

12 February 2026

To Members of the Council

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby summoned to a meeting of the **PROJECT & EVENTS COMMITTEE** (Cllrs: Fraser, Bampton Smith, Hedges, Hoyle, Macdonald, Turner, Young) which will be held in the Greenwood Room in Hebden Bridge Town Hall on **Tuesday 17 February 2026 at 7.30pm**



Emma Green  
Clerk to the Council



#### AGENDA

1. To receive apologies and reasons for absence and any substitutions.
2. To receive members' interests relating to agenda items for this meeting.
3. To report on matters arising from the minutes of meeting held 11 February 2026 not itemised on this agenda (to be tabled at the meeting).
4. **PROJECT UPDATE 2025-26**  
To receive a verbal update and decide on actions as appropriate.
  - a) Review of Christmas Lights & Switch On events (enc).
5. **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**  
To resolve to exclude members of the public and press under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 during consideration of items of a confidential nature.

4.9

## **Review of Hebden Royd Christmas Lights & Switch On Events**

To invite the Committee to review the current format, scale and delivery model of the Hebden Royd Christmas Lights Switch On events, and to consider options for alternative approaches for Christmas 2026 onwards that are proportionate, sustainable and reflective of current capacity, funding and community engagement.

### **Background and Context**

Historically, Christmas lights switch on events in Hebden Royd were modest, community-led occasions held in civic and community spaces. One event was held in only Hebden Bridge. The event typically featured local schools and artists, informal performances, and a ceremonial lights switch on by Santa, with limited infrastructure and generally minimal cost.

From 2012 the event was split into two, in Mytholmroyd this took place inside and outside St Michael's Church and in Hebden Bridge, in St. George's Square. Over time, attendance increased and the events expanded in scale. The venues also expanded, with the Mytholmroyd event moving from the church to Community Centre and also inside Hebden Bridge Town Hall respectively. This growth brought additional elements such as more stalls, children's rides, and at their largest, minor celebrity involvement and fireworks displays. As costs, complexity and safety considerations increased, some elements were later scaled back.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Rotary Club of Hebden Bridge via Light Up the Valley (LUTV) became involved in delivering Christmas activity across Hebden Royd and surrounding hilltop communities as part of the return to community events. LUTV benefited from post-pandemic external funding available at the time and planned and delivered events in partnership working with HRTC. In the years following the pandemic, this model established an expectation of larger-scale annual Christmas switch on events (albeit reduced from the touring version that visited the hilltop parishes) to the central locations of Hebden Bridge and Mytholmroyd. Therefore, in recent years HRTC has delivered two Christmas Lights Switch On events, in either town, each year.

### **Current Position**

The context in which the current events operate has changed significantly. All funding for Hebden Royd Christmas events is met directly from the HRTC Projects & Events budget. At the same time, the Rotary Club of Hebden Bridge has indicated that LUTV has now concluded, and that while still keen to support Christmas events, the Rotary Club has stepped back from longer-term project planning support and oversight to focus primarily on delivery support on event days. This coincides with the stepping

down of their event lead who previously led much of the Rotary's event organisation capacity.

Delivering Christmas Lights Switch On events at the same scale and complexity as 2025 would require additional officer capacity or external support beyond that currently allocated. In this context, especially with the conclusion of LUTV, November 2026 represents a transition point and an opportunity to review the Council's overall Christmas offer.

### **Recent Observations and Challenges**

The following observations are intended to inform the Committee's consideration:

#### **Event Scale, Cost and Attendance**

- The total budget for Christmas 2025 events was approximately £22,500. Based on 2025 attendance, the cost per head was relatively high, particularly at the Mytholmroyd event, although not unfeasible.
- Attendance at Mytholmroyd in 2025 was lower than anticipated, with Hebden Bridge seeing slightly higher but still moderate footfall.
- Visits to Santa's grotto at both locations were down by approximately 25% compared with previous years.
- Against a backdrop of a slight overall Project & Events budget reduction, if delivered at the same scale, costs in 2026 are expected to increase further due to inflation and rising performer, venue hire and contractor fees.

