

SANTA TOURS CONSULTATION

AGENDA ITEM No. 11

MEETING: RECREATION COMMITTEE

DATE: 27TH MAY 2026

REPORT BY: HEAD OF LEISURE AND EVENTS AND TOWN CLERK

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to put forward options for the format and method of the public consultation on the agreed format of the 2026 Santa Tours event.

2.0 Background to the Report

2.1 As Members are aware, the Council has undertaken a service review of the 2025 Santa Tours event via the Service Review Sub Committee Meeting on 4th February 2026, and subsequently held two meetings of the newly established Santa Tours Sub Committee on 3rd March and 28th April. The purpose of these meetings was:

- 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.*

2.2 A copy of the reports and minutes from these meetings can be viewed via the Meetings Section of the Council website.

2.3 The Council has considered detailed information regarding the challenges of running the event in its traditional format, including significant safety concerns and logistical difficulties, including sourcing vehicles and volunteers, and has investigated various options for the 2026 event.

2.4 It was agreed at the last Santa Tours Sub Committee that:

- a) *The plans for the 2026 event should be focussed on maintaining and enhancing the fixed location, meet and greet format on Christmas Eve, with more and improved locations, and the care home visits, supplemented by a separate non-stop tour of accessible streets, with Santa safely harnessed to the back of the vehicle, using the one Council works vehicle which is currently adaptable to fit a framework and harness.*
- b) *Officers do not further explore opportunities for working in formal partnership with the Rotary Club on a touring element but that officers are free to liaise with community organisations such as the Rotary Club with a view to them getting involved and assisting with the meet and greet format.*
- c) *A public consultation is undertaken to gain an understanding of what residents want and that officers identify options for the format and method of the consultation, seek feedback from the volunteer and public members of this sub-committee, and bring options to the next Recreation Committee meeting for consideration.*

- 2.5 This report focusses on options for format and method of the public consultation.
- 2.6 Feedback was sought from members of the Santa Tours Sub Committee, as requested, to inform this report, but no responses were received.

3.0 Current Situation – Public Consultation Format and Method

- 3.1 Officers are pleased that the Santa Tours Sub-Committee has made a firm decision on the format of the 2026 event, which provides a safe and deliverable event, and gives officers a clear remit to begin the early planning the event in the autumn.
- 3.2 Since the April Santa Tours Sub-Committee Meeting, officers have taken the time to undertake further investigations into what would be the best way to consult with the public on the plans for the 2026 event, both in relation to the format of the public survey, and the arrangements for publicising the consultation.
- 3.3 Officers are aware there were a number of differing opinions on this in the Santa Tours Sub Committee Meeting, ranging from not consulting at all and simply communicating the decision, to consulting on the preferred option, and consulting on all of the options considered by the Council over the last few meetings.
- 3.4 Suggested consultation methods ranged from online surveys, paper surveys being distributed to all households, press releases, boosted social media posts etc.

Survey Format

- 3.5 The Council first needs to decide on the format of the consultation.
- 3.6 Based on the discussions at the last Santa Tours Sub Committee Meeting, officers are of the opinion that there are three options open to the Council:
1. Communicate the outcome of the Council's review and decision reached as widely as possible e.g. press release, leaflet drop, website, social media etc.
 2. Undertake a survey on the preferred option as highlighted in paragraph 2.4c asking whether responders are in favour of running the event in this way.
 3. Undertake a survey on all of the options considered by the Council over the last few meetings.
- 3.7 Officers are of the opinion that options 1 and 2 should be considered.
- 3.8 If it is decided that a consultation is to be undertaken on the preferred option, officers have updated the draft survey reported to the last meeting to take account of the feedback at the meeting and this now focusses on the one agreed option.
- 3.9 This is attached for Member's consideration at Appendix 1 and Members are asked to consider the content and layout of this survey and provide feedback to officers.
- 3.10 However, officers would also support the first option of simply communicating the outcome of the Council's review and decision reached as widely as possible. This is on the basis that the Council has considered all options, in detail, in recent months and has agreed on a preferred format via the Santa Tours Sub Committee.
- 3.11 Officers are of the strong opinion that undertaking a consultation on all of the options considered by the Council over the last few meetings would risk going back over old ground and further delay the agreement of a safe and viable option, and the ability to begin detailed planning of the format of the event in the autumn.

