

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Cabinet
Date	-	1 July 2019
Report of the	-	Executive Director
Subject	-	Festive Lights in Bexhill

Recommendation: It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the funding agreement between the Council and Shining Lights (Bexhill) Limited be terminated; and
 - 2) the Executive Director be authorised to enter into a funding agreement with the Bexhill Chamber of Commerce and Tourism for the delivery of a lighting scheme for 2019 and beyond, in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member for Bexhill Affairs.
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Head of Service: Ben Hook

Lead Cabinet Member: Councillor Mrs Bayliss

1. In 2016, the Council entered into a four-year funding agreement with Shining Lights (Bexhill) Limited following an initial trial period in 2015 to erect, maintain and remove lighting in Bexhill Town Centre. The funding agreement provides for an annual financial contribution of £13,500 to facilitate the provision of the Bexhill Festive Lights charged as a Special Expense to Bexhill
2. This arrangement worked well in the first three years of operation (2015-2017) with Shining Lights providing town centre-wide Festive illuminations. However, in 2018 only a Christmas tree and two Bexhill town centre streets were illuminated.
3. The Council has accordingly sought to understand why this was the case. However, despite numerous requests, the director of Shining Lights has failed to attend meetings and has not provided any information as to its financial status, or to enable the Council to be assured regarding its future financial sustainability.
4. Shining Lights' business model relies heavily on generating income at events hosted throughout the year plus donations from the public and local businesses to raise sufficient match funding for the Festive Lights. However, Shining Lights has yet to hold any events at all in 2019 or announce any events scheduled to take place later in the year. Without a programme of planned events, it is unclear how future fund raising is being planned.
5. In the circumstances it is recommended that, the Council terminate the funding agreement with Shining Lights, in the absence of assurances regarding their financial standing.

Next Steps

6. The Council does not have sufficient officer capacity in-house to oversee the implementation of the Festive lights in Bexhill. Officers have held discussions with the Bexhill Chamber of Commerce & Tourism who have confirmed their interest in taking over the delivery of the Festive Lights. The Chamber has requested a formal funding agreement for a period of 2-3 years; however the details of such an agreement require further investigation and discussion with the Chamber in order to review the options for delivery, having regard to the budget available from the Council.
7. The Chamber would not be willing to enter into any match-funding obligation however they would look to encourage participation from other stakeholders in the town. They propose to provide lights and fittings on a rental basis, rather than buying or owning any lights.
8. It is understood that the provision of a lighting display would be accompanied by a switch-on event, although for the avoidance of doubt, the Council's funding would be tied only to the provision of festive lighting.
9. Authority is sought to continue discussions with the Chamber of Commerce and enter into a funding agreement, in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member for Bexhill Affairs, in order to secure the provision of lighting for the 2019 festive season and beyond.

Dr Anthony Leonard
Executive Director

Risk Assessment Statement

Continuation of the existing contract would be a risk to public funds due to the lack of transparency within and engagement by Shining Lights.

In Rye and Battle and in Bexhill local centres this is wholly undertaken by local groups and the Council's support is financial only. The Council does not have spare officer capacity in-house to oversee the implementation of the Festive lights in Bexhill. In the absence of an arrangement with the Chamber of Commerce the Council would not be in a position to implement a lighting scheme in Bexhill town centre.