



<b>Policy, Finance and Development Committee</b>	<b>Tuesday, 20 September 2016</b>	<b>Matter for Information and Decision</b>
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**Title:** Christmas and Festive Lights

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Each town centre has a set of Christmas or Festive lights installed each year for the festive period. They are referred to differently in each town as some of the lights also cover other festivals. The lights will be referred to as Christmas lights for this report.
- 1.2 Oadby and Wigston Borough Council currently have a contract in place with a supplier to install the Christmas lights in Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston each year. The contract includes the testing, installation, attendance at switch on and dismantling of the Christmas lights in the 3 town centres.
- 1.3 The current contractor is Central Electrical Services (Hinckley) Ltd, which is in the third year of a 3 year contract. Subject to performance there is the option to extend the contract by another 2 years.
- 1.4 During 2015 there were several incidents in each town centre where sections of the lights were not operating. This in the main was caused by water ingress into the sockets, which shorted the circuit. In the majority of these cases the lights were able to be switched back on. Other causes of failure were manufacturing faults, lamp column faults and damage resulting from the cutting by Leicestershire County Council.
- 1.5 Unfortunately this lead to a small number of complaints regarding the lights. The purpose of this report is to set out the way forward for 2016 and the future.

## **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that:
  - Members note the issues experienced during the 2015/16 festive period and the works that will be put in place during the year to rectify these.
  - The reporting of any Christmas light failures follows the procedure as set out in section 7.

## **3. Information**

### **4. History**

- 4.1 Oadby and Wigston Borough Council has provided Christmas lights for Wigston, Oadby and South Wigston for many years and the previous contractor Flag and Flagpole had been installing the lights for approximately 7 years. The previous lights were under appreciated and the coverage seemed to decrease each year, though the contract price remained the same (approx £37,000 per year).
- 4.2 The Christmas lights were placed under the remit of the Town Centre Manager in

May 2013 – leaving a short lead in time to organise a new display in each town.

4.3 With this in mind a new approach to the Christmas lights was developed, whereby the Borough Council would provide a basic set of lights to each centre and then each of the traders groups would then supplement additional lights to this. It was agreed that the installation would be organised by the Borough Council, to ensure that the correct Health and Safety requirements were met.

4.4 All three centres have supplemented their displays over the years by getting grants from Leicestershire County Council, from the Borough Council's Resident Forums or from their own businesses. In total there has been an investment of over £86,000 in new Christmas lights over the last 3 years.

## **5. Issues Affecting Lights**

5.1 There were several times during the last festive period where lights in all three towns were not working. This is not always avoidable, due to the nature of electrical services that are placed outside in all weather. It must also be noted that the weather during the period had been quite extreme, with some of the wettest and windiest weather experienced during the last few years.

5.2 South Wigston had several issues of light failures. Firstly the lights that were installed in some of the trees failed at some point. At the test and subsequently the switch on, all of the trees that had lights and power were working. Unfortunately, around a week later a run of 4 trees failed. This was more than likely linked with the fact that Leicestershire County Council had trimmed the trees in the spring of 2015 and had probably cut through some lights. This then appears to have shorted the lights in these trees. Unfortunately there was nothing that could be done to get these lights back on during the festive period, without it costing a significant amount of extra money.

5.3 Also within South Wigston several runs of lights tripped out during the festive period. This was caused by rain ingress into plug sockets, which caused the fuse to trip. These were easily reset and the contractor came out on several occasions to do this.

5.4 Another issue that occurred in South Wigston was that a lamp column shorted out and set the fuse board on fire.

5.5 Oadby also had a couple of issues, the first of which was the cone tree in the Oadby Centre. On the day of their switch on the tree had tipped, but given that it had been attached to the Oadby centre, it did not fall to the ground. The tree was put back into place by the contractor. At first it was thought that the wind had done this, unfortunately this occurred again a couple of times, the third of which there was no wind present. Therefore it must be presumed that someone had tipped the tree over. The contractor remedied this by drilling the tree into the ground and the problem ceased.

5.6 Similar to South Wigston, in Oadby 3 runs of lights all trip out at different times. This was also caused by the severe weather. The lights were reset on several occasions.

