

## Community, Leisure & Recreation Committee

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<b>Date:</b>	<b>7 February 2023</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Christmas Activities Feedback 2022</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Cassie Pinnells, Community Services Manager</b>

### Purpose of the Report

1. To provide feedback on the Christmas events and activities held in 2022.
2. To agree the shape and date of the 2023 Christmas event.

### Background

1. The light switch on launched the Christmas itinerary of events on Friday 2 December. This was similar to the 2021 programme, being a shorter and smaller event. The event was run in partnership with several local organisations and supported by sponsorship from local businesses. The rest of the festive timetable included gift fairs, Santa's grotto and a variety of competitions and fun family activities. There was the march of the penguins (similar to Tree of Hope) displayed in the Library, a penguin selfie-station, a penguin search to find 24 mini penguins and one big one hidden in windows around the town centre, plus a window display competition for town centre businesses and shops. Other festive activities run by partners that we were made aware of in time for publication such as concerts, wreath making and church services, were also highlighted in the Christmas booklet.

### Feedback and Review

2. **Christmas booklet:** the booklet was published and distributed in November to all households in Thame. It has received positive feedback, with general comments from residents finding it helpful to see all that was happening in one place and being able to reference again. Any post-delivery surplus stock was made available in a waterproof holder placed on the Christmas tree fencing outside the Town Hall, and in the Information centre.
3. **Light Switch On event:** formal feedback was very limited from the surveys posted via Facebook and in the newsletter. However, the general feel from on the night, alongside anecdotal feedback and the few survey responses we did receive, suggested it was a success and had a family feel. The limited attractions that we did have (stilt walkers, children's ride & selfie station) gave a focus and interest before the actual switch on. The mulled wine stall by the OX9ers was the only stall selling alcoholic drink on the night and was a sell-out success. The re-introduction of food stalls for the switch on was a positive note, and feedback from the stall holders is that they would all return again next year if invited.
4. **Stage:** the main change this year was a move from the usual dais to a bespoke drive-in stage. This was an adapted van with self-contained acoustics which had solar power. The stage was much easier operationally to manage. It allowed more visibility for the crowd, ease for the presenters and gave a professional feel to the event. Whilst not a cheap option, a large proportion of the cost was offset through sponsorship. If considered again for this year, a move one vehicle size up may provide extra benefit to enhance the PA capacity.

5. **Santa's grotto & gift fair:** the grotto was held at the same time as the local gift fair on Saturday 3 December in the upper chamber. The Round Table raised over £300 on the grotto and would be happy to do this again. However, they struggled to secure 'Santa's' to cover the whole day, and suggested slightly reduced operating times for the 2023 event. The gift fair was not as well attended by visitors as had been hoped, so advertising much earlier and more widely in future should be considered to maximise attendance. LWPA held a charity tombola and mulled wine stall outside the Town Hall. These raised over £500 for the LWPA.
6. **Community elements:**
- **Town Trail:** the 'Penguin search' seemed popular with families and there were approx. 30 fully completed entries online for the competition. The penguins were small, so extra clues were posted on Facebook, with the information centre also getting some additional enquiries to assist with the clues!
  - **Schools engagement:** as in 2021, we engaged the primary schools in identifying a pupil each to take part in the switch on. This was really successful, and they were able to use it to celebrate achievements these children had made during the past year.
  - **Selfie station:** this is something that again worked well, with the Penguin proving popular throughout the month. This was particularly noticeable with a steady stream of people during December, particularly families with young children. Over 20 photos were entered into the selfie competition on our dedicated Facebook page.
  - **March of the penguins:** the 3 primary schools engaged fully, and the library was hugely supportive. The change from last year's 'Tree of Hope' seemed to be well received, and feedback from the schools was that the children enjoyed colouring in the penguin cards.
  - **Window display competition:** not as many shops took part as last year, and on reflection the engagement was left quite late for this initiative. That said, there were some fabulous displays on show. Just over 200 votes were received in total with 4 businesses receiving the majority of these.
7. **Partnership:** Delivering the events this year was well supported by partner organisations, with charities and businesses being willing to get involved. The local churches participated and helped with the switch on event. There was a good response to sponsorship of the key activities and attractions.
8. **Event operational requirements:** This year a reduction in security costs was achieved due to the change of Light Switch on event as the layout enabled the High Street to be closed from 3pm rather than noon. Staff overtime costs were incorporated within normal working budgets.

### Future thoughts

9. Looking ahead to this year, consideration should be given to:
- Exploring more sponsorship options earlier in the year to help reduce the need/impact to council budget allocation for the event(s).
  - Maintaining and potentially enhancing the food stall offer at the switch on event.
  - Employing a bigger stage to maximise visibility, community interaction and engagement at the switch on event.
  - Repeating the local gift fair on the Saturday after switch on, but with more publicity to maximise attendance.
  - A repeat of the booklet that is delivered to homes with a calendar of Christmas events.

**Event Date 2023**

10. It is proposed that the Christmas events open with the switch on, on Friday 1 December 2023.

**Income and Expenditure**

11. Below are the figures (excluding VAT) for the income and expenditure for the Christmas events 2022 as at the accounts for the end of January 2023<sup>1</sup>.

<b>Expenditure £</b>		<b>Income £</b>	
Budget	25,610	Budget	4,000
<b>Actuals</b>		<b>Actuals</b>	
Operational	7,947	Sponsorship / donations	4545
Lights Contract	18,200	Stall Income	710
Tea Party	180		
<b>Total</b>	<b>26327</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>5255</b>
<b>Overspend</b>	<b>-717</b>	<b>Additional Income</b>	<b>1255</b>

Despite a small overspend on expenditure, the income and sponsorship was 31% up on prediction and covered 66% of operational Christmas events costs.

**Recommendation:*****The committee is asked:***

- i) To receive feedback on the Christmas events and activities held in 2022.***
- ii) To agree that the Christmas Lights Switch On event this year will be held on Friday 1 December 2023.***

<sup>1</sup> Figures on the budget monitoring spreadsheet are based on the end of December 2022