

OUTWARD FOCUS SELECT COMMITTEE

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Thursday, 13th July, 2023 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Dave Shaw in the Chair;

Councillors Paul Grafton, Sarah Lewsey,
Gordon Mann and Lee Waters.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Jamie Bell and Will Bostock.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Sarah Daniel, Mike Joy and
Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Councillor John Wilmott.

OF.1 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and/or Non-Registrable Interests

No declarations of interest were made.

OF.2 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 9 February 2023, be received and approved as a correct record.

OF.3 Christmas Lights

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting of the Outward Focus Select Committee, a revamped version of the previous Scrutiny Panel A. The 'Christmas Lights' topic had been added to the Select Work Programme by the Principal Select Committee at its first meeting in June 2023 due to the fact that the Council's current contract for Christmas Lights provision was due to end in 2024.

The Scrutiny Research Officer presented the report and took a few moments to outline the main remit of the Committee to the new Members present at the meeting. The Leader of the Council had initially suggested the topic as he had felt it was an opportune time for Members to consider the Council's future requirements for Christmas light provision and to provide valuable feedback to the Place Team in preparation for negotiation of the contract later in 2023.

(At this point in the proceedings, Councillors Gordon Mann and Lee Waters entered the meeting at 6.36pm.)

The Council's Assistant Director for Regeneration then gave an overview of the current Christmas Lights contract which focussed on the three main town centres with a yearly budget cap of £50k. Initial discussions outside of the meeting in respect of the new contract, had revealed hopes for the Christmas light provision to be extended to further areas (i.e. Huthwaite, Stanton Hill and the Rurals) but this could potentially dilute the budget provision to accommodate each additional area in future years.

In respect of the previous Christmas displays, responses had been very positive with the 3D designs proving to be extremely popular. Discussions with the County Council's Procurement Team would be commencing in September 2023 regarding the specifications for the new contract tender process. At this point it was mooted that some Member involvement in the early tender specification discussions might be useful to enable officers to get a steer on what is required going forward. At the present time there were no plans to extend the £50k yearly budget for the new contract.

Each year the Christmas lights were on display for around 6 weeks and this was tied into the Council's switch on events at the end of November and early into December. It was acknowledged that the cost of electricity for the displays over the Christmas period was not part of the contract award but it had not proved to be excessive and was paid for separately by the Council.

A suggestion was made for the Christmas Lights display to be extended to the Rurals and Members were advised that all the proposed changes/additions to the new contract would be included in the new specification (forming part of the invitation to tender) once agreed by the Cabinet.

The Committee then discussed some of the issues that had been faced by the Council with some display lights failing and Christmas trees being vandalised over the Christmas period. The response to fix the problems had sometimes been slow and this had caused some derision/complaints from residents over social media. Members were advised that unfortunately, a lot of the issues were not due to the lights but were caused by aging infrastructure that supported the displays i.e. lampposts and electricity cabling. Also, Members were asked to note that some of the displays outside of the contract (funded by County Councillor individual community funds) had proved to be problematic due to being managed on a piecemeal basis.

In respect of the new contract, the Assistant Director for Regeneration made a suggestion that tenders could be invited for two scenarios: one for the three main town centres and another for the town centres and all additional areas as earmarked. This would then enable officers and Members to analyse both options and pick accordingly.

To conclude it was acknowledged by the Committee that any feedback and suggestions would be gratefully received before the commencement of contract negotiations in late September/October 2023.

Members discussed the following:

- the extent to which residents appreciated the displays and how much the 3D designs were enjoyed by all, with people visiting from outside the District to see them.
- the excellent support and organisation offered each year by the Rotary Club in Hucknall to make the switch on events really special for all
- evidence of a move away from minimalistic/modern colours for Christmas displays with a desire to move back to more traditional colours and themes
- possibilities for extending the very popular market provision in Hucknall during the Christmas period
- in relation to the new contract, the Council being mindful of spreading the funding too far, resulting in smaller, less effective displays across the District
- the possibility of working with the Parish Councils to pool funding and work together to provide larger Christmas displays in the Annesley and Selston areas
- an acknowledgement that sponsorship for events was more difficult to obtain following the pandemic but that the avenue was still open for future Christmas events if so desired.

To conclude, the Scrutiny Research Officer thanked the Assistant Director for her attendance and contribution to the ensuing discussions. A few options for meeting the September/October deadline for providing feedback were then considered and a course of action was agreed upon.

RESOLVED that

- a) a meeting of the Committee be arranged in September 2023 (with an invite to all Members) to make suggestions and provide a steer as to the potential content and/or requirements for the new Christmas Lights contract, to be negotiated for 2024 onwards;
- b) the Assistant Director for Regeneration be invited to the September 2023 meeting to assist Members in formulating any recommendations to be submitted to Cabinet.

The meeting closed at 7.25 pm

Chairman.