu will have had a detrimental impact on takings, as the café takes less in comparison to other days. Officers observed that once the café sold out of food on the cool menu and was unable to replenish stock, there was a decrease in takings. However, the alternative is to close the cafe on extreme heat days due to the health and safety of staff and therefore this offer is a better alternative.

6.11. Despite this, overall, the café is +£6,595.41 on the previous year to date. On the week 14 to 18, officers ran a reduced menu and had a day when the splash park was not operational, which negatively impacted the increase in sales, in comparison to the previous year.

6.12. The opportunity for retail sales was identified and acted upon which was met with positive feedback and reduced the amount of disposable plastic entering the system, as customers could purchase toys designed for use in splash parks rather than using plastic cups.

6.13. The last two weeks of the summer holidays saw a decrease in air temperatures which contributed to the decrease in takings. The first week of October saw Breakfast Club cancelled due to the staff away day, which resulted in a significant difference in takings on the previous year.

6.14. Officers are continuing to explore the creation of a Friends of Bennett's group. On 12 September, officers hosted a family fun event at Bennett Memorial Recreation Ground which had three people attend. As a result, officers have since hosted a coffee morning, which allowed further ideas to be discussed and what residents want to see more of in the café and park. Officers will be arranging a follow up session to continue discussions and next steps.

6.15. Officers facilitated a pizza and drinks night on Friday 4 September, with live entertainment. The previous pizza and paint night was a success and received very positive feedback. Officers have reflected upon how it ran and the logistics and

have made some amendments to how food is delivered and spaces available. Two sessions are planned, one for October and one for December.

6.16. To be able to effectively plan for resource allocation, all activities are now bookable via the website to secure a place. Walk ins can only be accommodated if there are space resources available on the day. This also helps to effectively manage staffing and footfall.

6.17. A range of half term activities have been planned for October half term, alongside an elf on the shelf party in December and plan for a Christmas Build a Bear workshop.

6.18. A new coffee machine will be installed week commencing 19 October.

6.19. Members should note that the community hub will not be open on Christmas Eve, the last day of trading for 2026 will be on Wednesday 23 December reopening on Monday 4 January 2027.

6.20. The painting works for Splash will then begin on week commencing 04 January, and are envisioned to take up to two weeks, and therefore the Splash Café will be closed during this time. Officers hope to move groups where possible to other council venues during this interim period.

7. AUTHORS

7.1 Gill Peck – Youth and Community Manager
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DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MONDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2026

OLDER PEOPLE'S SERVICES

Purpose of report: For information

1. GOOD COMPANIONS CLUB

1.1. The Good Companions Club currently has 21 members. Officers continue to market the spaces available and have begun to advertise that the group is now accessible for those aged 70+.

1.2. Central Bedfordshire Council have informed officers that from April 2027, the funding they provide for Good Companions will no longer continue. Officers arranged a meeting with CBC to understand this decision further and any wider implications for the town. Due to the Salvation Army funding also being cut, there is potential for a group of isolated older people to find themselves without access to weekly contact/support. At the time of writing, officers have met with CBC who do not currently have any plans in place for a transition, or the next steps regarding funding. They have advised it will be open to tender by the end of 2026 and currently are not clear on what this will involve or look like. CBC's Commissioning Manager currently suggests it will be one organisation who gets the tender who then works with partners to deliver a service. DTC officers have reached out to the Salvation Army but currently it is unclear if funding was to cease whether this would mean the Friendly Club would close. It is clear though that although The Good Companions have some spaces this could not accommodate those currently all those in attendance at the Salvation Army.

1.3. The group have enjoyed a trip to ZSL Whipsnade Zoo and the fire station, a talk about food history, a visit from Dunstable History Society and an informative talk from Natwest about scams.

1.4. Over the next few weeks, Good Companions have various activities and trips planned. These include a Christmas meal out at Hunters Lodge, a Christmas Celebration party with live entertainment and a Christmas Boat Trip.

2. LUNCH BUNCH

2.1. The Lunch Bunch continues to operate a waiting list, with the group currently having 38 members.

2.2. The Lunch Bunch have enjoyed a variety of activities and talks in recent weeks. This has included a trip to the fire station, a visit to ZSL Whipsnade Zoo, talks from Dunstable Town Guides, Dunstable Town Councils Chief Executive Officer and Clerk, Natwest on scams and a Halloween Party with live entertainment.

