

FESTIVE LIGHTING COMMUNITY TRANSITION – END PROJECT REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides members with an update on community-led festive lighting delivery across Argyll and Bute in 2019, as well as an overview of the overall project.
- 1.2 The project was successful in that it delivered a transition from Council-led to community-led festive lighting. There are many positives to take from the project which can be applied in the future as the Council continues to work with communities to find different, more sustainable ways to design and deliver services in partnership.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Endorse the positive work of communities across Argyll and Bute to deliver their own festive lighting schemes;
 - ii. Note the significant amount of support provided by the Council's street lighting team to communities to ensure effective transitions;
 - iii. Note the detail in this report on festive community engagement; and agree that this general approach will be taken to the winter maintenance community engagement project, with further detail to be reported to the next EDI committee following the initial scoping work outlined at 3.15 of this report.

3.1 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Council, at its budget meeting in February 2016 agreed to a savings package where the revenue budget of £100,000 per annum for festive lighting was removed. An earmarked sum of £300,000 from the Council's reserves was made

available to support Council delivery and community-transition for three further years (up to December 2018).

3.2 The below table provides a chronology of reporting on this subject and the development of the project since the Budget meeting of 2016:

Committee	Comments
EDI August 2016	<p>This report baselined the varied historic arrangements in the 21 towns and villages where the Council delivered festive lighting.</p> <p>The specification and existing levels of community involvement differed from town to town and village to village.</p> <p>In December 2016 the Council commissioned an external contractor to deliver festive lighting to the historic specification while a community engagement plan was developed.</p>
EDI April 2017	<p>This report provided an update on Council-led delivery for Christmas 2016, and confirmed that community engagement was underway.</p> <p>The Committee agreed to evenly split the remaining festive funds c.£200,000 on an area by area basis (c.£50,000 per area)</p>
EDI Sept 2017	<p>This update outlined the initial steps of community engagement and the generally positive feedback.</p> <p>Members noted that the Council would deliver in 2017 unless a group was ready to take on festive lighting in their town/village.</p> <p>The committee also agreed that should groups wish to apply for funding any application would be subject to the normal process, with area committees to determine the applications in their areas.</p> <p>For Christmas 2017 Helensburgh delivered their own event with the aid of £20,000 from the earmarked funds; Tobermory, Innellan and Sandbank delivered their own events independently.</p> <p>The Council delivered festive lighting in all other locations via its internal street lighting team while discussions continued with community groups.</p>

	<p>At this point all areas where there was an existing group with some involvement in festive lighting agreed in principle to take festive lighting on.</p> <p>There remained a few areas where there was no identified group to take the task on.</p>
<p>EDI March 2018</p>	<p>This report updated members on the delivery of festive lighting for Christmas 2018.</p> <p>The committee agreed to outline heads of terms to form the basis of community agreements as well as a strategy to transfer lighting assets to communities.</p> <p>These documents supported the ongoing community engagement process, providing clarity on the respective roles and responsibilities of both parties.</p> <p>It was also agreed to carry forward any unspent monies from the earmarking by the end of 2018/19 to be made available to groups who signed up to a festive agreement with the Council.</p> <p>Lastly, the committee also agreed that the cost of single switch-on infrastructure was cost prohibitive, and that any works in this area be considered on a case by case basis in any future town centre public realm works.</p>
<p>EDI September 2018</p>	<p>This report presented members with a mixed picture as the final Christmas where the Council could provide the service approached.</p> <p>Ultimately (following continued negotiations with community groups following the committee, and area committee funding decisions) the status for Christmas 2018 was as follows:</p> <p>Previously established community methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helensburgh (£10,000 Council funding) • Tobermory (£3,000 Council funding) • Innellan • Sandbank <p>Agreements for Christmas 2018:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lochgilphead (£5,000 Council funding) • Inveraray (£1650 Council funding) • Furnace • Jura • Bowmore • Oban (£9,000 Council funding) • Dunoon (£8,000 Council funding) <p>Council-led delivery 2018; working towards agreements for Christmas 2019:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ardrishaig • Tarbert • Campbeltown • Rothesay • Rosneath • Kilcreggan • Rhu • Arrochar • Garelochhead • Cardross <p>The picture at that time was largely as expected, and the project remained on track to fully transition festive lights to community groups for the following season.</p>
<p>EDI March 2019</p>	<p>This report provided an update on the mixed model of delivery for Christmas 2018, as well as agreeing a scoring matrix guide for area committees to refer to when allocating any remaining funds.</p>

