

# **SANTA TOURS – REVIEW OF THE 2025 EVENT AND CONSIDERATION OF THE FUTURE FORMAT OF THE EVENT**

## **AGENDA ITEM No. 9**

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**MEETING:** **SERVICE REVIEW SUB-COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** **4<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2026**

**REPORT BY:** **HEAD OF LEISURE AND EVENTS AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM**

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### **1.0 Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to put forward detailed information in relation to the 2025 Christmas Eve Santa Tours event to allow the Service Review Sub-Committee to undertake an initial review of the event, following the essential changes made to the event last year to address various health and safety and insurance concerns.
- 1.2 This review will in turn guide the newly established Santa Tours Sub-Committee in its agreed remit:
  - a) To review the success of the annual Santa Tours event, taking into account feedback from officers, councillors, volunteers and public.
  - b) To investigate the feasibility of making further improvements to the event in future years, within the budget made available by the Council, the capacity of the Council officers, the availability of volunteers and vehicles, and health and safety and insurance requirements.
  - c) To make recommendations, as appropriate, to the Recreation Committee, relating to the future development of the Santa Tours event.

### **2.0 Background to the Report**

- 2.1 The Council's Events Sub Committee previously considered a report in February 2025, following the 2024 Santa Tours Event which provided detailed information relating to the planning and organisation of the event, and the concerns, risks, and difficulties that officers had encountered in running the event in its traditional format.
- 2.2 A copy of this report and the minutes of the meeting is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 2.2 The Council subsequently considered a report at the Recreation Committee Meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> November, which highlighted some serious health and safety concerns relating to the Event Risk Assessment, which had been confirmed by the Council's independent Health and Safety Advisor, following a health and safety audit, as being unmitigable, if the event continued to be run in the traditional format, and which would likely lead to the insurance policy for the event being invalidated.
- 2.3 A proposal was therefore put forward within this report to request consideration of changing the event to a new format whereby Santa would instead stop at a number of dedicated locations and times, planned in a way whereby he would not be more than 500 metres away from any individual household.

2.4 The proposal to change the format of the Santa Tours event created concern in the community with an outcry online, particularly on the Anything Aycliffe Facebook page, and coverage in the local press. The general consensus was that the event was a much loved and longstanding tradition within the parish, and must be retained in its current format if at all possible. Some of the concerns raised were based on the perception that the Council wished to cease the event which was never the intention of the officers and Council, with the proposed changes always having been about keeping the volunteers and public as safe as possible.

2.5 A copy of the report to the November Recreation Committee, the corporate risk assessment, health and safety risk assessments, and the minutes of the meeting is attached at **Appendix 2**.

2.6 It is not intended to repeat any of the information contained in these two reports in this report and members are therefore requested to re-read the two reports if necessary to reacquaint themselves with the issues.

2.7 Following a lengthy debate at the Recreation Committee Meeting, including the attendance of a number of members of the public, press coverage, and a number of statements in support of keeping the event in its traditional format, a further informal meeting between officers and councillors took place in early December to look at further options for changing the event.

2.9 Members and officers were in agreement that the event must be changed to address the health and safety concerns highlighted in the event risk assessment, and independently confirmed by the health and safety advisor and insurers, and considered a number of options to change the format of the event in a way that mitigated the safety concerns but retained as much of the magic and tradition of the event as possible, and making sure the event was accessible to as many members of the community as possible.

2.10 Options considered included:

- Designated stops and times around the Parish, planned in a way whereby Santa would not be more than 500 metres away from any individual household.
- Touring as many streets as is safely possible, with Santa inside the van waving at the public, but not stopping.
- Running the event over a number of evenings in the run up to Christmas Eve, with a greater number of volunteers to ensure public safety.
- A Santa Sleigh in a large central location with a large amount of space and car parking, or extending this to five Santa Sleighs in fixed locations (north, south, east, west and central), all with space and car parking available.
- A hybrid system, whereby each Santa would start and finish at fixed points for an extended period of time (five routes), with all locations including sufficient space and car parking, with Santa then touring that part of the town in between the start and end points, in the cab, without any stops, and covering as many streets as is deemed safe.

