



Lytham Town Council

Report to: Extraordinary Meeting - Full Council 14th September 2026

Date: Friday 11th September 2026

From: Clerk / Responsible Financial Officer

Agenda Item:

Subject: Christmas Lights Procurement - Tender Process - Outcome and Recommendation.

Status: For Decision

1. Purpose of Report

To report the outcome of the Christmas Lights 2026 tender process and seek Council's decision on award of contract.

2. Background

At its meeting on 29th July 2026 (Agenda Item 12, Decision 52/2026), Council resolved to invite tenders from MK Illuminations, Blachere Illuminations and Lightpool for the supply, installation and associated services relating to new Christmas lighting materials, in accordance with Financial Regulation 5.6, and authorised the Clerk to prepare a detailed specification in consultation with Cllr Blackshaw. The resolution set the total value of this tender at £45,000.

The Invitation to Tender, as issued, described the budget at Section 1.4 as “a maximum budget of approximately £45,000 exclusive of VAT”. This wording was the Clerk's own judgement in translating the resolution into tender language. This is not identical to the figure resolved by Council. This is addressed further at Section 5 below.

The submission deadline was Monday 7th September 2026 at 12:00 (midday). The specification requested bespoke aluminium pole banners in two designs for Clifton Street, three programmable LED column wraps for Henry Street and Dicconson Terrace, and 200m of warm white LED string lighting for the Christmas tree at Clifton Square, together with associated installation, maintenance, removal and storage services.

3. Tenders Received

Two tenders were received by the deadline: from Blachere Illuminations and from Lightpool (trading as Blackpool Illuminations). No response was received from MK Illuminations.

Lightpool's tender was received within the deadline but was not identified until the following day. The circumstances of this, and the Council's handling of it, are set out at Section 10 (Ethics, Interests and Process Integrity).

Blachere's submission comprised three commercial options:

- Outright purchase (Option 1),
- One-year hire (Option 2), and
- Four-year hire with storage (Option 3).

Options 2 and 3 were not requested in the original specification; they were volunteered by Blachere's representative during a site visit ahead of the submission deadline.

The Clerk indicated at that time that Council would receive and consider any information put forward, without this constituting a commitment to treat hire as a formal tendered option.

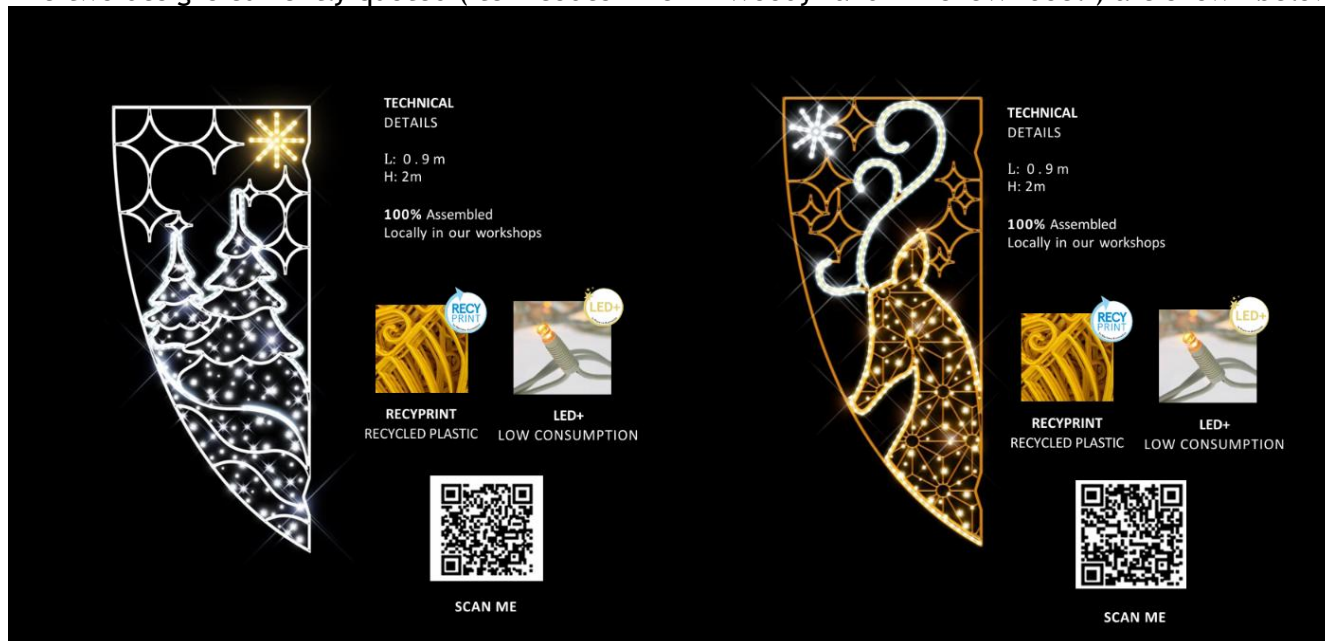
4. Deviation from Specification - Banner Design

The specification requested bespoke pole banner designs, created specifically for the Lytham scheme.