#### **Markets and Associated Activity**

- Fewer stallholders have come forward in recent years, citing reduced footfall, rising costs and clashes with other markets on Saturdays and Sundays.
- Stallholder fees are limited by viability concerns, while costs associated with infrastructure specifically market stall hire and additional car park lighting are significant.
- In 2025, the outdoor market element broadly broke even, but only with substantial input from Rotary as lead organiser, supported by HRTC. Should the market continue in its current format, additional support and capacity would be required.

#### **Delivery Capacity and Risk**

- The current events require extensive planning and on-the-day delivery involving long operational hours for staff and volunteers.
- Outdoor events in November carry ongoing risks related to weather and flood conditions, as demonstrated by the cancellation of the 2024 Mytholmroyd event.
- The complexity of managing large-scale, multi-element events increases operational and reputational risk for the Council.

### **Community Value and Engagement**

- The format of the events has remained largely unchanged over several years, with similar programming and performers.
- There is limited evidence regarding how much value the wider community places on the current scale and format of the events, particularly given changing patterns of engagement and cost-of-living pressures.

### **New Partnership / Alignment Opportunities**

In 2025, Hebden Royd Business Forum delivered a range of Christmas initiatives in Hebden Bridge through a successful HRTC Community Funding grant. These included one late-night shopping evening, creative street activity with Handmade Parade, a shopper's loyalty card scheme and window trail.

There may be opportunities for closer alignment between HRTC's Christmas activity and HRBF and partner-led initiatives, allowing the Council to support and enhance activity that combines and maximises footfall rather than continuing to deliver standalone large-scale events in isolation.

### **Re-branding and Future Direction**

With the conclusion of LUTV, there is an opportunity to re-brand the Council's Christmas offer to better reflect a refreshed focus and more sustainable delivery model.

### **Suggested Areas and Ideas for Consideration**

The Committee is invited to consider the current offer, in addition to bringing new ideas to the discussion. The following suggestions may support the discussion / provide a starting point:

- **Retain Two Switch On Events at a Reduced Scale**  
HRTC would continue to deliver Christmas Lights Switch On events in both Hebden Bridge and Mytholmroyd, but at a reduced scale. Events would be smaller and more focused, with fewer programmed elements and a simplified

format. Markets and ancillary activity would be reduced or removed, and overall infrastructure, staffing requirements and operational hours would be redrawn to create a more manageable and proportionate offer.

- **Single Annual Switch On Event (Alternating Locations)**

Delivering one principal Christmas Lights Switch On event each year, alternating between Hebden Bridge and Mytholmroyd on an annual basis. The non-host location could still receive Christmas lighting and lower-key festive activity, but without a full switch on event. This would allow resources to be concentrated on a single event, improving quality while reducing overall costs, workload and delivery risk.

- **Shift from Event-Led to Season-Led Christmas Activity**

HRTC could move away from large, single-day switch on events and instead deliver a programme of smaller-scale Christmas activity across the festive period. The focus could be on enhanced lighting, trails or installations and self-guided experiences that residents and visitors can engage with over a number of days. This approach would reduce reliance on weather-dependent outdoor events and spread both impact and engagement across several days.

- **Align with Existing Events and Partner Activity**

This option could see the Town Council aligning a Christmas Lights Switch on moment with existing partner activity, such as late-night shopping events or Calderdale-led street markets. By building on initiatives that already attract footfall, HRTC could reduce duplication, limit additional infrastructure requirements and maximise the impact of partner-led activity.

- **Commission External Event Delivery**

Where larger-scale Christmas activity is retained, this option would involve commissioning external organisers to manage planning and delivery within an agreed scope and budget. This approach would reduce the direct operational burden on officers, clarify responsibilities and help manage risk, while still allowing the Council to set the overall direction and priorities for the event.

### **Key Takeaway on Financial and Resource Implications**

Maintaining the current model will result in higher costs in 2026. Although the Projects & Events budget for 2026/27 has been marginally reduced, there remains adequate funding within the budget to support this. Alternative approaches may enable the

Council to reduce expenditure, better manage risk, and align delivery with available officer and volunteer capacity.