2.11 Reconsideration of the issue then took place at the Policy and Resources Committee Meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December, when it was resolved that:

- i) The hybrid option be agreed, to consist of five routes, using Town Council vehicles, with each route having a support vehicle, and each route having a fixed start, end or mid-point, with suitable car parking available, so that residents can meet and greet Santa for a period of 45 to 60 minutes, and Santa touring that part of the town, in between the fixed meeting points, inside the vehicle, without any stops, and covering as many streets as is deemed safe by the officers.
- ii) Officers investigate the feasibility of incorporating visits to care homes.
- iii) A review of the Santa Tours is undertaken by the Service Review Sub Committee early in the new year.
- iv) The Council sets up a Santa Tours Working Party in the new year with member, volunteer and public representation, and that this is placed on the agenda of the January Recreation Committee Meeting for agreement.

2.12 A copy of the minutes from the December Policy and Resources Committee Meeting is attached at **Appendix 3**.

### **3.0 Current Situation**

3.1 The 2025 event went ahead on Christmas Eve, on the basis of the agreed hybrid system, on the following basis:

- A total of five 'routes' went out on the night, using four Town Council vehicles and one three-seater donated vehicle, all fitted with a Santa Sleigh, lights, sound system and blow-up Santa / Snowman.
- The Council had to ask one local business to support the event as it does not own enough suitable vehicles.
- The remaining council vehicles were used as support vehicles on the night.
- A total of 9 council vehicles and 1 loan vehicle were used on the night.
- The Council vehicles used were 2 'three-seater cab' vehicles with a Santa, Navigator and Driver and 2 two-seater-cab' vehicles with a Santa and Driver.
- Each route was organised with three to four fixed locations, the majority with suitable car parking available so that residents could meet and greet Santa for a period of 15 to 60 minutes, depending on the location.
- Many of these locations were linked to local community centres or public houses and many of these locations embraced the event, opening their buildings and putting on hospitality and use of facilities for attendees.
- The 'meet and greet' with Santa took place outside of these facilities but with the option of moving Santa indoors if the weather had been inclement.
- All but one route had a support vehicle to assist the Santa vehicle in accessing and setting up at each site and travelling between sites. The remaining route had mobile support from Council staff.
- In between these fixed locations, Santa toured that part of the town, inside the vehicle, without any stops, and covering as many streets as was deemed safe.
- This was on the principle of only travelling through those streets with a thoroughfare or loop, and where the Santa vehicle would not be required to reverse or undertake risky manoeuvres.
- The three-cab vehicles, with a navigator, were used on the tours in the areas of the town with the greater degree of touring the streets.
- A separate mini tour of all care homes in the Parish was undertaken on Christmas Eve morning.
- A 'Find Santa' Application was developed and made available on the Council Website and Facebook page allowing members of the community to find the nearest location to them and the routes of Santa's tour of the streets.

- The total number of volunteers needed to run the event was 24 as follows:
  - Santas x 6 (5 x Routes plus Care Home Tour)
  - Drivers x 6 (5 x Routes plus Care Home Tour)
  - Navigators x 4
  - Support Vehicle Volunteers x 8 (4 x Routes x 2 Volunteers)
  - One mobile support vehicle manned by Council staff

3.2 A copy of the final routes and fixed 'meet and greet' locations for the 2025 event are attached at **Appendix 4**.

3.3 Running the event in this revised way brought with it a number of improvements, most importantly in significantly mitigating the identified safety risks, as well as in addressing some of the operational difficulties e.g. availability of volunteers and vehicles, and making the event more accessible, allowing members of the community to attend at a time and location that best suited them.