Blachere's submission proposes banners selected from its existing catalogue, rather than a design commissioned specifically for this contract, reflecting the compressed timescale for this year's procurement.

The Clerk raised this with Blachere, who confirmed in writing that selection from their existing range is possible, within the same structure quoted – 13 banners of one design and 13 of a second design. This does not extend to a wider choice of designs at the quoted price.

The two designs currently quoted (item codes IPL322 'Woody' and IPL323W 'Joel') are shown below.



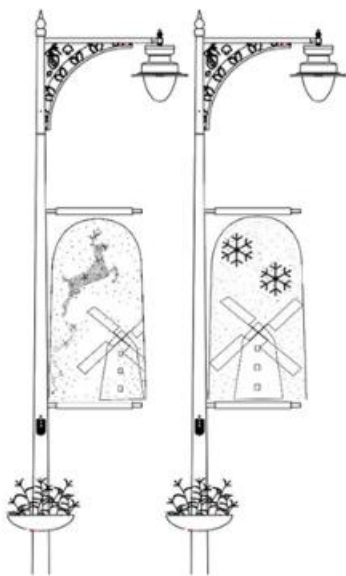
Lightpool's submission proposes genuinely bespoke banners, with a quoted manufacturing lead time of 8 weeks.

The design shown in Lightpool's tender document originates from earlier, informal outline design work carried out during the Council's pre-tender research into likely scheme costs (see Section 10 below).

The Clerk sought clarification from Lightpool by email as to whether this design was fixed or could be revised.

Lightpool has confirmed that the design shown was originally suggested from scoping conversations in June 2026, and that it can be amended, redesigned or changed if the Council requires an alternative, without affecting Lightpool's ability to meet the required installation deadline – provided the Council responds promptly to any redesign request.

Their current design is shown below.



Council is asked to note the banner design position for whichever route it resolves to pursue at Section 8, and, if awarding to Blachere, to confirm that catalogue-based designs are acceptable for the 2026 scheme, with bespoke design able to be revisited for future years should a contract be reconsidered.

5. Pricing

On clarification, Blachere confirmed that its Option 1 (Purchase) submission, as originally quoted, omitted storage costs in error. This has been corrected, using the same storage figure quoted under Blachere's Option 3 (£1,380.00) following telephone communication with the company on 9th September 2026.

- Blachere has a revised Option 1 total of **£34,788.30 ex VAT** (originally submitted as £33,408.30 ex VAT).
- Lightpool's Option (Purchase) totals **£47,081.00 ex VAT**, as itemised in its submission.

Council's resolution of 29th July 2026 set the total value of this tender at £45,000.

The Invitation to Tender issued to bidders described this as “a maximum budget of approximately £45,000”, with this being the Clerk's judgement in translating the resolution into tender wording.

On the wording bidders actually saw, it is the Clerk's assessment that Lightpool's bid is not inherently non-compliant. Measured against the figure Council itself resolved, it exceeds that figure by £2,081.00 (approximately 4.6%).

Blachere's corrected Option 1 total of £34,788.30 is £10,211.70 under the resolved budget of £45,000.

Council should treat the Lightpool figure as a value-for-money and budgetary consideration in reaching its decision, rather than a strict non-compliance.

6. Column Wrap Pricing - unresolved differential

The quoted prices for the Henry Street/Dicconson Terrace column wraps differ substantially between bidders: £5,500.00 per unit (Blachere, £16,950.00 for 3) against £660.00 per unit (Lightpool, £1,980.00 for 3, including fitting).

This is a difference of approximately 8.5 times.

NB: Both figures have been confirmed as intended by the respective bidders and are not pricing errors.

At this scale of difference, alongside differences in how each bidder has described their product suggests the real possibility that the two bidders are not offering directly comparable products. This has not been verified with either applicant due to timescale.

- Blachere's specification describes a bespoke, permanent, app-controllable RGBWW installation.
- Lightpool's submission describes the item in less technical detail, with an accompanying note that the illustrative image may not represent the actual product.

Council should therefore be aware, in weighing the evaluation and options below, that the Price criterion for this element may not reflect a like-for-like comparison between bidders.

Separately, Council should note that the Henry Street/Dicconson Terrace column wraps are intended to remain in place and in use throughout the year, not solely during the festive period. Through purchase, ownership would be with the Council.

This would represent a permanent piece of public realm lighting infrastructure, usable for other seasonal or civic events, rather than a Christmas-only cost.