Survey Methods

- 3.12 As highlighted earlier, possible consultation methods include:
1. An online e-survey
 2. A paper survey being distributed to all households
 3. A leaflet explaining the reasons the event needs to change, the options investigated, and the preferred option.
 4. A press release
 5. Boosted social media posts.
- 3.13 As previously reported, the Council currently uses the 'Smart Survey' software for undertaking public surveys and it is recommended that this software is used if the Council agrees to publish and undertake an e-survey.
- 3.14 This survey software allows the disablement of multiple responses, but it does not appear that a local restriction can be added (to ensure only responders with a Great Aycliffe Post Code or UK IP address can respond).
- 3.15 If agreed, it is proposed that the survey be publicised via the Newton News, Northern Echo, Council Website, noticeboards, and social media channels, as well as via the various local social media pages such as Anything Aycliffe, Around Town, Aycliffe Uncensored etc.
- 3.16 It is further proposed that consideration is given to paying for the posts to be 'boosted' to increase the chances of the post being seen. Boosting Facebook posts can be done in a range of ways. For example, a target audience can be defined, including age, gender and within a set location (e.g. a diameter of one mile of Newton Aycliffe) and the post can also be set to run for a set number of days. The cost of Facebook 'boosts' ranges from £2 to £200 per day with the amount spent determining the number of 'impressions' likely to be achieved.
- 3.17 Members also need to consider whether they would wish for a paper survey to be distributed to all households. This could be organised via the Newton Press or another company and indicative costs are included in the Financial Implications.

Officer Conclusions and Recommendations

- 3.18 It would be the conclusion and recommendation of the officers that the focus of the public consultation on the 2026 Santa Tours event should be on either:
- a) Undertaking a consultation on the preferred option, via an online e-survey and a paper survey being distributed to all households using the suggested draft survey attached at Appendix 1 (taking into account feedback from Members); or
 - b) Communicating the outcome of the Council's review and decision reached as widely as possible via a leaflet drop to all households, press release and boosted social media posts, explaining the reasons the event needs to change, the options investigated, and the chosen option for 2026 and including a commitment to continue to review and enhance the event in years to come.

4.0 Policy Implications

- 4.1 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.

5.0 Staffing Implications

- 5.1 Council officers will be tasked with organising and undertaking the consultation.
- 5.2 There would be a significant staff time implication if a survey is undertaken and a significant number of responses are received, particularly if these include a large number of qualitative comments.

6.0 Financial Implications

- 6.1 Currently there is a total budget of £3,300 for both the Santa Tours and Santa Letters.
- 6.2 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 for dry cleaning the Santa costumes, sweets for handing out to the children, light refreshments for volunteers, replacement lights, replacement Santa suits and associated items, fuel, and vehicle trackers.
- 6.3 The costs of the Smart Survey software are already budgeted for in the Corporate Budget.
- 6.4 The cost of Facebook 'boost' ranges from £2 to £200 per day with the amount spent determining the number of 'impressions' likely to be achieved.
- 6.5 Indicative costs have been sought for the printing of two-sided leaflet and its distribution to an estimated 12,500 households in the Parish. This leaflet could be used in either of the options set out in paragraph 3.17. The quoted costs are:

A4 Double Page Leaflet x 12,500	£638
Distribution to 12,500 Households	£750
Total Cost	£1,388

- 6.6 Any unbudgeted additional costs associated with the consultation, over and above the monies in the Santa Tours Revenue Budget, would need to be funded from the Revenue Budget Contingency Sum.

7.0 Crime and Disorder Implications

- 7.1 None specifically relating to this report.

8.0 Equal Opportunities Implications

- 8.1 It is recommended that the consultation is undertaken in a variety of different formats with the aim of it reaching every households in the Parish.
- 8.2 As with any Council document, the consultation documents will be produced in alternative formats upon request.

9.0 Environment, Biodiversity and Climate Change Implications

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

10.0 Risk Assessment

- 10.1 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.

11.0 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)

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

NO

12.0 Recommendations

12.1 It is recommended that Members:-

- i) Receive the report.
- ii) Consider the options highlighted in the report relating to both the format and method of consultation and consider the recommendation of the officers that the focus of the public consultation on the 2026 Santa Tours event should be on either:
 - a) Undertaking a consultation on the preferred option, via an online e-survey and a paper survey being distributed to all households using the suggested draft survey attached at Appendix 1 (taking into account any feedback from Members); *or*
 - b) Communicating the outcome of the Council's review and decision reached as widely as possible via a leaflet drop to all households, press release and boosted social media posts, explaining the reasons the event needs to change, the options investigated, and the chosen option for 2026 and including a commitment to continue to review and enhance the event in years to come.