3.4 Key benefits included:

- Reducing the number of volunteers required from 36 to 24 which is a more manageable number in terms of recruiting volunteers.
- Only five vans going out, four of which were Town Council vehicles, thereby reducing the risk of using donated vehicles from outside of the Council.
- Having standby volunteers and support vehicles on the night, so that should something go wrong on the night an immediate response would be possible.
- Increasing the likelihood of having a pool of reserve volunteers able to step in in the days leading up to the event or on the day if any volunteers drop out.
- Making it easier to properly vet, undertake health checks, brief, and train volunteers and reserves ahead of the event and for the drivers to be checked for competency and to undertake a test drive of the vehicles.
- Removing the risk of Santa travelling on the back of a moving vehicle.
- Removing the risk of large vehicles needing to access narrow streets and cul-de-sacs with large volumes of parked cars.
- Reducing the risk of 'allurement' i.e. children running up to moving vehicles as there will be fixed locations with the vehicle will be parked up.
- Reducing the need for and risk of unsuitable types of vehicles needing to be loaned in and the scramble for vehicles up to and even on Christmas Eve.
- No hold ups, time changes, or missed streets causing frustration for the public and abuse of staff and volunteers.
- Times and locations are fixed allowing the public choice in where and when to see Santa, increasing accessibility and flexibility as the public would be able to either choose from the closest stop to them or choose a place and time which is best suited to their plans.
- Reducing the risk of missing Santa due to routes running early or late.
- Many of the locations were in locations which were suitable for families to visit by car. One of these destinations had an extended stay.
- Santa was able to engage more with the children as he was on the ground meeting and greeting rather than up a height bending over the side of the vehicle trying to speak to the young people.
- Volunteers were only out in cold weather for a maximum of four hours as opposed to the five to six hours previously.
- Volunteer drivers are able to receive training on the vehicles prior to the event taking place, which eliminated one of the highest risk factors.
- Every area had a chance to see Santa before 7.30pm, with the latest estimated return at a time of 7.40pm last year, whereas under the previous format some units were not returning to base until 8.45pm or later, which conflicted with parents trying to get children settled for bed.

3.5 A number of officers attended the event on the night to check on the welfare of the volunteers, but also to get a feel for how well the revised arrangements had been received by the public and to assess what went well and what did not work.

### **Fixed Locations / Meet and Greet**

3.6 Officers were delighted to receive a lot of assistance and support from many community organisations, public houses and churches who offered up their car parks and provided hospitality and assistance on the night.

3.7 Most of the fixed locations were well attended, with a steady flow of visitors, and public feedback from those in attendance was mainly positive, with a fun atmosphere and everyone enjoying themselves. Families of all ages came out to see Santa with parents, grandparents attending, including disabled people. There were no issues with cars parking with most residents attending the locations on foot.

3.8 Some locations and times were better attended than others with large numbers of public observed at Neville Parade Community Centre, School Aycliffe Community Centre, the Huntsman Pub, the Turbinia Pub, Pioneering Care Centre, Church of the Latter-Day Saints, Woodham Golf Club, the Iron Horse Pub, Aycliffe Village, Scout Hut and Staintondale. At the Oakfield stop, volunteers needed to take the initiative to control the area and limit car access. The Town Park was less well attended than anticipated but still had attendance numbers in the low hundreds.

3.9 Less well attended were Bewick Crescent and Greenwell Road, which would need rethinking this year, and the St Oswald's Park location, although a group from a nearby sheltered housing unit attended this location, commenting that this year they had all been able to see Santa as they knew the exact time. These are all things which can be developed if Council agrees to continue this format.

3.10 For those who attended the stops, the experience of being up close and engaging more with Santa was a positive one and this could be further developed by working in partnership with more community organisations in future years.

3.11 The dry weather on the night contributed towards the success of the fixed locations and the willingness of the public to attend these and a key consideration for future year's events needs to be having arrangements in place to mitigate against inclement weather. However, it should be noted that the weather has always been a factor in how well attended the event is.

3.12 In summary, officers are of the opinion that there is a strong foundation to build on with the fixed location format, with the key to improving the event lying in tweaking the timings and locations, including identifying stops in those areas which did not have as much coverage, such as the Western area, reviewing those locations that did not prove popular, and working closely with community centres, churches, public houses and other organisations to run the event in partnership with access to their facilities in the event of bad weather and the availability of refreshments. Officers already have some ideas for revisions to the timings and locations, for example seeking to move the town centre car park stop into St Clare's Church Hall to follow on from the end of the family Christingle Service.

### **Care Home Visits**

3.13 The visits to the Care Homes on the morning were also very popular and well received, with many families timing their visits to see relatives to tie in with the visit by Santa. A small gift was issued to each establishment for the residents. Officers are of the opinion that this addition should become part of the event moving forward.