Feedback raised by businesses in this area during discussion at the Christmas Lights Working Group – though not formally minuted – has been that this area has previously felt overlooked by schemes focused on Clifton Street and Clifton Square.

7. Evaluation

The options were evaluated by a panel of three assessors (the Clerk/RFO, the Chair and the Vice-Chair) against the criteria set out at Section 5 of the tender specification, using the agreed Marking Guide, which has been previously shared with Councillors for their information.

Each criterion was scored 1-5 by each assessor and weighted according to its published weighting; a minimum score of 3 in every criterion was required for a bid to meet the Council's minimum standard, with no compensation between criteria.

Option	Chair	Vice-Chair	Clerk	Average / Standard Met?
Blachere – Option 1 (Purchase)	34.5	34.5	37.5	35.5 – YES
Blachere – Option 2 (1-Year Hire)	32.0	30.0	35.0	32.3 – NO
Blachere – Option 3 (4-Year Hire)	33.5	31.5	41.5	35.5 – NO
Lightpool (Blackpool Illuminations)	37.0	41.5	37.5	38.7 – YES

- Blachere Option 1 (Purchase) and Lightpool both meet the Council's minimum standard.
- Lightpool has the higher average score of the two (38.7 against 35.5).
- Blachere's Options 2 and 3 (hire) both failed the minimum standard, reflecting assessors' judgement that a hire arrangement leaving the Council with no asset at the end of the contract does not represent acceptable value for money when weighed against outright purchase, regardless of headline annual cost, and are not considered further below.

8. Options for the award of contract and Clerk's recommendation.

Council is asked to choose between three routes for award of this contract:

	Route A Lightpool	Route B Blachere (full)	Route C Blachere (partial)
Total Price (ex VAT)	£47,081.00	£34,788.30	£17,838.30
Banner design	Genuinely bespoke; can be amended subject to prompt Council response	Catalogue (Joel/Woody or alternative within same structure)	Catalogue (as Route B)
Column wraps	Included, £1,980.00 (specification comparability unverified – see Section 6)	Included, £16,950.00, permanent year-round asset, ownership to Council	Not procured
Evaluation standing	Highest average score, 38.7/50, meets minimum standard	35.5/50, meets minimum standard	Scope variant of Route B; not separately scored
Key consideration	Meets original bespoke-design requirement and scores highest, at a cost of approximately £12,300 more than Route B	Lower cost than Route A; catalogue design; retains the permanent column wrap asset	Lowest cost, but does not address the Henry Street/Dicconson Terrace stakeholder feedback at Section , and forgoes the permanent asset

Council should be aware that Route A (Lightpool) has the highest evaluation score, and is the only route offering a genuinely bespoke banner design, which reflects what was originally specified in the Invitation to Tender.

Council specified a genuinely bespoke design, and Route A meets that specification most closely; if Council considers that this benefit, together with Route A's higher evaluation score, justifies the additional expenditure, that is a decision properly open to Council.

Notwithstanding this, the Clerk's recommendation is Route B – full award to Blachere under Option 1.

This reflects a value-for-money judgement that the Clerk, in the role of Responsible Financial Officer, who considers it necessary to set out this position plainly within this document rather than leave it unstated.

The difference in cost between Route A and Route B is approximately £12,300 ex VAT.

Council specified a genuinely bespoke design, and Route A meets that specification most closely; if Council considers that this benefit, together with Route A's higher evaluation score, justifies the additional expenditure, that is a decision properly open to Council.

Route C is a lower-cost alternative that forgoes the column wraps element completely, together with the stakeholder and permanent-asset considerations set out at Section 6. It is included as the least expensive option across the tenders received and is illustrative and intended to inform debate.

Note:

A further alternative was considered in preparing this report - that of a split award across suppliers. This would mean purchasing the column wraps procured from Lightpool and the remaining elements from Blachere.

Whilst considered, it is not recommended by the Clerk for the following reasons.

Neither bidder's tender was priced or evaluated on the basis that it might be split and combined with the other's; the column wrap price differential noted at Section 6 remains unverified as a like-for-like comparison; and a split award would introduce two separate contractors, each with their own insurance and RAMS, working across a single scheme with no single point of responsibility for delivery ahead of the switch-on date.

This option is noted for completeness rather than presented as a fourth route

Council is not required to adopt the Clerk's recommendation and may lawfully resolve to award under any of the routes set out above

9. Legal Basis for Partial Award (Route C)

Council has the discretion to award all or only part of a tendered scheme. Section 6 of the Invitation to Tender reserves the Council's right not to accept the lowest, or any, tender. This is a reservation broad enough to cover partial acceptance.

This is consistent with general public procurement practice:

- Section 18 of the Procurement Act 2023 requires contracting authorities to consider whether requirements could be supplied under more than one contract or lot, and
- Regulation 46 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 confirms that authorities may award by lots and are not obliged to award every lot tendered.

