

EVENTS SUB-COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY 12TH FEBRUARY 2025

Minutes of the meeting of the **EVENTS SUB-COMMITTEE** held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Aycliffe Lane, Newton Aycliffe, on **WEDNESDAY 12TH FEBRUARY 2025** at 7.00pm.

PRESENT:

Councillor Martin Ashcroft (Chairman) and:

Councillors Arun Chandran, John Clark, Andy Hill, Jed Hillary, Sandra Kirby, Carl Robinson, Anne Woodward and John Woodward

OFFICERS:

Mr Dan Austin (Town Clerk)

Mrs Rachel Goddard (Events Clerical Assistant)

Mrs Judith Thexton (Head of Leisure and Events)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Councillor Lindsey Aston

One member of the public.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tony Armstrong, Neil Collinson, Sandra Haigh and Joanne Jones.

2. MEMBERS' DISPENSATIONS

No requests for dispensations had been received.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Arun Chandran, Jed Hillary and Andy Hill declared a non-pecuniary interest in the Santa Tours agenda item as they are all volunteers for the event.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no questions from members of the public.

5. MINUTES

It was proposed by Councillor Andy Hill, seconded by Councillor John Clark and

RESOLVED - that the minutes of the meeting of the Events Sub-Committee, held on the 2nd October 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. FIREWORKS DISPLAY

The Head of Leisure and Events submitted a report to provide members with an overview of a number of anti-social behaviour issues and health and safety concerns which took place at the 2024 Fireworks Display and to request consideration of changes and mitigatory measures that may need to be implemented into the planning of the event in 2025.

A lengthy discussion took place regarding the incidents reported and proposed changes to the event and mitigatory actions.

Councillor Arun Chandran proposed that all of the recommendations of the report be agreed with the exception of the final recommendation regarding the consideration of levying a small charge for the wristbands this year, which he proposed be deferred until after the Town Council Election so that the new Council can consider this issue.

He further proposed that officers write a news article, to be published in the Newton News, outlining a summary of the incidents which took place at the event, and detailing the measures which are to be implemented, including stop and search, closing the cemetery and bringing the event time forward, as well as canvassing public opinion on the possible introduction of a small £1 charge for wristbands from 2025 onwards.

Councillor Jed Hillary seconded this proposal further proposing that any news item includes reference to the forthcoming Martyn's Law legislation.

Council Jed Hillary raised concerns regarding the proposed dog handler patrolling the wooded area between the field and cemetery, questioning whether the dog would react negatively to the loud noise.

The Head of Leisure and Events clarified that she would seek reassurance from the security company regarding the dog's experience and training and suitability for working at a fireworks display, and that the dog would only be deployed to the event site if required.

The Chairman requested that Members agree each recommendation in turn in order to allow councillors to ask any questions or seek clarification on each item, if required. This was agreed.

RESOLVED – that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) West Cemetery be closed to the general public on the evening of the Fireworks Display.
- iii) A stop and search facility be implemented at the event, to be operated by the security company.
- iv) Any remaining underspend on the 2024/25 Fireworks Display Budget is carried forward via the Revenue Budget Support Reserve and used to support the 2025/26 Fireworks Display Budget for the purchase of additional signage and more wooden stakes for the signage.
- v) The purchase of additional Heras fencing and crowd control barriers for use around the launch site, cemetery and proposed stop and search point, at a cost of £4,000, be agreed, and funded from the £6,000 saving on this year's Senior Citizens' Trips Revenue Budget.

- vi) The purchase of a small, framed marquee-like structure to facilitate stop and search at Council events be agreed, and funded from the VAT windfall resources, with any additional cost of up to £1,000, if required, to be funded from the £6,000 saving on this year's Senior Citizens' Trips Revenue Budget.
- vii) The engagement of six additional security staff for future Fireworks Display events be agreed, to be funded from contingency resources in the 2025/26 Fireworks Display Revenue Budget.
- viii) The engagement of a dog handler to patrol the wooded area close to West Cemetery be agreed, to be funded from contingency resources in the 2025/26 Fireworks Display Revenue Budget, subject to officers ascertaining the dog's previous work experience and training and confirming its suitability for the event.
- ix) Newton Aycliffe Police are to be approached to request a meeting to discuss the incidents and how they can help support future years events with a view to working together to find some solutions.
- x) A large sign be placed near the sports complex play area directing people to exit the site via the drive, which may reduce the risk of crushing at the end of the event.
- xi) The event time is brought forward, with the lighting of the beacon at 18:30hrs instead of 19:00hrs and starting the fireworks display at 18:45hrs instead of 19:15hrs.
- xii) Officers write a news article, to be published in the Newton News, outlining a summary of the incidents which took place at the event, and detailing the measures which are to be implemented, including stop and search, closing the cemetery and bringing the event time forward, referencing the forthcoming Martyn's Law
- xiii) Using the news article to canvass public opinion on the possible introduction of a small £1 charge for wristbands from 2026 onwards.

7. SANTA TOURS

The Head of Leisure and Events submitted a report to provide members with an overview of the 2024 Santa Tours event, including details of a number of incidents and issues on the night, and to request that Members provide feedback and guidance as to any changes that they wish to see implemented to assist officers in the planning of the 2025 event.

A lengthy discussion took place regarding the incidents reported at last year's event, the challenges presented by a growing town, increased parked cars and difficulties accessing some streets, problems sourcing volunteers and vehicles, and increasing public expectations, and how these concerns could be mitigated whilst preserving the magic of this event.

Councillor Arun Chandran recognised the exceptional hard work and stress involved in planning and organising Santa Tours and expressed his gratitude to the officers who organise this event.

He proposed that the report be received and that the event continue in its current format.

He further proposed that officers prepare a news article to be published in the Newton News, outlining a summary of the difficulties being encountered planning and running the event in terms of sourcing vehicles and volunteers, the growing town and managing public expectations, and outlining what changes may need to be implemented in future years if these difficulties cannot be addressed, including the option of Santa not going into all streets but stopping at various locations around the town at designated times so that people can come to whichever location / time suits them best.

He further proposed that officers be given delegated authority to make any adjustments to the event in response to any difficulties experienced in the run up to the event.

Councillor Jed Hillary seconded the proposals further proposing that the recommendation from the report to introduce a vetting system for new volunteers, in the form of a face-to-face meeting in late November, early December, be agreed.

Councillor Jed Hillary further suggested investigating of the feasibility of refabricating the sleigh frames to make them adjustable and investigating the use of the Council's Kubota vehicles. The Head of Leisure and Events raised concerns over the financial implications of fabricating the frames.

Councillor Andy Hill recognised what a wonderful event the Santa Tours is, but as a volunteer he felt that social media is causing harm to this event, and has noticed over the last 5 or 6 years, the public have had very high expectations regarding timing and individual visits.

Councillor Carl Robinson expressed concerns regarding the public's expectations and the difficulties sourcing volunteers and vehicles and accessing all streets on the town, and proposed reducing the number of streets visited, and instead having Santa stop at designated locations around the town at pre-planned times, and to consider running the event over two evenings on 23rd and 24th December to reduce the number of vehicles and volunteers required.

This proposal was not seconded.

Councillor Carl Robinson asked to have it recorded in the minutes his opposition to the event to continue in its current format.

Councillor John Clark also expressed concerns around the public perception of any changes to the event and proposed that officers and members continue to monitor the situation and identify solutions.

Councillor Martin Ashcroft wished to have his gratitude recorded to the Works Section staff and Council officers for the work involved in making this event a success.

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received.
- ii) The Santa Tours event continue in its current format for 2025.
- iii) Officers prepare a news article to be published in the Newton News, outlining a summary of the difficulties encountered in planning and running the event in terms of sourcing vehicles and volunteers, the growing town and managing public expectations, and outlining what changes may need to be implemented in future years if these difficulties cannot be addressed, including the option of Santa not going into all streets but stopping at various locations around the town at designated times so that people can come to whichever location / time suits them best.
- iv) Officers be given delegated authority to make any adjustments to the event in response to any difficulties experienced in the run up to the event.
- v) A vetting system for new volunteers is introduced, in the form of a face-to-face meeting in late November, early December.

8. EXTERNAL EVENT APPLICATION

The Head of Leisure and Events submitted a report to request Members' consideration an external event application from Coopers Amusements asking to hold a fun fair on Council land at Moore Lane Park in May 2025.

It was proposed by Councillor Carl Robinson and seconded by Councillor John Clark that the recommendations of the report be agreed.

RESOLVED - that it be recommended that:

- i) The report be received;
- ii) Permission be granted for Coopers Amusements to use Moore Lane park playing fields for a fun fair between 24th May and 27th May, subject to officers receiving all the relevant paperwork.
- iii) A ground rent for the event of £750 be agreed.
- iv) Standing Orders are waived to allow officers to immediately advise Coopers Amusements of the decision to allow them time to plan and promote the event, without the need to wait for the Events Sub-Committee minutes to be ratified by the Recreation Committee and Full Council.

Chairman