2.3. Over the coming weeks, the group will have talks from Dunstable Town Council's Town Centre Manager, a Christmas quiz, a meal out at Hunters Lodge and Christmas at Priory View.

2.4. Officers will need to budget for 2028/2029 for the hall hire for this group. It has currently been offered for free for the last 18 months. For the next financial year, 2027/2028, £1,500 has been agreed for the hire of Priory View. It is anticipated that this figure will double in 2028/29.

3. OVER 55'S BREAKFAST CLUB

3.1. The over 55's Breakfast Club continues to be at capacity. Officers have been promoting other services to those who have expressed an interest in the breakfast club. Officers continue to try and seek volunteers to help support with the running and facilitation of this group.

4. COFFEE MORNINGS

4.1. Officers have run two coffee mornings since the last update, and these have been well attended. These have taken place at Beecroft Community Centre, which was supported by Age UK and Peter Newton Pavilion which was supported by Bedfordshire Police.

4.2. Officers will continue to run coffee mornings at various locations across the town. Members are welcome to attend the coffee mornings to meet local residents. These will take place from 10.30 am to 12 noon on the following dates and locations:

Tuesday 17 November – Grove Corner
Tuesday 22 December – Priory View
Tuesday 19 January – Dunstable Cemetery Chapel
Tuesday 2 March – St Mary's Church Hall

5. ROCK AND ROLL

5.1. Rock and Roll took place in September, with live music, 58 people attended this event. Officers will be marketing the next Rock and Roll which is taking place in December, with a Christmas theme. At the time of writing, 46 tickets have sold.

6. AUTHOR

6.1 Gill Peck – Youth and Community Manager
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DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

MONDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2026

SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT DECISION REPORT

Purpose of report: To approve a four-year Service Level Agreement. With Alina Orchestra.

1. RECOMMENDATION

1.1. It is recommended that the Council enter into a four-year Service Level Agreement from budget 303 4321 with Alina Orchestra; for £2,000 per year, totaling £8,000 over the four years.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Officers have met with Alina Orchestra to understand more about its aims and objectives. The charity aims to make high-quality live classical music accessible to everyone, regardless of age, background or circumstance. It is currently developing its work in Dunstable, following successful activity in Buckinghamshire, and aims to build meaningful and sustained relationships with local communities by taking professional live music beyond traditional concert settings and directly to people in the places where they live and meet.

2.2. Alina Orchestra has indicated that it would like to apply for £2,000 per year. Their aims are to support the well-being and social connection of older and vulnerable people through engaging live music experiences in care homes and other community settings. The sessions would be welcoming and interactive, encouraging participation, conversation, reminiscence and connection among residents, staff and carers.

2.3. Alina Orchestra has already begun making local connections and has contacted Caddington Grove Care Home and Dunstable Locality Children's Centre to explore opportunities for activity. These relationships provide an initial route for older and potentially vulnerable residents, as well as children and families, and would be developed alongside further partnerships with organisations that already know and support Dunstable's communities.

2.4. The £2,000 SLA would support bringing professional music directly into Dunstable's communities through the innovative Band in a Van programme. This would enable performances to take place in accessible and familiar community locations, reach residents who might not otherwise encounter a professional orchestra and create shared cultural experiences.

2.5. Alina Orchestra would monitor the number of activities delivered and Dunstable residents reached, with particular attention to engagement with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Feedback from participants and partner organisations would be

used to assess the impact of the programme and inform how its work in Dunstable develops.

2.6. The funding would contribute towards professional musicians, project planning, coordination, and delivery. It would enable Alina Orchestra to contribute to Dunstable's cultural life through accessible public and community performances, develop lasting partnerships with local organisations and respond to identified local need. It would also create opportunities for people to connect through music, whether through sessions for older people in care homes, Band in a Van activity in community locations or public performances bringing a wider audience together.

2.7. Alina Orchestra aims to establish an ongoing presence in Dunstable rather than deliver a series of one-off events. The SLA would provide a starting point for building trusted local partnerships, identifying gaps in cultural provision and developing a community music programme that could grow over time through additional funding. This approach would support Dunstable Town Council's ambitions to improve services for all sectors of the community, including older people, and to strengthen and develop cultural services and activities within the town.

3. MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

3.1. Members should note that approving the £2,000 SLA would leave £100 per year available for the next four years for another organisation to apply for funding or for existing SLA amounts to be increased. However, this is the first SLA request officers have received from a new organisation in several years.

3.2. Officers have met Alina Orchestra, and this has provided officers with a deeper understanding of the project proposal, how it has worked in other areas and how the SLA would support the delivery of this.

3.3. Officers are satisfied that the request responds to an identified community need. The proposed initiatives—Band in a Van, Music in Care, the Community Partnership Programme, and Dunstable Concert and Events Development—would broaden the town's current cultural offer and provide residents with new opportunities to access professional live music.

4. FINANCIAL IMPACT

4.1. There would be no additional financial impact to the town council as a result of the recommendations of this report. £13,500 has been allocated for grants to voluntary and community organisations in the 26/27 budget and in the following three years. At present £600 (Sorted Counselling) £2,000 (BRCC) £2,000 (CAB) £2,000 (Hospice at Home) £1,000 (Dunstable Town Band) £2,000 (Dunstable Foodbank) and £800 (Dunstable Town Guides) is committed, leaving £1,000 available for seedcorn funding and £2,100 available for SLAs.

If members were to approve the four-year SLA to Alina Orchestra, a total of £100 per year would be available for groups and organisations to apply for and/or to increase existing SLA amounts.

5. POLICY AND CORPORATE PLAN IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The recommendations contained within the report supports the Council's overall vision to make Dunstable a better place, creating a lively and vibrant town and improving the quality of life for all those who live, work and visit. It also supports the corporate priorities of preserving and enquiring the history and identity of the town, creating a sense of pride in Dunstable and continue to improve services targets to all community sectors in the town.

6. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The proposal is expected to have a positive equalities impact by taking accessible live music into care homes and community settings and prioritising older people, vulnerable residents, children and families, and people who face financial, health, mobility or other barriers to accessing conventional cultural venues.

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS – none

8. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS – none

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS – none

10. ENVIRONMENTAL AND BIODIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS – none

11. CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IMPLICATIONS – none

12. APPENDICES

12.1 Appendix 1 – Application form.

13. AUTHOR

13.1 Gill Peck, Youth and Community Manager
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Name of Organisation:	Alina Orchestra
Organisation website/social media:	www.alinaorchestra.com
Select category:	Charity
Charity number (if applicable):	1195807
In no more than 500 words, please give your aims.:	Alina Orchestra aims to make high-quality live classical music accessible to everyone, regardless of age, background or circumstance. Through our developing work in Dunstable, we aim to build a meaningful and sustained relationship with local communities, taking professional live music beyond traditional concert settings and directly to people in the places where they live and meet. Our aims are to: - Increase access to high-quality live music for Dunstable residents, particularly people who may experience financial, physical or social barriers to attending traditional concert venues. - Support the wellbeing and social connection of older people through engaging live music experiences in care homes and other community settings. Our musicians create welcoming, interactive experiences that encourage participation, conversation, memories and connection. - Bring professional music directly into Dunstable's communities through our innovative Band in a Van programme. By performing in accessible and familiar community locations, we can reach residents who might not otherwise encounter a professional orchestra and create shared cultural experiences close to home. - Contribute to Dunstable's cultural life through accessible public performances, helping to create a lively and vibrant town and giving local residents opportunities to experience professional musicians performing in their community. - Develop lasting local partnerships with Dunstable Town Council, care providers, community organisations and

	other local partners, enabling us to respond to local needs and develop our activity over time. - Create opportunities for people to connect through music. Whether performing for care-home residents, taking Band in a Van into a community location or bringing a larger audience together for a public performance, our aim is to use live music to create positive shared experiences and strengthen a sense of community. Through this programme, Alina Orchestra aims to establish an ongoing presence in Dunstable rather than deliver a one-off event. The programme will support Dunstable Town Council's ambitions to improve services for different sectors of the community, particularly older residents, and to strengthen and develop cultural services and activities within the town.
How much are you applying for? Please submit in the format of £xxx.xx:	2,000
In no more than 1000 words, please state what you need this grant for and how this will benefit Dunstable.:	We are seeking a grant of £2,000 per year to support the start of our development into Dunstable, establishing a new programme of community music activities with a particular priority on reaching disadvantaged and vulnerable residents who may experience barriers to accessing high-quality arts and cultural opportunities. Our aim is to make professional live music accessible to everyone, regardless of age, income, health, mobility or personal circumstances. Rather than expecting people to come to us, much of Alina Orchestra's community work takes music directly to people in the places where they live, meet and feel comfortable. This grant would provide an important starting point for our work in Dunstable. It would contribute towards professional musicians, project planning and coordination, and delivery, while enabling us to develop local partnerships and understand where our work can have the greatest impact. Our intention is to establish a sustained presence in Dunstable that can grow over time, rather than

deliver a series of one-off events.

