



REPORT FOR DECISION

Item No:- ME22/036

Committee:-	Markets and Events Committee
Date:-	30 th November 2022
Author:-	Martin Hammond, Clerk
Report Title:-	Arrangement for Christmas Lights and Switch on event 2023 onwards
Wards Affected:-	Willian Knibb primarily

1. Purpose of Report

To consider if and how the Council wishes to assume full responsibility for Christmas lights in 2023 and for the annual lights switch on event.

2. Recommendations

The clerk recommends

- a) That the Council agrees in principal to take over the provision of Christmas lighting displays in 2023 subject to more details being made available by NNC as to the costs to be incurred and the legal arrangements for fixings being used.
- b) That the Council seeks quotations for the annual provision of Christmas lights displays from specialist providers and declines the offer of the transfer of the current lighting arrays held by NNC
- c) That the Council assumes responsibility for arranging the switch on event in 2023, subject to further reports on costs, resourcing, practicalities and features

3. Information

3.1. NNC have asked this Council (and Wellingborough Council), in our respective towns, to

- a) assume responsibility for providing Christmas lights from 2023 onwards
- b) assume responsibility for organising the annual switch on event from 2023.

3.2. The Christmas lights traditions and practices in the two towns are different and therefore there are quite different considerations for each town. Kettering's display and event are significantly greater than Wellingborough's and therefore more expensive and work intensive. Elsewhere

on this agenda, and for convenience, the events programme envisages that the Town Council does take responsibility for both these items, for the reasons set out below, but members will need to be aware of the financial and resource impacts of doing so and to consider the best way of managing this new function.

3.3. NNC have decided they do not wish, largely for cost and equity reasons, to continue providing Christmas lights in any part of their area, nor to organise switch on events. Elsewhere in the NN area, town councils have organised these events and provided lights, and in Corby, the town centre owners do that. Only Kettering and Wellingborough have that service provided by NNC and Rothwell and Desborough benefit from the provision of lights only at the moment.

3.4. In 2022, there is a joint effort between KTC and NNC to provide the Christmas experience with the Town Council this year providing or paying for

- a santa's grotto
- Christmas markets on five days, including on the 24th November (the switch on event)
- Street entertainment and music on Saturdays

whilst NNC organises the switch on event and puts up the lights.

3.5. Switch on event

3.5.1. Organising the Christmas lights switch on is a resource intensive exercise, not only in terms of preparation time, but also on the day. Some 20 NNC staff are employed on the day as well as security, and traffic management staff. This Council will need to find a way of managing the event with a much more limited number of staff in future.

3.5.2. It is understood that the 2022 Christmas lights event will cost in excess of £14000 to arrange. At present, a sum of £9000 has been included in the KTC budget on the basis that some elements of the arrangements can be stripped out without detracting from the enjoyment and the spectacle. This obviously will have to be depth charged.

3.5.3. There is some value in combining all the events activities throughout Christmas under one authority. It is possible that some temporary help might be necessary during the preparatory season and on the day if the same sort of spectacle and event is to be maintained. It would be possible to scale the event down, but that might appear – in 2023 - that the Town Council is not capable of providing the same quality of event as NNC.

3.5.4. The alternative approach – doing nothing – will mean that a popular event that takes place every year – will be lost, along with some of the economic benefits to the town centre which flow from it.

3.6. Christmas lights display

3.6.1. The current lights used in town were acquired by KBC, and are stored, maintained, and tested by NNC, with some replacement of arrays taking place periodically. The newest arrays were bought in 2019 and other parts are significantly older. It is not clear what the overall condition of the lights is. NNC pay contractors to put the lights up and take them down. The contractors use fixings on privately publicly owned buildings and features – although not generally to lamp posts. The electricity is drawn from the existing public power infrastructure throughout town, and not obviously separately accounted for.

3.6.2. Initial discussions with NNC suggests that the current annual cost of storing, maintaining, testing, replacing, insuring, fixing, and taking down Christmas lights is in the order of £30,000 but at this point no hard evidence or break down of costs has been provided and

it may not exist in a way which can be disaggregated, as these costs also cover displays used in Rothwell and Desborough. There is no information at all about electricity costs.

- 3.6.3. The conditions of the fixings is unknown. Agreements to assume responsibility for erecting lights on privately owned buildings are unknown. It cannot be assumed that agreements for the town council to do so will be forthcoming. The process of establishing our rights to do so may be work intensive.
- 3.6.4. NNC is proposing to transfer the lights to KTC at no cost. However, it is not prepared to store them, so if the Council was to accept the existing lights it would have to:-
- Find and pay for storage
 - Pay a contractor to test the lights as required by law
 - Replace lights and displays as necessary
 - Pay a contractor to erect them and take them down each year
 - Insure them

Only some of these costs will be reflected in the approximate £30,000 cost referred to above – storage, insurance and testing costs will be additional.

- 3.6.5. In Wellingborough, there had been a practice of hiring in lights every year from a provider - which also guaranteed variety from one year to another and takes away the need to manage and store lights between times. Discussions with one contractor will have taken place before this meeting and there at least two other known providers who can be asked to quote.
- 3.6.6. Members' views are sought on therefore declining the offer of taking on the Christmas lights arrays held by NNC and instead that quotations be sought for a contact which allows for the provision of lights each year, their erection and removal.
- 3.6.7. The alternative – not to provide lights – will have the effect of reducing the attractiveness, look and feel of the town centre at Christmas and potentially impact on the economy of the town centre at a crucial point in time.

4. Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1. The budget consultation has posed questions about the provision of Christmas lights, and responses to date can be reported verbally at the meeting.

5. Finance, Legal and Resource Implications

- 5.1. The Council will spend about £20,000 in 2022 on Christmas events and activities and will attract about £750 in market stall hire income.
- 5.2. The 2023/24 budget has had included in it £60,000 for Christmas in 2023; this allows, as best as can be estimated at the moment, for:
- Lights switch on event £ 9,000
 - Provision of lights £31,000
 - Events and activities during December £20,000

6. Policy Implications

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

There will be some waste of resources if NNC has to dispose of, in some cases, relatively new Christmas lights.

Background Papers

Email exchanges with NNC
Financial management system

15/11/22