- 3.3 The above provides a chronology of the reporting on this project to date. The Council ceased to provide the festive lighting service as of 31st March 2019 as per the budget decision of February 2016. At that time there remained funds to disburse and resource continued to be offered to community groups to allow them to arrive at their own solutions for the 2019 Christmas season. This included support as required from a Project Manager to develop their schemes, as well as technical advice for their chosen electrical works providers from the Street lighting Clerk of Works.
- 3.4 The costs of officer time in project management throughout the project were absorbed as part of the normal course of business; street lighting physical works, advice, support etc. were recharged to the earmarked £300,000 budget; and the additional technical advice offered to conclude matters for Christmas 2019 was absorbed as part of normal street lighting budgets as it was not significant.

3.5 All areas that we are aware of delivered community-led solutions in 2019. Some areas delivered their own solutions without the aid of available grant monies from the Council, but have expressed a desire to conclude agreement paperwork in early course in order to access the grant funding available for use in future years to support the sustainable community delivery of festive lighting. At the time of writing the funding remaining to be disbursed is £3,291, which has been identified for community councils in Lomond (ref HL Area Committee 5 March 2019). This hasn't been distributed yet simply because of a lack of response to requests to conclude partnership agreements and/or requests for minor amendments which are yet to be agreed. Concluding these agreements should be straightforward, and all remaining paperwork is expected to be completed in early course, with all funds disbursed no later than the end of this financial year.

Community Engagement

3.6 Transitioning a service which had been delivered by the Council historically to a community-led model was roundly unpopular with communities, but generally viewed as somewhat inevitable given year on year budget cuts and the fact that festive lighting was a non-statutory service with no Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE) allocation from the Council's government funding.

3.7 The project did, however, bring an opportunity for communities to control the entirety of the festive event in their area, rather than having to structure their events around Council technical input and availability. For example, in the past the Council had often received requests to support switch-on events on particular dates which clashed and couldn't be resourced, leading to some communities not being able to hold events as desired.

3.8 In terms of best or better value, community groups are able to access funding and secure discounts which the Council is unable to – such as local contractors supporting events at cost/at a discounted rate as their local community contribution. This is an attractive prospect for local contractors from a marketing perspective, possibly leading to increased business.

3.9 The above is the context in which the community engagement and moves towards transition commenced. The lighting transition was treated as project in its own right, with a specific project manager identified to lead (although not exclusively). This approach had some positives and some negatives:

Single point of contact	
Positives	Negatives
A single conduit for community groups to come through allowed relationships to be built and provided those groups with a consistent experience	At certain times of the year this led to intense periods of activity (and often greater demands than could be supported) for a single officer.
Having a single project lead allowed significant project specific knowledge	This naturally created a single point of failure should that officer be

to be built-up, making the overall process of engagement easier	unavailable.
A proactive approach was taken to building relationships, with initial and many subsequent meetings happening face to face. It is felt that this approach was a significant contributing factor to the overall success of the project	This necessitated, at points, significant time and travel commitments and work outside normal hours to attend evening meetings etc. This is a resource intensive approach.
Staff retention – the same member of staff acted as PM on this project from the beginning of the community engagement element (April 2017)	Lack of specific PM resource prior to April 2017. The project might have concluded earlier, although on balance it is felt that outcome would have been unlikely given the three-year Council support window previously agreed.