While this contract falls below the thresholds at which these specific provisions bind the Council, they confirm that partial award is an ordinary and lawful feature of public procurement generally. This is separate from, and does not affect, the choice between Route A and Route B, which is a distinct decision between two competing, compliant tenders.

10. Ethics, Interests and Process Integrity

This section brings together matters relevant to the fairness, transparency and integrity of this procurement process, for Council's awareness in reaching its decision. It also serves as a documentary record of these issues within the Council's corporate consciousness

Declared interest – Cllr Blackshaw

Council's resolution of 29th July 2026 authorised the Clerk to prepare the detailed specification for this tender in consultation with Cllr Blackshaw.

The Council notes that Cllr Blackshaw has a prior business relationship with Lightpool due to previous involvement in arranging and preparing Christmas lighting events. This was not formally declared as a registerable interest at the time.

In view of this, the Clerk did not include Cllr Blackshaw on the evaluation panel for this tender. Early, informal contact with Lightpool during the Council's pre-tender research into likely scheme costs (June 2026) was handled initially by Cllr Blackshaw and subsequently by the Clerk directly. No contact with Lightpool outside the formal tender process has taken place since the tender was launched.

For balance, Council should also note that Blachere had a comparatively longer period of direct, on-site engagement with the Clerk ahead of submission.

Council is asked to note this position.

Lightpool tender – discovery after initial opening

Lightpool's tender was sent to the correct mailbox (tenders@lythamtowncouncil.gov.uk) at 10:12am on Monday 7th September 2026, within the submission deadline.

However, it was filtered to a junk folder by the email system and was not identified until the following day. On discovery, this was briefed directly to the Chair and Vice-Chair and the tender documentation shared with them. It was included in the evaluation process alongside the Blachere submission.

Council should note that, as the tenders mailbox is held unopened until the deadline to preserve confidentiality between bidders, Lightpool's submission was not opened alongside Blachere's at that time; this was a consequence of the junk filtering rather than a decision taken in the process, and the Clerk brought the submission forward for evaluation as soon as it was found.

Evaluation scoring – assessor awareness of bias

Following the correction to Blachere's Option 1 pricing described at Section 5, the Clerk, as one of the three assessors, considered whether to revise his own Price score for Blachere Option 1 upward in light of the improved, corrected cost.

The Clerk decided against doing so, and retained his original score, on the basis that a revision made after having already seen a competing tender in the same round could not be relied upon as free from unconscious bias.

Council is asked to note this as an example of the safeguards applied during the evaluation process.

11. Timescale

Blachere's supporting information indicates a delivery lead time of 6-8 weeks from contract award, based on an anticipated award date of 9th September 2026, to meet the Council's switch-on date of Saturday 14th November 2026.

Lightpool's submission indicates a manufacturing lead time of 8 weeks for bespoke pole features, with completion of all works required by Friday 13th November 2026, and has confirmed this remains achievable provided the Council responds promptly to any design queries.

As this meeting falls on 14th September 2026, prompt award and, where applicable, prompt turnaround on any design confirmation is recommended by either route to preserve the switch-on date.

NB; Both applicant organisations have been notified of this date for decision by email.

12. Recommendation

It is recommended that Council:

- Notes the matters set out at Section 10 (Ethics, Interests and Process Integrity);
- Resolves to award the contract under one of the following routes:
 - (A) to Lightpool at £47,081.00 ex VAT, being the highest-scoring evaluation outcome and offering a genuinely bespoke banner design as originally specified;
 - (B) to Blachere Illuminations under Option 1 (Purchase), full scheme, at £34,788.30 ex VAT (corrected to include storage). This is the Clerk's recommendation on value-for-money grounds; or
 - (C) to Blachere Illuminations under Option 1 (Purchase), partial scheme excluding the Henry Street/Dicconson Terrace column wraps, at £17,838.30 ex VAT;
- If awarding under Route B or C, Council notes and accepts that banner designs will be selected from Blachere's existing catalogue rather than bespoke to Lytham for the 2026-27 season, for the reasons set out at Section 4, and confirms whether the two designs shown (Joel and Woody) are acceptable;
- If awarding under Route A, notes that the banner design shown can be amended if required, subject to a prompt Council response to any redesign request;
- Notes the unresolved differential in column wrap pricing between bidders, as set out at Section 6;
- Notes that Blachere's Options 2 and 3 (hire) did not meet the Council's minimum evaluation standard and are not recommended for award; and
- Authorises the Clerk to proceed to contract award promptly following this meeting, in view of the lead times required to meet the 14th November switch-on date.
- Note that Council has a legal power to incur expenditure for Christmas lighting. Section 144 of the Local Government Act 1972 (power to encourage visitors and provide entertainment) is the power that applies.

Signed:

Luke Russell

Clerk / RFO

Friday 11th September 2026