

## Christmas Light Future Funding

### Report by Ricky Moffat, Head of Commercial Operations

#### 1 Purpose of Report

At its meeting of 29 August 2017 Council agreed the following;

*“The budget for Christmas 2017 to allow a full review and engagement with Midlothian Communities in relation to Christmas lights to include other civic functions over the festive period.”*

*The purpose of this report is to detail the actions to date, outline future options and detail current proposals for Christmas 2018.*

#### 2 Background

2.1 At its meeting on 29 August 2017 the Council considered a report titled “Christmas Light Funding Options”, which set out three options for consideration, namely:

- A. Whether it wishes to continue to fund the supply, erection, maintenance, and take down of Christmas Lights and trees at the various towns across Midlothian including support Switch on Events
- B. Consider an option to reduce this funding over a phased period (of up to five years) subject to local communities bridging the funding gap and taking responsibility for the funding to provide Community Christmas lights in the future.
- C. Cease the supply, erection, maintenance and the take down of all Christmas lights and trees across Midlothian from winter 2017.

A copy of this report is available via the following link: [Christmas Light Funding Options](#)

2.2 Christmas lighting has been provided in a number of locations across Midlothian from some of the smaller villages up to and including the larger towns. In addition the actual lighting provided varies between a few lights to a tree and significant displays throughout some town centres.

As such, the cost of providing Christmas lighting varies significantly. As part of the preparatory work prior to consulting with the local communities in terms of future provision, costs were determined for each community based on the installations provided.

This information was provided to each of the following communities in April 2018.

COMMUNITY	COST	NOTES
Penicuik	£10,805	£8458 contribution from the Penicuik community
Loanhead	£7,955	
Bonnyrigg	£20,955	
Dalkeith	£8,925	
Mayfield	£3,575	
Gorebridge	£3,390	
Newtongrange	£ 5,810	£1375 contribution from the Newtongrange community
Pathhead	£840	
Lasswade	£2,120	
Roslin	£1,550	
Bilston	£805	
Rosewell	£2,425	
Danderhall	£1,770	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£70,0925</b>	

A meeting was arranged with the local communities to obtain feedback and to understand what the potential for future provision within each community may be. This meeting was held on 20 June 2018 at Midlothian House with a minute of the meeting attached as Appendix 1.

The general concensus from the community leads was, that the scale of funding that would be required for the future provision of Christmas lighting was something they would likely be unable to provide.

Each community was therefore asked to consider the matter further and to provide a response by the end of July 2018 with regards to the future provision of Christmas lighting.

Furthermore, the Councils financial position as reported to the Council meeting by the Head of Finance and integrated Service support on 26 June 2018, indicated the projected funding deficit.

2019/20 Budget Cap	£5.054m
2020/21 Budget Cap	£9.793m
2021/22 Budget Cap	£13.643m
2022/23 budget Cap	£23.002m

### 3 Community Responses

The following table details the responses received by the end July deadline.

COMMUNITY	RESPONSE
Penicuik	Xmas committee exploring ways to fund raise and reduce cost. Committee not keen on reducing event size as all of their inventory is new. Exploring – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removal of events team support</li> <li>• Donation/sponsorship of xmas trees</li> <li>• Self-storage of decorations</li> </ul>
Newtongrange	Meeting scheduled for end of July to discuss 3 possible options <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- As per 2017 (£5,810)</li> <li>2- Reduced event (£3,985)</li> <li>3- No event (£0)</li> </ol> <p>Local businesses have pledged financial support to the event</p>
Bonnyrigg	Councillor Derek Milligan representing Bonnyrigg Community events committee was positive about fund raising as a one off event, however lower confidence with the ability to sustain this over a period <p>Costs supplied showing a reduced display cost (removal of 12 lights on high street)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- As per 2017 (£20,955)</li> <li>2- Reduced event (£17,630)</li> </ol>
Poltonhall	Unable to respond by your deadline as Poltonhall CC does not meet in July. Next meeting is on 8 August 2018 and will respond the following day.
Pathhead	There are only four lights erected in the area and the local community do not feel they would wish to fund such a small display.
Gorebridge	Gorebridge will have to do without lights this year as we don't have any funds to pay for them and there isn't enough time or resources on the community council to undertake the work needed to raise funds. <p>We'll discuss what we can do to reduce the cost and pay for this</p>

	for winter 2019.
Loanhead	Included as appendix 2 to the report.
Mayfield	Unable to respond by your deadline but will respond by date of Council meeting.
Roslin	As of now we have decided to source and erect and decorate our own tree. I believe from the meeting held on 20 June 2018 it a requirement that your staff would have to connect the lights. Unless funding is forthcoming it seems unlikely we will have any street decorations. I will update you should funding become available.
Rosewell	We feel we haven't been given very much notice to raise funds or enlist help for the lights - 27 April. There are no meetings with the community over the summer period, which makes it difficult to gauge where we are at, but the general consensus is to try and continue with the lights. Over the last few years, there has been a lot of development in Rosewell, with substantial sums of money for Community Facilities Contributions (as detailed in Section 75 agreements) - why has this not been considered for funding the communities lights?

