



REPORT FOR DECISION

Item No:- ME22/047

Committee:-	Markets and Events Committee
Date:-	1 st February 2023
Author:-	Emma Dezelu, Deputy Clerk
Report Title:-	Review of Christmas 2022 and planning for Christmas 2023
Wards Affected:-	William Knibb mostly

1. Purpose of Report

To:-

- a) Provide a summary of the 2022 Christmas activity and
- b) To agree how to proceed with Christmas 2023 activity

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that

- a) The activity report for 2022 be noted
- b) That tenders be sought from companies able to provide and erect Christmas lights in the town centre, for a three year contract period, with a tender document broken into zones so as to allow decisions to remove any areas which cannot be afforded within the budget.
- c) That a single tree be acquired for installation in the market place of the size and type previously provided.
- d) For the Switch on event, external events companies be asked to quote for providing the stage, compere, acts, big screen and ancillary entertainment and that the Council eschews the use of a big name celebrity and relies on local people and acts to front the event.

- e) Grotto - Members views are sought on whether to provide an indoor grotto in 2023, or to provide one with a smaller footprint in the market place
- f) Members are asked to endorse the proposed arrangements for Christmas Markets, street entertainment and the Christmas trail

3. Information review of 2022

3.1. Switch on event .

- 3.1.1. The 2022 Switch On event and entertainment was organised by North Northamptonshire Council with Kettering Town Council running the trader and food stalls. The event was well attended by the public, despite rain earlier in the day.
- 3.1.2. A total of 23 traders were booked for the event and sited around the Market Place and along High Street and Sheep Street. Feedback from the traders was generally positive, with traders noting that the crowd dispersed after the lights were switched on at 6:30pm, despite there being entertainment still running on the stage. One complaint was received about the volume of music from the stage.
- 3.1.3. Costings for the event have been provided by NNC's events team, to enable planning for 2023. They spent £14534 of which about £xxx was for the cost of VIP fees, VIP reception and related arrangements. These costs however do not include the NNC direct labour both for stewarding the event, connecting the lights for the switch on moment, or for set up and removal costs of the stage. Their staffing was supplemented by volunteer labour from street pastors, first responders and NNC staff given time from their normal duties.
- 3.1.4. Other feedback, including that gathered during KTC's budget consultation exercise, included comments about the overall cost of staging the event, the value of paying for a celebrity and ensuring the event has more input from local groups and organisations. Anecdotally, there was an impression that the event did not feel very local in its execution.

3.2. Santa's Grotto – Sunday 27 November to Saturday 24 December

- 3.2.1. The grotto was provided by North Pole Productions, based in Kettering, and ran during the weekends and school holidays up to Christmas Eve. There was no grotto in town in 2021, however a similar grotto was organised by North Pole Productions and ran in the Market Place in 2020.
- 3.2.2. Ticket prices were kept low, to differentiate the town centre grotto with other local providers. Sales and bookings were managed by North Pole, and sales figures were 500 children through the grotto.

3.2.3. Sited in the Market Place inside a marquee, the grotto took up a large proportion of the area of the area and its size meant there was a limitation on the Christmas markets. However, it did form part of the draw for coming to the Market Place and, along with the entertainment provided, gave some critical mass to the events organised on Saturdays particularly.

3.3. Christmas Markets and street entertainment – Saturdays 26 November 3, 10 and 17 December

3.3.1. Markets were organised on four Saturdays in the run-up to Christmas in the Market Place to increase footfall in the town. They were held alongside the grotto in the Market Place and consisted of stalls, food traders, music and entertainment and further down High Street towards the town centre.

3.3.2. This was the first year Christmas markets were run in such a way in the town centre. Feedback from traders has been generally positive, fairly dependent on the nature and type of stall, with some stalls proving much more popular than others. Some traders reported a general reluctance of the public to spend, blaming the background of the cost of living crisis.

3.3.3. Several traders carried on to attend general markets on Fridays and Saturdays in December and have expressed interested in returning for the specialist markets in 2023. Useful contacts have also been built with traders, especially food traders, who are interested in returning to attend Saturday events in the Market Place.

3.3.4. The town centre was busy during the market Saturdays and one challenge on the day was attracting people down to the Market Place. Entertainment was spread down High Street and banners were put up around the town centre to get people to the markets. If the markets become regular Christmas attractions, their reputation will build and combined with ongoing publicity they can be grown.

3.3.5 Entertainment consisted of a mixture of street entertainment – juggling, balloon modelling, children’s storytelling and games and walkabout elves – plus music from a range of bands, choirs and musicians – and DJs.

3.4. Christmas trail – Saturday 26 November to Saturday 24 December

3.4.1. The 12 Days of Christmas Trail was a free activity for children to gather clues in shops around the town and claim a prize at the end. It involved working with 12 local businesses/organisations, to drive footfall to those businesses. Only 60 children completed the trail although it seems more

started than finished This was less than in previous years and was probably a reflection of the three-year gap since it last ran and that awareness of it had dipped amongst families.