We have already begun this development by making local connections and have been in touch with Caddington Grove Care Home and Dunstable Locality Children's Centre to explore opportunities for activity. These relationships provide a starting point for reaching older and potentially vulnerable residents, as well as children and families. We would build on these connections and develop further partnerships with organisations that already know and support Dunstable's communities.

Our proposed programme would have three connected strands:

Band in a Van

We would bring Alina Orchestra's Band in a Van programme to Dunstable. Band in a Van takes professional musicians out of traditional concert venues and directly into communities, creating high-quality live interactive music experiences in accessible and familiar local settings.

Working with Dunstable Town Council and community partners, we would identify areas and groups where the programme could have the greatest benefit, particularly where access to arts and cultural opportunities may be limited.

Band in a Van is informal, welcoming and accessible. Taking music directly into a community setting helps remove some of the financial, practical and social barriers that can prevent people from attending conventional concerts. We would explore opportunities with Dunstable Locality Children's Centre to reach children and families, particularly those who might not otherwise encounter professional musicians and live orchestral music.

Music for older and vulnerable residents

A second strand would develop our work with care homes and organisations supporting older people. We have already made contact with Caddington Grove Care Home as part of our initial development in Dunstable.

For people living in residential care, experiencing poor health, isolation or reduced mobility, attending a conventional concert may not be possible. Bringing

professional musicians directly into care settings enables residents to experience high-quality live music in a familiar and accessible environment.

Our work is not simply about performing to people. We create warm, engaging and interactive experiences where residents can respond, participate, talk and reminisce. These sessions can create positive shared experiences for residents, staff and carers and contribute to wellbeing and social connection.

Accessible public and community performances

Alongside targeted outreach, we would like to develop opportunities for accessible public performances in Dunstable. This might include a community concert, a Band in a Van performance open to the wider community, or contributing professional live music to an appropriate Dunstable Town Council community or civic event.

These performances would bring different generations and sections of the community together and contribute to Dunstable's cultural life. Our priority would remain ensuring that the Council's investment enables us to reach people who have fewer opportunities to engage with professional arts and culture.

Benefits for Dunstable

This funding would mark the beginning of Alina Orchestra's development into Dunstable. The benefit would therefore extend beyond the individual activities delivered through the grant. It would enable us to establish relationships, learn more about local needs, identify gaps in cultural provision and begin building an ongoing community music programme for the town.

Our initial contact with Caddington Grove Care Home and Dunstable Locality Children's Centre demonstrates that this process is already underway. With the Town Council's support, we can turn these emerging relationships into activity and develop further partnerships with organisations working directly with Dunstable residents.

Our priority will be disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. This could include older and socially isolated residents, people living in care settings, children and families experiencing disadvantage, and people for whom financial

	circumstances, health, mobility or other barriers make accessing conventional cultural venues difficult. The programme will increase access to professional live music while creating opportunities for people to connect. Music provides a powerful shared experience and our aim is to create activity that is enjoyable, welcoming and meaningful, while contributing positively to wellbeing and community life. Our proposed work aligns strongly with Dunstable Town Council's Corporate Plan, particularly its priorities to improve services targeted to all sectors of the community, including older people, and to strengthen and develop cultural services and activities within the town. We would monitor the number of activities delivered and Dunstable residents reached, with particular attention to our engagement with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Feedback from participants and partner organisations would help us understand the impact of the programme and inform how our Dunstable activity develops. Our ambition is for this grant to be the first stage of a longer-term development in Dunstable. By establishing trusted local partnerships and demonstrating the value of the work, we hope to build on this initial investment, seek additional funding and expand the range and reach of our activity over time. The £2,000 Service Level Agreement would therefore act as a catalyst: enabling Alina Orchestra to begin putting down roots in Dunstable and bringing our community-focused approach to professional live music to residents who may have the fewest opportunities to experience it. By taking musicians directly into care settings, family and community spaces and neighbourhoods, while also creating opportunities for the wider community to come together, we aim to contribute to a more connected, inclusive and vibrant Dunstable and establish a programme that can continue to grow in future years.
In addition, what are you going to be able to do as a	This funding will enable Alina Orchestra to take the first practical steps in developing our work in Dunstable, delivering initial activity while creating the partnerships