## All Disabilities Matter Santa's Grotto

3.14 The local charity; All Disabilities Matter linked in its town centre Santa's Grotto to the Council's Santa Tours event, opening the Grotto on Christmas Eve, recording a video with the Mayor of Santa setting out on his tour of the town. The Grotto was open to all but also offered a dedicated opportunity for disabled and neurodiverse children to visit Santa. Officers wish to thank All Disabilities Matter for their assistance and support.

### Touring of Streets

3.15 Unfortunately, the 'tour' element of the event, with Santa travelling around selected streets, inside the vehicle, and waving at the public, was not a success and was poorly received by the community, leading to a large number of negative comments on social media (although no formal complaints have been received by the Council). Please note, that negative social media comments have also regularly been received in previous years in relation to the traditional tours, with complaints around timings and streets being missed.

3.16 Officers witnessed families who had come out to wait for Santa coming past in their areas who were left disappointed at the fact that the vehicles passed by quickly, did not stop, and that there was no opportunity for engagement with Santa.

3.17 It is clear that a proportion of the public highly value the traditional touring of the streets and want to see this restored as closely as possible to previous years.

3.18 As Members are aware from the previous reports, it will be very difficult to mitigate the many health and safety risks associated with running the Santa Tours in the traditional format, with Santa on the back of the vehicle, and going into every street.

3.19 The previous reports clearly highlight the risks and operational difficulties associated with this, including the use of donated vehicles and late receipt of these vehicles, difficulties sourcing enough volunteers and the late drop out of volunteers, tight cul-de-sacs, dead ends, and high volumes of parked cars, Santa travelling on the back of a moving vehicle, and allurement of children to moving vehicles.

3.20 Whilst it would not be impossible for the Santa Tours to be restored to the traditional format, officers are of the opinion that this could only be safely achieved by:

1. Making significant investment in implementing additional safety measures, for example by investing in additional vehicles, making adaptations to and fitting safety mechanisms to vehicles (as long as these were in line with VOSA regulations), and engaging professional stewarding, at a time when the Council is facing a difficult financial situation and when the 2026/27 Revenue and Capital Budgets have already been set; and / or
2. Moving the event away from Christmas Eve and running it over a number of evenings in a similar way to the Rotary Club. This way, only one Council vehicle would need to be adapted, including fitting a harness or seat belt, more volunteer stewards (and staff) could be used to create a soft buffer around the sleigh, reducing the risks of allurement, with volunteers bringing people to the sleigh by entering tight streets and cul-de-sacs on foot, rather than trying to bring the vehicle into tight dead ends. Each night would also require an officer of the Council overseeing safety rather than this responsibility being placed squarely on the shoulders of volunteers who are not trained in these areas. Additionally, by not being on Christmas Eve there is less potential for parked cars. Most importantly, it would remove the significant pressure and risks of trying to run 12 routes and cover every street in the town on one night.

## Formal Feedback

3.21 Whilst there was a large amount of unofficial feedback on social media, the only official feedback received by the Council to date was from Acorn Residents Association and a local community centre.

3.22 The Chairman of Acorn Residents Association made the following comments:

*To whom it may concern,*

*I am the chairperson for ACORN community association and have been speaking to residents in our area about the said Santa Tours.*

*I have to bring it to the Council's attention that the residents were not happy with last year's hybrid tour. Those that attended the car park gatherings reported that they didn't feel safe when attending; issues being cars driving children running (which they do) into the road and in-between parked cars, having to queue for Santa (which luckily the weather was cold but fine) so children were getting impatient. The stop off at the town centre was too late for most, so they drove to earlier ones (which defeats the whole situation). We had elderly residents who love to pop out to see Santa when he stops in the street and quite a few disabled children who didn't get to see Santa as they don't do crowds.*

*So the point of the email is to ask the council to start earlier so solutions to problems can be found and the old tours can be reinstated (they understand Santa can't safely do cul-de-sacs), but why can't a helper visit the areas to inform residents the big man is 5 minutes away?*

*We wait in anticipation for all the developments to be announced.*

3.23 A formal reply was provided, thanking the Chairman for his feedback, providing clarification on some of the issues highlighted, which in some cases were at odds with what was observed by officers in attendance, and providing reassurance that the Santa Tours were going to be subject to a full service review this year and that the Council was setting up a Santa Tours Sub-Committee with public and volunteer representation and to which he was welcome to apply to be part of.