5.7 Wigston also had a few issues, one of which was the cone tree on Bell Street being tipped over. This was rectified by the same solution as to the Oadby tree.

5.8 Also Wigston had 1 run of lights fail, this was also caused by the severe weather. The contractor reset these lights and they stayed on for the rest of the festive period.

5.9 Also a small cone tree on top of the precinct fell over during the windy weather – this

was rectified by the contractor.

- 5.10 There was also an issue with a run of lights at the Bell Street entrance, where the lamp column completely failed, therefore there was no power at all to the lights in that area. This occurred two weeks after the switch on and was reported to Leicestershire County Council which is responsible for the column. Unfortunately the County Council did not rectify the problem before the lights were taken down.

## **6. Planned Works**

- 6.1 To rectify the issues that occurred last year the following work will be completed to ensure that the lights have the minimal amount of disruption possible.
- 6.2 The Christmas lights are supplied with an IP44 rated socket, which is designed to be splash proof. Unfortunately in severe weather this is not adequate enough. Therefore we will be investing in replacement IP56 rated sockets that are actually waterproof. Unfortunately the budget will not allow for all sockets to be replaced, therefore the sockets will be replaced in priority order – so the areas that suffered failures last year will all get replaced.
- 6.3 The tree lights that were trimmed by Leicestershire County Council will be fully replaced. The installation of these is part of the contract and will not hold an additional cost to install and these lights will be replaced partly from some stock we hold and partly with some newly purchased lights. Only trees that already have power fitted to them will have lights in for 2016.
- 6.4 All cone trees will be drilled into the ground to ensure they are not toppled.
- 6.5 Several lighting displays have failed, including the cone tree in Oadby, cone tree in Wigston and an overhead in South Wigston. As these lights are under warranty, they have been sent back to the supplier for repair/replacement.
- 6.6 Leicestershire County Council will be responsible for repairing any lamp columns which there have had electrical issues. This will be done before the contractors start work in September.
- 6.7 A separate plan for all three centres will be drawn up prior to the installation of the lights. The plan will show the location of the lights and the location of the infrastructure. This will be conveyed to each trader group and made accessible to Members, to ensure they know the extent of the lighting that should be operational and there can be no ambiguity of where they expect lights as to where they are actually installed.
- 6.8 Meetings with all three trader groups will be organised to ensure they know exactly what the Council plans to install and where, as well as to agree dates and times of Switch on's.

## **7. Reporting Procedures**

- 7.1 It has been suggested that a new reporting process is put into place that Councillors, traders and the general public can follow to ensure that any lighting issues are recorded and dealt with consistently and effectively.
- 7.2 If a member of the public, Councillor or trader sees that there is a fault with the lights, this must be reported to the Council's Customer Services Centre. Customer Services staff will then log the incident on their system to track the incident. The Town Centre Manager will be notified and this will also be able to be picked up by other members

of the team in the absence of the Town Centre Manager.

- 7.3 Once a matter is reported, a response will be given to the person reporting the issue within 2 working days.

## 8. Conclusion

- 8.1 Although there were several issues in each town centre, it should be noted that the majority of the lights in each town were operational throughout the whole festive period.
- 8.2 It should also be noted that since 2013 the lights have been much improved compared to previous years and many compliments have been received.
- 8.3 Although outdoor electrical works cannot be guaranteed to work at all times, the work the Council and the contractor will do this year should minimise the issues as far as possible for 2016 onwards. This does not mean that all issues will be eliminated though.
- 8.4 The proposed reporting process and also the fact that the plans will be supplied to the businesses prior to the festive period should ensure that issues are dealt with in an improved way.

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Implications	
Financial (CR)	Budget is in place to cover the works mentioned within the report.
Legal (AC)	No significant implications.
Risk (AT)	<b>CR4 Reputation Damage</b> - There is a risk to the Council's reputation if the lights are not operational through the festive period. The works and procedures set out in this report are designed to reduce this risk.
Equalities (AT)	No significant implications.
	Equality Assessment:-
	<input type="checkbox"/> Initial Screening <input type="checkbox"/> Full Assessment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable