



**Report to:** Development Committee

**Subject:** Festive Lighting in City Centre

**Date:** 2 October 2012

**Reporting Officer:** John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470

**Contact Officers:** Shirley McCay, Head of Economic Initiatives, ext 3459

<b>1</b>	<b>Relevant Background Information</b>
1.1	Belfast City Centre Management (BCCM) are formally seeking a financial contribution towards upgrading the Christmas lighting stock in the City Centre.
1.2	The annual Christmas festive lighting scheme is managed and directed by BCCM within the City Centre with BCC taking responsibility for the City Hall and grounds. Over the last 10 years there has been investment of over £500,000 on the majority of main pedestrian and shopping routes in the City Centre.
1.3	The manufacture of festive lighting has changed and improved significantly over the years including the use of lighter aluminium frames and low wattage energy efficient led lighting. A large portion of Belfast's current stock is outdated, uses heavy galvanised steel frames and fluorescent lighting. A number of the decorations are considered dangerous and cannot be used any longer for health and safety purposes.

<b>2</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
2.1	Having a vibrant city centre with quality festive lighting is considered to be an important part of the marketing package of Belfast over the Christmas season. Sustaining footfall and driving sales especially during this trading period is even more significant in the economic downturn given that this is when many traders trade up and balance their books which sustains them through the leaner months of the year. BCCM are formally seeking both BCC and DSD commitment towards upgrading and replacing some of the festive lighting stock for 2012.
2.2	In 2000, BCCM commissioned an evaluation of the existing festive lighting stock as most of the stock was obsolete or excessively costly to repair.
2.3	BCCM carried out an economic appraisal to identify costing and funding options for a major re-launch of the festive lighting initiative. As a consequence, BCCM secured £190,000 to install a new festive lighting scheme in the city centre.

2.4	Over the past 10 years an additional £300k has been invested to roll out festive lighting to new areas and to replace damaged or obsolete features as required. The majority of this work took place over 8-10 years ago using filament lighting, this was prior to the introduction of low cost environmentally friendly led lighting.
2.5	Year on year, businesses within the city centre have been contributing directly for the installation of new festive lighting features. The past 4 years has seen a decrease in the level of contribution due to current economic climate.
2.6	In 2008, Belfast received a new city brand – the Belfast ‘B’. The logo was launched by Belfast City Council and replaced the out-dated ‘smiley face’ which had been used for many years. To reflect this change, BCC asked BCCM to commission the design and manufacture of bespoke led festive lighting features to incorporate the new B Festive brand and provided £40k towards the costs.
2.7	In 2009, the Department for Social Development (DSD) initiated a £150k reStore Project in Castle Street. £28k was allocated to the installation of a new led festive lighting scheme for Castle Street.
2.8	In 2009, DSD contributed £31k towards new led festive lighting for Donegall Place and Ann Street as a substantial number of features could not be installed following the rationalisation of street furniture through the Belfast Streets Ahead project.
2.9	In 2010, DSD initiated a £150k reStore Project in North Street. £30k was allocated to the installation of a new led festive lighting scheme for North Street.
2.10	BCCM dedicates an annual budget of £75k towards the testing, installation, connection, dismantling, maintenance, insurance and storage of the Christmas lighting scheme for Belfast City Centre.
2.11	The specific objectives of the proposal to invest in new festive lighting within the City Centre area are:
2.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To achieve a consistently high standard of display across the city centre;</li> <li>- To replace incandescent lighting features with energy efficient LED lighting wherever possible;</li> <li>- To replace the heavy galvanised steel frames with light aluminium frames to reduce risk in high winds;</li> <li>- To minimise maintenance repairs and call-outs;</li> <li>- To produce a quality festive lighting scheme for visitors, shoppers and employees to enjoy;</li> <li>- To promote Belfast as a premier shopping and tourist destination; and</li> <li>- To complete the project within stipulated timeframes and financial budgets.</li> </ul>
2.13	Whilst BCCM originally was pursuing funding towards a 3 year programme, due to budgetary constraints it is now seeking a 1 year commitment for 2012 with both DSD and BCC being asked for £50,000 each to match £50,000 already in the Belfast Chamber of Commerce budget. BCCM has completed the tender process and subject to securing of the finance they affirm they are in a position to implement the new lighting for 2012.

<b>3</b>	<b>Resource Implications</b>
3.1	BCCM is seeking a commitment of £50,000 from BCC for 2012 to match £50,000 which has been committed by Department of Social Development (DSD) for 2012 also. Belfast Chamber of Commerce has also committed £50,000 for this year.

<b>4</b>	<b>Equality and Good Relations Considerations</b>
4.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations Considerations attached to this report.

<b>5</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
5.1	Members are asked to approve £50,000 towards the upgrading of the Christmas lighting stock of BCCM for the City Centre in 2012.

<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Tracking</b>
If approval is granted by Committee an update report will be brought back to Committee in due course.	

<b>7</b>	<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
BCCM – Belfast City Centre Management DSD – Department for Social Development	