3.24 The feedback from one of the community centre's is copied below:-

*"My own feedback regarding the use of the community centre was that we loved it as a committee! It brought lots of people to our centre that would not normally come and the experience was really positive. We offered free refreshments (although we did suggest a donation towards upkeep of the hall if people would like to) and had the hall open for all to use. If we were able to take part again next year, I anticipate that as we had more time to prepare, we would be able to decorate more etc, making the experience even better. I will let you know when I get feedback from the committee"*

3.25 Volunteers were asked for feedback upon their return from working on the revised event and comments included:-

- *Bewick Crescent and Greenwell Road had a very limited public turnout;*
- *The community centres and public houses were well attended;*
- *They did not like driving past people without stopping or engaging with the public while undertaking the touring aspect of the event;*
- *They enjoyed being down off the unit and engaging with the public;*
- *A chair is needed to make it easier to talk to children rather than kneeling down;*
- *The timing of one nursing home visit was not correct;*
- *Car park closure is needed at some stops;*
- *More stops are needed and some stops not long enough; and*
- *Consider going indoors at venues.*

3.26 As highlighted earlier, there was a very positive reaction and willingness to get involved in the event from the various community centres and buildings, public houses and churches many of whom have indicated a willingness to continue to take part in future years, and build on the first year by making adjustments where required to improve the event. For example, a number of organisations indicated their willingness to open up their buildings to bring Santa and the community together indoors

3.27 Officers would welcome feedback at this meeting from councillors, volunteers and members of the public both on how the 2025 event went and how it could be safely developed and changed this year to make the event even better.

### **Shildon Town Council Santa Tours**

3.28 Officers held a meeting with the Town Clerk from Shildon Town Council on 21<sup>st</sup> January to discuss the Shildon Town Council Santa Tours event, to establish how these tours are run, and consider whether there is anything that they do differently which could be taken on board in this Council's review of the event.

3.29 It was established that whilst there are some similarities between the events, there are some notable differences.

3.30 Shildon Town Council send out only two vehicles, both of which are owned by the Council and have at least three seats. The vehicles are fitted with a cage which is bolted onto the vehicles, following removal of the tailgate, with bars for Santa to hold onto, and a further frame bolted to the original frame to which a harness is fitted.

3.31 An adaption to the current frame is something that this Council could consider further for its own vehicles and officers will be visiting Shildon Town Council to view their vehicles and safety cages. However, it needs to be stressed that whilst this may assist in allowing Santa to travel on the back of the vehicles and go some way to addressing one key safety risk, this would not address the various other risks including narrow streets, tight cul-de-sacs, parked cars, allurement, lack of oversight of volunteers, the growing town, the need to bring in vehicles from outside, shortages of volunteers, volunteers dropping out at late notice, and difficulties properly briefing stand in volunteers.

3.32 Each of the Shildon Town Council vehicles has a driver, navigator and Santa. There is therefore a total volunteer requirement of six people, made up of staff, councillors and public. The vehicles tour the streets of the town, with Santa on the back of the vehicle waving at the public, but *not* stopping. The Council endeavour to cover most streets, but some streets are missed out if issues with safe access, parked cars and anti-social behaviour are experienced. It is important to note that the two units either have staff or councillors volunteering as driver and or navigator and therefore dynamic risk assessments can be carried out during the event by those who have a greater understanding of the area being toured and risk assessment

3.33 The vehicles do not travel at more than 15 miles an hour and Santa sits inside the vehicle if travel on main roads at higher speeds is required. This is something that cannot be accommodated on the Council's two-seater vehicles.

3.34 It was highlighted that Shildon as a town is very different to Great Aycliffe, being a much smaller town and with more traditional roads and streets, which lend themselves to the public coming out and standing on the road edges. Most streets have a clear route through, which the vehicles are able to travel safely through or with the ability to turn around, without the need to stop, reverse, or undertake difficult manoeuvres.

