



Report on Christmas Light Provision for Minehead

Background

As councillors know, Minehead Town Council has provided the Christmas lights in the town for many years. Up until approximately five years ago, this was carried out as an in-house function. Due to the health and safety issues associated with working at height, electrical installation, lighting maintenance costs/reliability and the dependence on a small number of appropriately skilled staff, a decision was made to contract out the main Christmas lighting. The in-house Amenities Team continued to install the Christmas trees above the shops.

In 2021 a three-year contract was awarded to a company called Festive Lighting. The option to extend this contract by an additional two years was exercised in 2023, which meant the final year of the 5-year period was December 2025. As things currently stand, there is no Christmas lighting provision for 2026 and beyond.

The shop trees have been a well-valued addition to the Christmas display. However, these artificial trees are now very aged and arrangements with shops for the use of electricity have presented complications. Informal agreements with shops to supply power are no longer sustainable, with some businesses expressing discomfort with the arrangement. It has also resulted in inconsistent provision, with some shops repeatedly missing out. The safest, fairest and most consistent approach now would be to cease the provision of shop trees unless significant new investment is made.

The Avenue stanchion lights used at Christmas do not fall within the Christmas lighting contract. They were purchased as a one-off joint arrangement between BID and MTC. These lights remain very popular and to plan effectively, councillors may wish to consider a separate discussion about their future when considering earmarked reserves later this year.

Needs

Many ratepayers judge value for money based on visible services. Christmas lights are a key part of this and Minehead has consistently received positive feedback for its displays. Christmas lighting brings joy at a darker time of year. A draft tender contract has been produced for councillors to review alongside this report.

It is essential that the tender process is completed in a timely manner. Christmas lighting contracts are often agreed by June of the first year to enable planning. Any delay would significantly affect the town's ability to secure lights for 2026. Councillors are therefore asked to read this report carefully and consider approving the Invitation to Tender by the end of February.

Blenheim Gardens was devolved to the Town Council in May 2025. The Clerk has had early discussions with potential providers about a Christmas light trail in the Gardens. The Invitation to Tender includes this as an optional element. However, it's likely the Gardens currently lack the necessary infrastructure. Substantial investment would be required before such an event could be delivered, meaning this would need to be considered as a separate, budgeted project.

The aim is to create a well-structured, efficient Amenities Team working to scheduled tasks while remaining responsive to issues in the town. With expanded responsibilities under devolution, the higher skill set required, the health and safety implications and the unpredictable nature of Christmas lighting repairs, it remains more cost-effective and safer to keep Christmas lighting as a separate contracted service delivered by an experienced provider.

The shop-front trees are at end-of-life. If councillors wish MTC to continue delivering these, investment would be required in new trees, improved electrical infrastructure and enhanced health and safety processes. If councillors choose not to continue this provision, discussions with the Business Association may be appropriate to inform them of the Council's intention and explore alternative delivery models.

Proposed Timeframe:

Councillor feedback – February 2026

Council agreement for tender document – no later than March 2026 (Full Council)

Invitation to Tender period – April 2026

Evaluation – May 2026

Contract award – May 2026 (Full Council)

Financial and Legal Considerations

The 2026/27 budget includes £25,000 for Christmas, covering both the Christmas lighting and the Christmas Light Switch-On event. The Switch-On typically costs around £5,000, leaving approximately £20,000 for Christmas lighting.

The previous contract cost £14,255.45 per annum in 2021–2023. This included setup and removal of lights and covered Wellington Square, the Christmas tree and the Parade central motifs.

In 2024 and 2025, costs were reduced by splitting the contract between a supplier and a separate installer. Supply cost £6,754.71 and installation/removal cost £6,200.71, totalling £12,954.71.

These were fixed costs agreed in advance. With inflation and expanded expectations, budgeting £20,000 is appropriate.

Christmas lights can be provided by Town and Parish Councils under Local Government Act 1972, S.144. The Procurement Act 2023 requires transparency, equal treatment, and objective evaluation. Although the contract value falls below the threshold requiring publication on the central digital platform, the Council must still follow core principles: open advertising, fair evaluation, clear specification and auditable decision-making.

Recommendations

1. Agree to Maintain Christmas lighting as an external contract.
2. That the finance and general purposes committee reviews the draft Invitation to Tender (ITT) in detail, provides any required amendments or feedback, and recommends a final version to Full Council so that it can be formally approved no later than the March 2026 Full Council meeting.

3. Agree that shop trees are discontinued unless councillors commit to full reinvestment. If discontinuation is agreed, the Council engages early with the Business Association to communicate the decision and discuss any alternative arrangements they may wish to pursue.

Ben Parker

Town Clerk

February 2026