- 3.4.2. Feedback from the businesses taking part was that the trail was nevertheless popular and generally worked well, increasing traffic into their shops. There were some issues with children getting hold of the trail sheet at the start, which could be solved by having more sheets available at more venues or a different start point (eg the library)

4. Christmas 2023 arrangements

- 4.1. **Lights display** – three potential providers were shown the existing lights arrays in December and asked to give a ball park figure for how much it would cost for them to provide something on a similar scale; this would involve erection and removal of the lights. The indicative costs are between £25000-£40000 although not everyone has yet replied. It is proposed that the Council goes out to tender for the provision of lights as soon as possible, with a flexible list of sites so that if costs exceed budget then decisions can be made about what is dropped from any eventual contract. Their advice is that a three year contract is likely to secure the best price.

- 4.2. **Christmas tree** - The usual town tree is a 30ft Nordmann fir which is set in the central anchor point in Market Place. Quotes are being sought for provision of a tree and so car quotes have varied hugely from £650 to £14,000.

- 4.3. **Switch on event** - KTC has agreed to take on the event for 2023 from NNC. Previously, NNC organised the event using their own staffing resources, and hiring in equipment and entertainment. Options for running the event in 2023 include
- KTC taking on the event management on the ground, using available resources or
 - outsourcing to an event management company.

Elements of the event to manage include:

- Equipment: Stage, sound and lighting, Radios, Fencing, Promotional Banners, Big screen; Services:
- Entertainment – on stage and roaming, Artist liaison and stage management, Advertising and promotion;
- Staffing: Event Control, traffic management, First Aid, Security and Event Safety, Stewarding and stage management
- Managing the Market and Trader element: Booking stalls and traders, Erection of stalls, Siting and event management on the day.

NNC used approximately 20 people to manage the event on the day in 2022 plus they called on resources from Three Lions Security, Oneway Traffic Management, police, First Responders and street pastors. A further dozen or so staff plus vehicles, were employed to remove the staging etc after the event.

Initial discussions with two potential providers show that it would be possible to contract with someone to provide the stage, compere, acts and ancillary entertainment for an affordable amount.

4.4. **Grotto** – This year’s arrangements cost just under £13,000 and took up a large portion of the Market Place – the actual service cost £5000, but the cost of the marquee, security, barriers and branding added a further £7,800. The options for 2023 are

- Do the same or very similar again
- Commission a smaller grotto in the Market Place presumably from a different provider
- Provide a Grotto indoors – the main options would be in the Newlands Centre or the Art Gallery, in conjunction with either Newlands or NNC.

An outdoor grotto in the Market Place is likely to cost in the region of £13,000 - £20,000, which would involve it being open during weekends and school holidays up to Christmas, as well as staffing, management and a booking system.

4.5. **Markets and events** – these could be held in the Market Place, on the four Saturdays in the run-up to Christmas, supported with music and entertainment.

4.6. **Christmas trail** – the trail around shops and businesses is relatively low-cost to provide but gives publicity and footfall to local shops during the festive period.

5. Consultation and Engagement

5.1. Feedback from the budget consultation exercise re Christmas showed that 65% of people who commented were in favour of the town council running the Christmas lights switch on event for 2023. Comments included concerns about the expense of the lights for the town and the cost of a celebrity for the switch-on event.

5.2. Ideas for how to celebrate Christmas 2023 included holding markets, fairs, running traditional events and involving choirs and bands.

6. Finance, Legal and Resource Implications

6.1. The total cost of activities in 2022 was £21,102, against which the Council received a small contribution to security costs from NNC of £211 and income of £1,020 from market stall hirings. The costs were broken down as follows:-

• Christmas Santa’s Lapland lodge	£12,817
• Christmas markets and entertainment	£ 7,624
• Switch on event	£ 388
• Christmas Trail	£ 293

6.2. These costs include for the cost of providing market stalls and the services of an events supervisor on three of the Saturdays in December.

7. Climate Change Implications

7.1. Events are provided to boost the local economy, increase footfall into the town centre and are primarily aimed at local people and bringing them into town, as opposed to them travelling to other town centres. In that sense, they contribute to lower emissions from shorter journey lengths. In so far as local people are involved as traders, entertainers and event providers, then this boosts the very local economy and strengthens local community links.

7.2. Christmas lights consume electricity – the proposal to acquire/hire newer lights will enable us to use better energy performance lights than those is use last year and beforehand.

7.3. Many of the activities provided have a low carbon footprint. The provision of the grotto can be made less resource intensive by changing how it is provided in future.

8. Other Policy Implications

The Council's policy is to support the economic vitality of the town centre.

Background Papers

Activity reports from events in 2022

Accounting system information

Quotes received