3.35 Interestingly, it was highlighted that up until the Coronavirus pandemic, Shildon Town Council did undertake a more traditional tour of the town *with* stops, but this was ceased in 2021, following essential temporary changes made to the event in line with COVID rules. The decision to permanently change the event was made for a variety of reasons, including the fact that the event was taking too long to run and becoming increasingly unmanageable due to the growing town and increasing public expectations, health and safety concerns, and anti-social behaviour. The Town Clerk highlighted that Shildon Town Council suffered a similar public outcry at the time of the changes but that this very quickly settled down and the event still remains very popular with few public complaints, although negative comments are still received every year on social media.

3.36 In summary, Shildon Town Council run a much smaller event than this Council, along the lines of the 'limited tour' element of the hybrid system adopted by this Council last year, with the only difference being that Santa travels on the back of the vehicle, with a cage and harness fitted to the vehicles.

## **Conclusions and Future Considerations**

3.37 The Council will need to consider and decide whether it wishes to pursue alternative options for running of the event in the traditional format, bearing in mind the difficulties and costs involved in satisfactorily mitigating the risks, or whether to focus on improving and adapting the fixed meeting point format (which was positively received by those who attended) to ensure the event is as accessible and magical as possible.

3.38 The Council has agreed at the Meeting of the Recreation Committee on 14<sup>th</sup> January to set up a Santa Tours Sub-Committee with member, volunteer and public representation, with a remit to review, on an ongoing basis, the success of the event and investigate the feasibility of making further improvements to the event in future years. It is proposed that any further work on the improvement and enhancement of the event is delegated to this sub-committee.

3.39 The set-up of this sub-committee has been widely publicised and volunteers and members of the public are being encouraged to get involved and help shape the future of the Santa Tours event.

## **4.0 Matters for Consideration**

4.1 Members are requested to:

- Evaluate the success of the changed Santa Tours Event on Christmas Eve 2025, taking into account the information provided in this report and officer, councillor, volunteer, and public feedback at the meeting.
- Consider and agree the preferred format of the 2026 event.
- Consider the future resourcing of the event, and making any recommendations for possible changes to the budget for the event ahead of the 2027/28 budget setting process (see Financial Implications Section).
- Put forward ideas for the future development and improvement of the event;
- Advise officers of any further work or investigations that are required ahead of the 2026 event.

4.2 It is also recommended that any further work on the improvement and enhancement of the event is delegated to the Santa Tours Sub-Committee, following this initial review and Members are asked to consider and agree the key issues for discussion at these meetings.

## **5.0 Policy Implications**

5.1 Consideration of this report will assist the Town Council with the delivery of the following Strategic Aims:

*No. 1 - To provide good quality governance and management of the Council.  
No. 2 - To manage the Council's finances and assets in a responsible manner.  
No. 3 - To provide accessible, affordable leisure facilities and opportunities.*

## **6.0 Staffing Implications**

6.1 The event is planned and administered by the Head of Leisure and Events and Events and Administration Assistant in the days, weeks and months leading up until Christmas Eve with volunteers being sourced, vetted, briefed and trained, the event routes and fixed locations being planned and agreed, publicising the event, setting up the vehicles etc.

6.2 The Head of Leisure and Events oversees the event on Christmas Eve afternoon and evening, with support from the Works Team Leader in being on call to respond to requests for help and in de-rigging the vehicles.

6.3 Support is also provided by the Senior Administration Assistant on the afternoon of the event, and this year, a number of officers, including the Town Clerk, Works and Environment Officer and Works Team Leader visited a number of the fixed locations to check on the welfare of the volunteers and get a feel for how well the revised arrangements had been received by the public and to assess what went well and what did not work.

6.4 Significant time is also spent by works operatives setting up and derigging the vehicles before and after the event.

## **7.0 Financial Implications**

7.1 Currently there is a total budget of £3,300 for both the Santa Tours and Santa Letters.

7.2 Currently all volunteers are offered a £20 gift card as a small token of appreciation for giving up their time on Christmas Eve, while there are costs to dry cleaning the Santa costumes, sweets for handing out to the children, light refreshments for volunteers, replacement lights, insurance of any donated vehicles, Santa suits and associated items, fuel, and vehicle trackers.