## 4 Report Implications

### 4.1 Resource

If Council is minded to continue to support the supply, erection, maintenance and dismantling of Christmas lights this will increase the budget gap previously identified to the Council by the Head of Finance and Integrated Service Support and as set out earlier in the report.

The total additional cost as detailed in section 2.1 would be £70,925. This would assume no contribution from the local communities.

In addition, this takes no account of the replacement of any lighting that may beyond economical repair.

If Council are minded to support the supply, erection, maintenance and dismantling of Christmas lights a contingency fund of up to £5,000 should be provided for.

Any decision to fund Christmas lights by the Council would necessitate a supplementary estimate

### 4.2 Risk

Notwithstanding the positive impact that the provision of Christmas lights have within local communities there is an element of retail activity that arises as a consequence of people being attracted to a particular area and this would be at risk if Christmas lights were no longer provided.

The previously stated risk to health and safety regarding the shed at Vogrie has been temporarily addressed by the use of an interim arrangement at Whitehill Business Park.

### 4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

- Community safety
- Adult health, care and housing
- Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- Sustainable growth

- Business transformation and Best Value  
 None of the above

#### **4.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan**

In terms of the key priorities through the Single Midlothian Plan, the provision of Christmas lighting should be considered alongside the Council's relative priorities.

#### **4.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes**

The provision of Christmas lights has a positive impact on the well-being of the local communities however this is a non-statutory service.

#### **4.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach**

Christmas lights make the local communities more attractive for those who live visit and work in area.

#### **4.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders**

Each of the affected communities has been consulted with as detailed in this report. The actual level of support forthcoming from communities is detailed in section 2.2.

#### **4.8 Ensuring Equalities**

There are no equality issues arising from this report.

#### **4.9 Supporting Sustainable Development**

The consultation held with local communities was to explore options to continue to provide Christmas lights which was specifically aimed at increasing community involvement.

#### **4.10 Digital Issues**

There are no digital issues arising from this report.

### **5 Recommendations**

It is recommended that Council:-

- a) Note the feedback following the consultation with local communities, as detailed in the report and
- b) Agree to the cessation of Christmas lights funding in view of the Councils financial position.

**1 August 2018**

#### **Report Contact:**

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#### **Background Papers:**

## NOTE OF CHRISTMAS LIGHTING MEETING

Held: 20 June 2018 at 6pm

Location: Midlothian House

Council Attendees: John Hackett (Councillor), Ricky Moffat (Head of Commercial Operations, Wayne Clark (Lighting Supervisor)

Community Attendees: Derek Milligan, Pamela Graham, Suzanne Yeoman, Trevor Taylor, Cath McGill, Eddie Robertson, Irene Hogg, Dot Horne, Malcolm Muir, Eddie Linton-Smith, Barbara Wilson, Fiona Warner, Sandy Brown, George Johnstone, Kenneth Baird, Sharon Hill, Judy Thomson.

### Introduction and Welcome

John Hackett welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the purpose was to find a way to work with communities to enable Xmas lights to continue to be displayed in the various towns and villages across Midlothian.

This was against a background of the Council having continued funding the Xmas lights last year, with all funding being withdrawn for Xmas 2018.

It was pointed out that the lighting workforce who put up the Xmas displays had been cut from a staff compliment of 7 to 3 within a 5 year period, and as such their principal workload will be lighting maintenance during what is the Xmas decoration period

The intention of this meeting and future discussions would be reported back to Council in due course.

### Meeting Notes:

There was a request that the detail provided to each community be shared with all communities. Ricky Moffat to progress.

Gorebridge advised they had bought lights in 2014 on the understanding that the Council would provide support thereafter.

There were a number of comments regarding the civic pride communities get from having a Xmas display and this should continue to be supported by the Council. Furthermore there was a request that Council reconsider this cut and identify ways to reinstate the cut. Irene Hogg, stated that it may have been more appropriate to reduce the budget in stages to allow communities to adapt and plan a strategy.

John Hackett explained the budget difficulties faced by the Council and the competing needs from the growth in social care to the increasing number of children to be educated in the fastest growing Council area in Scotland elderly. Each year there will be increasing pressure on the (reducing) available budget.

Similarly there was a consensus from the communities that it was impossible for them to commit to raise the necessary funding year on year to have Xmas displays continue. In effect Midlothian would be "dark" at Xmas time.

Derek Milligan suggested that gala funding could be considered and divided proportionally across communities. However, he stated that it is unlikely that Bonnyrigg community could sustain funding beyond this year.

There was a request to consider developer contributions being used to fund Xmas lights. John Hackett explained that this was not possible.

