

**ANGUS COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE – 24 MAY 2016**

**CHRISTMAS LIGHTING**

**REPORT BY THE HEAD OF TECHNICAL & PROPERTY SERVICES**

**ABSTRACT**

This report advises the Council on the discussions and opportunities for community engagement and empowerment in Christmas lighting displays.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Committee:

- i) approves the principle of continued engagement with the burgh communities to develop potential transfer of services to the community;
- ii) delegates authority to the Head of Technical and Property Services, in conjunction with local elected members, to determine the support needs for the community groups, including financial input, in order to promote sustainable service delivery through the community groups.

**2. ALIGNMENT TO THE ANGUS COMMUNITY PLAN/SINGLE OUTCOME AGREEMENT/CORPORATE PLAN**

This report contributes to the following local outcomes contained within the Angus Community Plan and Single Outcome Agreement 2013-2016:

- We have a sustainable economy with good employment opportunities
- Angus is a good place to live in, work in and visit

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 In 2010 a review of the Christmas Lighting service within the seven burghs was undertaken and the outcome reported to Committee in Report No. 419/10. Prior to this review the renewal of the Christmas lights was funded by the communities and supported by matched funding from the council. Where funding was not raised by the community there was no renewal of lights and subsequently the asset condition deteriorated over time and the service was unsustainable with frequent faults and complaints leading to poor community satisfaction levels. The service provided by the council was the erection of the communities' lights but when the communities failed to adequately invest in these lights the council was held responsible.
- 3.2 The policy established in 2010 set out a sustainable approach with the council budget split proportionately between renewing the asset and the erection, maintaining and dismantling the displays. The areas of the displays are limited to that which can be afforded within the budget, which has remained static for many years at £132,000, and was regularly overspent. The community involvement continued through discussions on the displays and some funding contributions to additional lighting.
- 3.3 Through implementing the policy, the costs of service provision were reduced to a point that they could be contained within the allocated budget. In recent years' service improvements have been reduced with the 2015/16 out turn being circa £120,000.
- 3.3 Outwith the burgh towns the communities are solely responsible for Christmas lighting displays and areas such as Friockheim and Glamis providing high quality displays. The

council supports these communities with electricity supplies/costs and nominal grants of £350p.a.

- 3.4 Given the financial climate, and in recognition that the Christmas lighting is a non-statutory service, costing the council £120,000, the continued provision of a service to the burgh towns must be assessed against the financial challenges and the other priorities of the council. A review of the service delivery has considered how the council can reduce its expenditure on Christmas lighting, whilst maintaining a level of service/support by enabling and empowering the communities of the seven burgh towns to deliver, in partnership with the council, the Christmas lighting in a similar manner to those successful communities in the smaller settlements.

#### **4. CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 Officers regularly engage with the community groups involved in Christmas lighting displays, although this is challenging as the community groups' interest varies from burgh to burgh, and overtime, such as where Community Councils have not been formed. Across the burghs there are differing levels of engagement, with some communities pressing to have greater involvement whilst others are yet to engage.
- 4.2 The Christmas lighting displays can be considered as a number of individual processes, such as purchase of the lights, testing of the infrastructure (anchor bolts etc) that carry the lights; erection and removal of the displays; maintenance of the lights whilst erected; electricity supply; electrical testing of the features; and storage of displays when not in use.
- 4.3 Some of these processes fall best to the council as an overseeing authority, such as testing of the anchor bolts on a council wide basis or provision of electricity supply and energy costs, and these activities are recommended to be retained.
- 4.4 Other processes can be undertaken through the community either through volunteers; services in kind; or employment to third party operators. This is dependent on the skills, enthusiasm and ambition of the community groups and wider community. There are similarities with other community projects such as floral displays or Community Asset Transfer projects. Due to variations across the burghs and the variety of groups, the discussions need to vary across the groups to match the groups abilities to undertake some or all of the processes, and are therefore bespoke to each community group's needs. The groups will continue to be support by qualified experienced staff.
- 4.5 In order to provide a sustainable service, delivered by the community, some investment is required at the initial stage. This can include funding for replacement of the asset as per 419/10 or alternatively providing funding to the community groups to outsource service provision.

#### **5. PROPOSALS**

- 5.1 Negotiations and discussions with the individual community groups are continuing and at this time two groups are in a position whereby the groups can take a leading role in the forthcoming Christmas lighting displays, and building on this it is hoped that other burgh communities will be encouraged to progress their own displays.
- 5.2 As noted above each group is different and in supporting the groups the support needs to be tailored to the needs. The Committee are asked to delegate authority to the Head of Technical and Property Services, in conjunction with local elected members, to determine these needs, including financial input in order to promote sustainable service delivery through the community groups. Any financial support will be contained within the budget for the individual burghs as set out in Report 419/10 and the overall Other Services budget, and will be with the aim of reducing the council's future funding of this service.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The 2016/17 budget allocation for Christmas Lighting is £120,000. The proposals within this report to empower community groups to help deliver, in partnership with the council, the Christmas lighting displays will reduce this budget demand in the long term.

In the short term there may, depending on the community groups' discussions, be a need to utilise some of the funding towards start-up/transfer cost and these will be contained within the above budget.

**NOTE:** The following background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this Report :-

Report No: 419/10 - Christmas Lighting - Infrastructure Services Committee 1 June 2010

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