result of this funding? (500 words or less):	needed to build a larger programme over time. With an annual grant of £2,000, we anticipate being able to deliver approximately two Band in a Van events and 2-3 care-home visits in Dunstable. Our priority will be to use these activities to reach disadvantaged and vulnerable residents who may have fewer opportunities to experience high-quality professional live music. Band in a Van will enable us to take professional musicians directly into community settings, creating free, welcoming and accessible music experiences. Our care-home visits will particularly benefit older and potentially isolated residents who may be unable to attend conventional concerts because of health, mobility or other circumstances. We have already begun developing relationships with Caddington Grove Care Home and Dunstable Locality Children's Centre, providing a starting point from which to identify local needs and reach different sections of the community. However, we see the value of this funding as extending beyond the individual events it directly supports. It will provide the foundation for Alina Orchestra to establish and develop its presence in Dunstable. Alongside delivery, we will work to build relationships with community organisations, care providers, schools, health services and other local partners. These partnerships will help us understand where our work can have the greatest impact and identify opportunities to collaborate. Importantly, the Town Council's investment will also provide a foundation on which we can seek additional funding from other sources. Our intention is to use the Council's support alongside other funding opportunities, gradually increasing the amount and range of activity we can deliver in Dunstable. Over time, we hope this will enable us to move from these initial Band in a Van events and care-home visits towards a broader programme involving more community activity and, ultimately, larger-scale events and concerts in Dunstable. We therefore see this Service Level Agreement as a starting

	point for a longer-term partnership. It will create tangible activity for residents immediately, while helping us develop the relationships, evidence and additional investment required to grow a sustainable programme of high-quality, accessible live music in Dunstable over future years.
What new initiatives will you add? (500 words or less):	As part of our development into Dunstable, Alina Orchestra will introduce a number of distinct initiatives: 1. Band in a Van – Dunstable We will introduce our Band in a Van programme to Dunstable for the first time. Professional musicians will perform in accessible community locations, taking live interactive music, and music-making, directly to residents rather than expecting them to attend a traditional concert venue. We anticipate this funding supporting approximately two events initially, prioritising communities with fewer opportunities to access arts and culture. 2. Music in Care – Dunstable We will establish a programme of professional live music visits to Dunstable care homes, particularly reaching older, isolated and vulnerable residents. We have already made contact with Caddington Grove Care Home and anticipate initially delivering approximately two care-home visits through this funding. Our ambition is to build a network of care partners so this activity can expand as further funding is secured. 3. Community Partnership Programme We will develop a new network of Dunstable partners who can help us reach disadvantaged and vulnerable residents. We have already begun conversations with Dunstable Locality Children's Centre and want to develop relationships with schools, health services, community organisations and other local partners. These relationships will help us understand local needs and identify communities that could particularly benefit from our work. 4. Dunstable Concert and Events Development We will begin developing opportunities for larger-scale accessible concerts and community events in Dunstable. These would not necessarily be funded solely through this £2,000 award. Instead, the Town Council's support will provide a foundation from which we can approach other

	funders and partners, combining different sources of investment to make larger projects possible. Our intention is for these initiatives to form a development pathway: starting with targeted Band in a Van and care-home activity, building trusted local partnerships, attracting additional investment and gradually developing a broader programme of community events and concerts. In this way, the Service Level Agreement will support both immediate new activity for Dunstable residents and the longer-term development of Alina Orchestra's presence in the town.
What other funding are you currently in receipt of? Please include the Funder, the amount, and the start and finish dates.:	Currently, we have a number of funders - Arts Council England £29,536 (AUG 2026-AUG 2027) Milton Keynes City Council £20,000 (APR 2026 - APR 2027) Rothschild Foundation £10,000 (DEC 2025-DEC 2026_ Garfield Weston Foundation £7,000 (JAN 2026-JAN 2027)