- 3.10 This was the first time a project of this nature had been undertaken, and it evolved over time. Overall the resource commitment required and the levels of support needed to get groups to a position where they were able to take on festive lighting in their town or village was much greater than originally estimated, particularly in the initial stages. The framework which was agreed at the EDI meeting of March 2018 (template heads of terms etc.) was developed at that time on the back of community input from the initial stages of engagement, which is considered to have been the best approach to create an effective transition process which was largely community-led. That being said, the agreement of this framework was relatively late in the process and the project may have benefitted from template heads of terms being in place from the beginning. Anything developed prior to community input may not have been appropriately informed, and thus unacceptable to groups, and the project may not have benefitted from the initial goodwill from communities engendered by the cautious, open-book initial approach.
- 3.11 A balance had to be struck between decision making transparency on funding allocations and timelines to move complex negotiations on to a point where funding could be provided. Colleagues in Legal and Regulatory Support, and members, were particularly accommodating when funding requests came forward out with the normal area committee programme of meetings, facilitating several special meetings to allow funding requests to be considered and funding to be allocated. This by its very nature is resource intensive and time consuming – undoubtedly the process would have moved quicker and been less costly to the Council in terms of resources had a delegation been made to officers to progress matters. On the other hand, the project would have been unlikely to engender the strong political support that it did, nor would the process have been transparent and accountable. Indeed the focus on the single point of contact would have intensified in a way which was likely to be unsustainable.

- 3.12 The project would likely have been easier to deliver if the overall service provision across Argyll and Bute had been consistent, however, that was unrealistic given the nature of the services provided and the fact that it developed historically as in-kind support for community-led events. A uniform provision of features per town would have made the administering of operational delivery and funding much simpler, but of course the service could never have developed in that way because of the individual wants and needs of local communities.
- 3.13 Undertaking any sort of arms-length survey or other type of remote engagement was unrealistic because of the above, and because of existing community involvement via different groups in one fashion or another. Going forward, however, if such an approach is taken for other services the Council is unable to provide or looking to deliver differently, it may be less resource intensive to initially baseline a uniform level of service delivery to form the basis of a discussion, with that discussion potentially being able to be started via an arms-length survey or other consultation mechanism.

Winter maintenance community engagement

- 3.14 Community engagement on winter maintenance (as per the previous £50,000 budget allocation of February 2019) would benefit from the above approach, and would lend itself to this because: (1) there are no established groups that we are aware of involved in formal winter maintenance volunteering; and (2) the service is already baselined and consistently applied across the area as a result of the detailed and annually updated Winter Services Policy. The Council never benefitted from a Festive Lighting Policy when the service was removed, rather much of the service provision existed largely as custom and practice.
- 3.15 The development of the community partnership plan for winter maintenance will be progressed over the next six to twelve months, with a view to eventually incorporating this into the winter maintenance policy document which is reported to EDI annually. The overall aim will be the same as the festive lighting project – to support communities to provide a consistent and sustainable alternative provision throughout the Argyll and Bute, within the capabilities of the Council to support it. The first phase of development is underway and involves benchmarking other such schemes across the country. An initial community consultation/data gathering exercise is being developed to understand the desires of communities and the likelihood of securing suitable community delivery partners. Following the establishment of a knowledge base from the community consultation, the engagement project could then run in largely the same fashion as the successful festive project.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 This project has ensured the future delivery of festive lighting in communities across Argyll and Bute thanks to a lengthy and resource-intensive community engagement and support process.

- 4.2 A significant revenue saving (£100,000) has been delivered, showing that savings can be made at the same time as having honest conversations with communities about the future design and delivery of services they consider important to them. There are some general principles from this project which could form a road-map to success for any other similar future projects which are based on genuine opportunities to do things differently, in a community-led and sustainable fashion.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy – none (ref Budget meeting February 2016)
- 5.2 Financial – none. The project has delivered a revenue saving of £100,000
- 5.3 Legal – none. Agreements in place to set out the roles and responsibilities of the Council and groups, and protect both
- 5.4 HR – none
- 5.5 Equalities/Fairer Scotland Duty
- 5.5.1 Equalities – none
- 5.5.2 Socio-economic duty – none
- 5.5.3 Islands – none
- 5.6 Risk – there is a risk that community-led festive lighting may not be sustainable in the longer term
- 5.7 Customer Service – none. Examples of good practice in community engagement

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