

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL**

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY  
30 MAY 2013**

**EXECUTIVE  
18 JUNE 2013**

**CHRISTMAS LIGHTS TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

**1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 At its meeting on 7 March 2013, Scrutiny Committee – Economy agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to look at the future funding of City Centre Christmas Lights. This brief report sets out key outputs from the work of the Task & Finish Group.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Christmas Lights project was historically delivered by the Exeter City Centre Consortium (disbanded in 2007). The City Council has taken the lead for delivering the Christmas Lights project since 2007.
- 2.2 Business funding for the Lights project has gradually reduced over a number of years – with the trend of a decline in funding starting whilst the City Centre Consortium was still leading on the Christmas Lights project. Christmas Lights were only delivered in 2011 and 2012 due to private sponsorship deals.
- 2.3 The area covered by Christmas Lights has gradually reduced, with the core area now lit being limited to Princesshay (funded through the Princesshay service charge), Guildhall Shopping Centre (funded through the Guildhall Centre service charge) and High Street. Some Christmas Lights have also been delivered in areas such as Fore Street and Castle Street (funded by local businesses).

**3. SUMMARY OF WORK**

- 3.1 Membership of the Task & Finish Group comprised Cllrs Crow (as Chair of Scrutiny Committee - Economy), Denham (as Portfolio Holder for Economy and Tourism) and Cllrs Brock, Bull & Prowse. Cllr Prowse was elected as Chairman of the Task & Finish Group at its first meeting.
- 3.2 The Task & Finish Group considered a range of issues, namely:
- Reviewing the mechanisms used for delivering the City Centre Christmas Lights project during the last decade and identifying weaknesses in the process.
  - Identifying funding vehicles used for support Christmas Lights projects in other towns & cities.
  - Identifying role played by Business Improvement Districts in supporting Christmas Lights projects.

### ***Should There Be Christmas Lights?***

- 3.3 The Task & Finish Group commenced its first meeting with a discussion on the core question of whether there should be Christmas Lights. There was dialogue around the focus of towns and cities, and specifically competitor towns and cities around the region, on delivering lighting schemes that provided a key feature of Christmas marketing and promotional campaigns. There was recognition that quality must be a key feature of Christmas Lighting schemes if they're to provide a valuable contribution to the economic competitiveness of the City Centre during the Christmas period.
- 3.4 The Task & Finish Group unanimously accepted the case for Christmas Lights as a key element of driving footfall in to the City Centre and delivering a competitive Centre during the key Christmas trading period.

### ***Funding Arrangements in Competitor Centres/BIDs***

- 3.5 It was noted that Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) play a key role in the funding of Christmas Lights in a number of Centres across the region and, specifically, in both Plymouth and Barnstaple. BIDs have unlocked substantial sums of money that have allowed:
- Comprehensive schemes, to include all Town & City Centre areas;
  - Year-on-year investment in new lighting schemes;
  - A focus on ensuring attention is paid to 'gateways' and getting first impressions right;
  - The delivery of design competitions for Christmas Lights features – including children's and schools competitions;
  - Christmas Lights to be a core feature of competitor town and city Christmas marketing and promotional campaigns.
- 3.6 Members noted that the cessation of BID arrangements in Taunton had resulted in significant challenges to the delivery of Christmas Lights, with a focus of effort in seeking a further BID to underpin longer-term development of the Christmas Lights project.

### ***Proposal***

- 3.7 The Task and Finish Group supported an approach to Christmas Lights involving:
- Core City Council funding for an annual Christmas Lights display, with annual costs for a core display identified as £14,500 for 2013, 2014 and 2015.
  - The development of a model under which the core annual display could be grown dependent on attracting in additional funding from retailers across the City Centre and key sponsors;
  - The development of presentation material for City Centre businesses, showing clear illustrations of what additional Lights would be delivered against varying levels of additional business income;
  - Targeted business meetings being held with groups of businesses across the City Centre, encouraging them to support a new partnership approach to Christmas Lights funding;
  - Positive letters being sent out to City Centre retailers – encouraging active support for the Christmas Lights project;
  - A clear statement of intent that there should always be early clarity on what Christmas Lights displays could be delivered for identified available resources.

- Christmas Lights should focus on building out from a quality display at the core of the City Centre, on ensuring attention is paid to 'gateways' & getting first impressions right and on encouraging positive engagement with businesses in 'secondary' retail areas.

3.8 'Core Christmas Lights Scheme' costs are set out in Table 1 and 'Additional Growth Costs' are identified in Table 2.

#### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 A budget of £14,500 is needed to support the proposal from the Christmas Lights Task & Finish Group.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATION that:**

5.1 Scrutiny supports the proposals from the Task & Finish Group as set out in paragraph 3.7 above and requests approval by the Executive for an identified £14,500 budget for 2013, 2014 and 2015 to provide a core display.

**JOHN HARVEY**

**CITY CENTRE MANAGER**

on behalf of the Christmas Lights Task & Finish Group

#### **ECONOMY DIRECTORATE**

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**

**Background papers used in compiling this report:**

None

Final T&FG Scrutiny Report, 20.05.13(jh)