

## EXETER CITY COUNCIL

### SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – ECONOMY 14 NOVEMBER 2013

#### CHRISTMAS LIGHTS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

#### 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report advises members on the progress made in implementing the recommendations set out by the Christmas Lights Task & Finish Group and approved by the Council's Executive in June 2013.

#### 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 had 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. The area covered by Christmas Lights had also gradually reduced, with the core area lit in 2012 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 were also delivered in areas such as Fore Street and Castle Street (funded by local businesses).
- 2.4 In March 2013, Scrutiny Committee – Economy agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to look at the future funding of City Centre Christmas Lights. The Task & Finish Group made a number of recommendations which were supported by Scrutiny Committee and agreed by the Council's Executive on 18 June 2013.
- 2.5 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. SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

- 3.1 A key strand of work has been to deliver a scheme that clearly marks an enhancement of the Christmas Lights delivered in previous years, whilst ensuring that the scheme can be delivered within the core working budget of £14,500.
- 3.2 Whilst the initial proposals for Christmas Lights that were considered by the Task & Finish Group earlier in the year would have represented an improvement on the Christmas Lights delivered in previous years, work has been undertaken to identify a range of options that could be delivered within the same funding envelope. A positive outcome has been delivered through this work, with further enhancements to the core scheme proposals achieved alongside an improvement in the cost base.

- 3.3 Cost reductions, associated with display enhancements, on the original core proposals (High Street crossings, Bedford Square feature, Fore Street column displays & South Street gateway feature) mean that the core display can be extended to include a Queen Street gateway feature. Illustrations of the scheme plans will be available at Scrutiny Committee. A summary of proposed expenditure on the core scheme is shown at Annex A.
- 3.4 Work on raising finance from the private sector to support the Christmas Lights display is on-going, although there has been some progress on this front. A meeting with the Portfolio Holder for Economy & Culture and Task & Finish Group Chair on 9 October agreed that in 2013 the focus should be on delivering (an enhanced) version of the 'core scheme' (to include the addition of a 'gateway' feature in Queen Street, on developing the scheme to include lamp column decorations in Sidwell Street and Paris Street (should business income allow) and supporting businesses in bringing forward their own localised lighting schemes.
- 3.5 An update will be given at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on further fundraising progress.
- 3.6 City Council support for Christmas Lights has already unlocked a commitment from Castle Street businesses to deliver their own Lights, a commitment from Fore Street businesses to add to the number of Christmas Trees they erected in 2012 and it is expected that there will be a commitment from Gandy Street businesses on Lights to follow. A monetary value of £2,000 can be attributed to in-kind commitments to date. In addition, Christmas Lights will be delivered by traders in other parts of the city, including Magdalen Road and St Thomas.

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

- 4.1 A City Council budget of £14,500 is in place to support the Christmas Lights project in 2013.

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

- 5.1 Scrutiny notes progress in implementing the previously agreed recommendations of the Task & Finish Group.

**JOHN HARVEY**

**CITY CENTRE MANAGER**

on behalf of the Christmas Lights Task and Finish Group

**ECONOMY DIRECTORATE**

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

**Background papers used in compiling this report: None**