7.3 In recent years, each route has been sponsored by a local company or organisation who very kindly donate £100 per route towards the costs of running the event. In 2025 all five units were sponsored.

7.4 The small budget allocated for this event means that no resources are currently available to fund the employment of professional stewards, the hiring in of vehicles or making adaptions to existing vehicles.

7.5 It may be a future consideration, if the Council agree to maintain the format of fixed locations and involving local community centres, churches, public houses etc, to consider offering a small donation to each organisation as a token of gratitude and to offset the costs of providing hospitality (hot drinks, snacks, energy costs) or the purchase of decorative Christmas items to enhance the area for the community.

7.6 Please note, any decision to make significant investment in implementing additional safety measures etc would need to be very carefully considered at a time when the Council is facing a difficult financial situation and when the 2026/27 Revenue and Capital Budgets have already been set.

## **8.0 Crime and Disorder Implications**

- 8.1 Previous reports have highlighted the issues experienced with negative comments on social media, anti-social behaviour, in the form of verbal abuse of the volunteers, an angry resident running up at the council offices looking for Santa, and even some instances of items being thrown at Santa.
- 8.2 There were no accidents, near misses or incidents reported by the volunteer teams in respect of the 2025 event. Officers observed one informal report of a lone male observing the Town Park meet and greet. He was challenged and advised he was simply watching 'to see what the event was like'.
- 8.3 One volunteer advised officers of an incident, which is believed not to be related to the event, of a suspicious vehicle in one of the locations.
- 8.4 As highlighted earlier, there was a large number of negative comments and criticism of the Council on social media, largely in relation to the 'tour' element of the event.

## **9.0 Equal Opportunities Implications**

- 9.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment is attached at **Appendix 5**.
- 9.2 It is considered that the changes made to the event in 2025 have made the Santa Tours event more accessible to groups with protected characteristics as the event now allows the community to take part at a time and place that best suits them.
- 9.3 Provision was also made, via working with a local charity, for an accessible Santa's Grotto event to be held in the town centre for those with disabilities and neurodiverse conditions.
- 9.4 Officers also had a discussion with a local disabled group visiting Santa at one of the fixed locations who expressed their gratitude for the revised arrangements as it meant they could attend at their leisure, knowing Santa was on site for an extended period of time, whereas in the past they had regularly missed him.

## **10.0 Environment, Biodiversity and Climate Change Implications**

- 10.1 None specifically relating to the issues in this report.

## **11.0 Risk Assessment**

- 11.1 It is not considered that the matters contained in this report pose a risk to health and safety of staff or to the financial or public standing of the Council to a degree that a risk assessment should be appended to this report.
- 11.2 The risks identified in previous reports and documented in the Corporate Risk Assessment and Health and Safety Risk Assessment, which are attached at Appendix 2 with the previous report, have all been sufficiently mitigated as a result of the changes made to the format of the event last year.
- 11.3 The health and safety risk assessment for the revised event, which is also attached with the previous report at Appendix 2, has been updated and reviewed by the Council's Health and Safety Advisor and insurers and it has been confirmed that both are satisfied that the risks are now being managed to a reasonable level on the basis of the 2025 format of the event.

## **12.0 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)**

12.1 Is any personal or sensitive data required for this proposal which may have any implications for GDPR?

**NO**

## **13.0 Recommendations**

13.1 It is recommended that Members:-

- i) Receive the report.
- ii) Evaluate the success of the changed Santa Tours Event on Christmas Eve 2025, taking into account the information provided in this report and officer, councillor, volunteer and public feedback.
- iii) Consider and agree the preferred format of the 2026 event.
- iv) Consider the future resourcing of the event (see Financial Implications) and make any recommendations for possible changes to the budget for the event ahead of the 2027/28 budget setting process.
- v) Put forward ideas for the future development and improvement of the event.
- vi) Advise officers of any further work or investigations that are required ahead of the 2026 event.
- vii) Agree that any further work on the improvement and enhancement of the event is delegated to the Santa Tours Sub-Committee, following this initial review and Members are asked to consider and agree the key issues for discussion at these meetings.