Kenneth Baird stated that further cross party discussions may be a way to identify funding that could be used for Xmas lights.

To reduce costs it was suggested that lights could be left in place. Wayne Clark stated this could be possible but the down side was the potential early failure of the lights. Ricky Moffat also advised that the budget saving being discussed was in relation to revenue savings. This takes no account of future replacement costs for lighting.

Derek Milligan highlighted the exercise undertaken to obtain costs from private contractors and indicated that these costs were significantly higher than the costs provided by the Council.

Wayne Clark pointed out potential savings from the 2017 costs such as self-storage, donation of Xmas tree by local business, sponsorship, and events managed by volunteer's not council employees

Ricky Moffat offered individual meetings to communities to help create sustainable strategies

Communities were asked to provide their response back to the Council by the end of July. Ricky Moffat would then provide a report to Council in August, providing the detail of the responses for Council consideration.

There was a request to include Robert Hogg in future communications. In addition it was requested that the community liaison team be included.

John Hackett thanked the communities for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 8pm.



### **Xmas Lighting Meeting – 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018**

Present: Irene Hogg, Nan Haddow, Peter Frame, Alan McLaren, Pat Kenny, Mandi Doig and Gina Temple (Representing Loanhead Community Development Association, Loanhead & District Community Council, Loanhead Miners Youth Football Club, The Link, Loanhead Children's Gala Day Association, LASC Childcare Services, Scottish Womens' Institute (Loanhead) and the Paradykes Parent Council).

The meeting was called to discuss Midlothian Council's proposal to remove funding for all Xmas Lighting throughout the County as discussed at the public meeting on 20 June 2018 which was attended by Council staff, councillors and community representatives. The outcome from this meeting was that if local communities could not fund the Xmas lights then Midlothian would have a dark Xmas.

For the past 5 years the LCDA has invested in new lights each year and has spent almost £10k over this period and the improvement has been marked. This investment was based on the understanding that the community would fund replacement lights and the Council would cover erection, dismantling, maintenance, electrical testing, energy costs, Christmas tree, storage etc. According to the Council the cost for Xmas Lighting in Loanhead for 2017 was £7955. Some of the items on their list were disputed as no repair materials, barriers, stages or signage was supplied. Irene Hogg obtained a quote from a private company for the equivalent service at £5806.80 (incl VAT) so this can be done more cheaply.

#### **A discussion on how to cut costs took place:**

- Plant a tree in the Green to reduce the costs of erection and dismantling each year. It was agreed that this was not practical as it would impede Gala Day Celebrations. In a few years it would require a tree surgeon to trim it and the roots may start to come up in the Green or even the roadway.
- Leave the Xmas lights up all year round. The lights in the trees in the Green are left up all year round, but it is not practical to leave the other lighting up as it would suffer wear and tear due to the weather, meaning early replacement. "Much of the display in Loanhead is erected on temporary poles around Fountain Green. If these were left in place throughout the year they would be highly visible, detract from the appearance of the area and considerably restrict the use of Fountain Green for other events. This could even result in Fountain Green becoming unusable for the Gala Crowning Ceremony and other events during Gala Week.
- It was suggested we try and find storage within Loanhead, but as there is now no Town Hall premises this was not practical and if we did find a suitable venue we would have to take out insurance.
- We discussed the possibility of approaching local businesses and organisations to fund raise for the lights. The Retail Parks and Industrial Estate companies are removed from the town centre and many have their own designated charities. Local organisations are struggling as it is to cover their costs. The Gala Day is the oldest in the County and although it does receive sponsorship from some businesses it was agreed that approaching these sponsors would only dilute the support for the Gala.
- The LCDA organise the annual Fireworks Display and the Remembrance Day Parade as well as providing for the capital costs of replacement lights etc. therefore the community is already taking a big role in ensuring civic pride in Loanhead.

#### **Conclusions**

- There was no sustainable funding model for a small community to take responsibility for the cost of Xmas Lighting.



- Midlothian Council should continue to fund Xmas Lights, even if it means outsourcing to a private company to reduce the costs.
- The Council would not save the £7955 if they don't fund the lights due to ongoing employee costs.
- Whilst the financial challenges faced by the Council are appreciated, the expenditure on Christmas lighting represents a tiny part of the Council's total budget and the Council should have sufficient flexibility to accommodate these costs. The existing arrangement already involves costs for new and replacement lights being met by individual communities. Community groups have worked hard to raise the funds to purchase lights on the understanding they would be erected by the Council. If the Council was now to decline to erect, power and maintain the lights, that would throw away the investments made by communities in Christmas lighting, including over £3,600 spent by LCDA in the current year for new lights which are still to be used. Such a situation would clearly be a major disincentive to community groups becoming involved in other future schemes with the Council involving a shared approach to the funding and operation of community amenities. Midlothian Council should be responsible for ensuring Civic Pride in the County and Xmas Lights are a big part of that.