

Title of Report: Christmas Programming Update	Officer Presenting: Head of Culture Author: Festival and Events Manager and TBC
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on programming development for Christmas and to seek approval for additional budget identified for Community Christmas activity.

2 Background

- 2.1 At the September Business and Culture Committee members were given an outline of the proposed Christmas 2020 programme.
- 2.2 The Christmas programming co-ordinated by the Business and Culture Directorate is designed to complement the existing calendar of events at this festive time, enhance the visitor and shopper experience while drawing on the district's rich built and cultural heritage through working in partnership with council departments and district wide business and cultural providers.
- 2.3 Members had requested at this meeting that officers explore further funding opportunities that would enable investment in Christmas community activity to the same level as in previous years and to look at the possible alignment of the Mayors Community Christmas activity with this funding.
- 2.4 Officer have continued to monitor the most up to date public health guidance due to the pandemic, which has seen a numerous events across Northern Ireland being postponed, rescheduled or cancelled and further lockdown measures announced for the Derry and Strabane Council district from the 5th October 2020.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 Due to the ongoing financial pressures and the likely Covid restrictions that council have been facing, Officers had sought to reduce the annual Christmas budget of £80,000. Members had agreed a proposed budget for Christmas 2020 of £20,000 in September, however requested that Officers sought to identify a further £18,000 funding to enable the Christmas grant aid funding to be allocated to Communities this Christmas. Traditionally this funding has been allocated through the Neighbourhood Renewal Group structure (£3,000 X 5 areas) and a pot of £3,000 made available to communities in Castlederg, Newtonstewart and Sion Mills for Switch On events as a legacy activity with the former Strabane Council.
- 3.2 The £15,000 of the community grant aid money had traditionally been allocated through the NRG structures as the activity has been aligned alongside the Council's core Christmas activity and campaign in the urban s ensuring that visitors and shoppers to the district experience some festive activity across each of the weekends from Mid-November through to December. Other Christmas activity can always be applied for and awarded through the Community Festival Fund.
- 3.3 Officers are continuing to plan for the delivery of a range of Market Trading opportunities to support our local economy during the Christmas Period. It is hoped that Council will deliver a Festive Walled City Market during the month of December. This will be subject to public health restrictions and any regulations that may be in place at the time.
- 3.4 Officers are engaging with the Strabane BID to co-ordinate a focused Christmas Programme to support Strabane Town. This will involve an extensive shop local campaign aimed at promoting the In Strabane Gift Card and the potential delivery of a Christmas Drive-In Movie experience (subject to regulations).

4 Financial, Equality, Legal, HR, Improvement, Rural Needs and other Implications

- 4.1 Members previously approved a Christmas Budget of £20,000, an additional £18,000 has since been identified with the Chief Finance Officer to enable the Christmas in the Communities activity to happen at the same level as previous years as outlined above. This budget can now be allocated with member's approval for Christmas activity within the community providing the current restrictions are lifted and this, it is proposed, would be a condition of the letter of offer. Officers will work with these groups on this and will bring back a further report for information.
- 4.2 The Mayor has agreed to continue his level of annual funding to Christmas activity and officers will work to ensure that it is aligned to complement and/or enhance any existing activity delivered directly by this directorate and other partners. The Mayor's office will work with the Local Growth Partnerships to ensure distribution of this activity.
- 4.3 All activity will be procured in keeping with DCSDC Financial procurement & procedures.
- 4.4 Clearly this is a very challenging time and the current restrictions may be extended. Officers will work with all the stakeholders and partners involved in the Christmas activity and will only proceed with spend where it is safe to do so and only go ahead with any activity if it is deemed safe and within the current public health guidelines.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 It is recommended that members note and approve programming and financial arrangements as set out above.
- 5.2 To allocate £15,000 for this year through the Neighbourhood renewal structure subject to review for 2021.
- 5.3 That the Culture working group meets early in 2021 to review how community grant aid funding is distributed through a competitive grant aid process for Christmas 2021 and beyond.

Background Papers