

MEETING:	COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE:	12 APRIL 2010
TITLE OF REPORT:	UPDATE ON RESPONSE TO COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REVIEW OF TOURISM
PORTFOLIO AREA:	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

CLASSIFICATION: Open

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

To update Members on the completed and planned actions that relate to the Review of Tourism with Specific Reference to the Tourist Information Centres in Herefordshire.

Recommendation

THAT

- (a) the actions are noted and**
- (b) a future report is brought back to this committee on the implementation of the Review of the Destination Management Partnership.**

Key Points Summary

- The findings of the Review of Tourism with Specific Reference to Tourist Information Centres, was presented to this committee on 18th April 2008. This makes the report nearly 2 years old and there have been some changes within tourism since then which are continuing at a pace. The recommendations within the review have influenced some of those changes, most fundamentally a review of the Destination Management Partnership (DMP).

Alternative Options

- 1 That the review group is reconstituted to update the review findings.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 2 To ensure Members are aware of the progress within the Tourism Service.

Introduction and Background

- 3 At its meeting on 18th April 2008 the Community Services Scrutiny Committee received a report on the findings of its Review Group. Since that time the report's findings were submitted to Cabinet for consideration on 30th June 2009. However, Cabinet deferred consideration of the report until 26th November 2009 where it agreed the recommendations as set out in the report to it. In accordance with the scrutiny process the Committee considers Cabinet's response and assesses whether a further report on progress against the action plan is required. The committee at the meeting of the 7th December 2009 did not accept the report based on the accompanying action plan as being an "inappropriate response to the work undertaken by the team" amongst other concerns.

Key Considerations

- 4 Many issues raised in the review are still relevant, if not more so considering the economic downturn and financial pressure of public services in the upcoming years.
- 5 A number of activities have taken place that relate to the recommendations (as listed in Appendix 1), but more fundamentally a review of the DMP has been commissioned. The reason for this review was to assess the potential of tourism in the county and the role of the DMP in fostering change and development.
- 6 The findings of the review will be delivered through a transition group, they centre on the need for:
- A more strategic focus to the DMP, priorities guided by a new Tourism Strategy;
 - Enhanced marketing and branding;
 - Reorganising of roles of the tourism team within the Council;
 - Membership to be based on localities, rather than the DMP being based on a paying membership.
- 7 It is expected that the transition group will make progress on implementing the review recommendations by October 2010.
- 8 The scrutiny review had a specific focus on TICs. Since the review the TICs continue to see a general decline in use as outlined below:

Location	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Cost per head £
Hereford	76433	77368	72390	61500	61242	1.54
Ross	59540	56996	54117	51497	53984	0.93
Leominster	34665	37451	36835	33434	30733	0.81
Ledbury	80534	78192	57515	21808	21684	0.65
Queenswood	33205	33220	34423	36440	41372*	0.92
Totals	286382	285233	257287	206687	211024	1.19

*Queenswood increased due to additional opening hours

- 9 An asset management plan for the TICs has been deferred whilst options for leases have been explored. Proposals will be submitted to cabinet in May 2010.
- 10 The cabinet report will address issues highlighted in the scrutiny report including the moving of Ross TIC due to the expiry of the lease at Swan House; expiry of the lease at Leominster

TIC; and the high lease costs at Hereford TIC.

11 Since the review a number of the activities have already taken place that relate or link to the recommendations in Scrutiny Committee's tourism review. These include:

- Ledbury Tourist Information Centre has been relocated into the Masters House with its own TIC identity. The visitor numbers and sales in the centre have increased over and above the projected figures after the move from the high street location.
- Better internal and external signage at Bromyard Centre has been implemented and costs have been acquired for a touch screen with a data base driven system with accommodation - though this would require capital expenditure which is currently not available.
- A telephone is now linked to Ross Tourist Information Centre for accommodation bookings from Bromyard TIP.
- The number of brochures published by Visit Herefordshire have been reduced with information being incorporated within a main Visitor Guide and a Discover Guide which enables visitors to see at a glance what is on offer in the county thereby encouraging them to increase their stay in the county. The only other key publications are the cider route and black and white leaflets, these are distinctive trails that are signposted and are very popular with visitors.
- The front page of the web site has been improved with links to events with special themed banners for the different seasons. There has been an increase in number of hits to the website to half million a month. The web site was highly commended in Heart of England Tourism Awards, 2008.
- The number of accommodation bookings via the web site has been increased and an electronic purchasing system (e-shop) has been introduced to enable more tickets for events to be sold. 2009 tickets sold include UGO (£1,500), Food Festival (£4,500) and Walking Festival (£1,600) as well as Big Chill (£36,000), events at Eastnor Castle and local events in the market towns (£3,000 approximately).
- An area for food and drink businesses has been established on the web-site thereby increasing awareness of the range of food and drink made in the county. Increase in the profile of the Food Festival with the contribution to the economy growing year on year £900,000 (2009) against £760,000 in 2008. Visit Herefordshire was awarded highly commended at the Heart of England Tourism Awards, 2009 for most enterprising Festival.
- The contribution made by Tourism to the economy of Herefordshire has grown year on year with the latest STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Model) figures showing a contribution of £415 million in 2009 compared to £410 million in 2008.
- A restructure of the core tourism team and TIC staffing has been completed to match priorities within the service.

Community Impact

12 TICs are seen as a key market town presence and a "symbol" of the Council's investment in market towns and tourism. They are used approximately 50% by local people, though visitor numbers have generally been declining as people use pre-visit web information.

Financial Implications

13 There are no financial implications relating to this report.

Legal Implications

14 Legal requirement regarding early termination of leases.

Risk Management

15 Failure to provide effective tourism services would impact on the economic life of the county.

Appendices

16 Appendix 1: Recommendations of Review of Tourism with Specific Reference to Tourist Information Centres.

Background Papers

17 Review of Tourism with Specific Reference to Tourist Information Centres.

Recommendations of the Review of Tourism with Specific Reference to Tourist Information Centres

1. Continue to provide TICs at or close to the main centres of tourist activity in the County, notwithstanding reductions and changes in patterns of use. Utilisation and effectiveness to continue to be monitored via footfall and cost per visitor data.
2. Retain direct control over tourism information services. Never combine the functions of a TIC with those of an 'Info in Herefordshire' office.
3. Meet the challenges posed by rising expectations and modern means of communication, and the drive for greater VFM, with a new 'hub and spoke' structure for the delivery of tourist information.
4. Establish a central hub, co-located with a principal TIC, staffed by 2.25 fte staff plus the TIC supervisors. Its functions to comprise:
 - 4.1.1. The centralised handling - to common higher standards of promptness, comprehensiveness and professionalism - of all remote enquiries.
 - 4.1.2. The formation of a centralised facility for the maintenance and provision of brochures etc relating to destinations beyond the County boundary, thus facilitating the updating of this information whilst eradicating multiple holdings and, most importantly, freeing valuable storage and display space at the TICs.
 - 4.1.3. The potential for centralisation of some peripheral TIC functions such as accommodation, bus and theatre etc bookings.
 - 4.1.4. The provision of a central resource facility for the TICs.
5. Constitute the central hub and its co-located 'spoke' TIC as an exemplar facility.
6. Bromyard Centre to become a TIP with better internal and external signage, a more obvious telephone for enquiries and, as a trial the installation of a window mounted touch-screen information facility.
7. Enable the Kington TIC to remain in its present location and refurbish the building's fabric and decoration providing this can be done from within existing budgets.
8. Complement each of the other 'spoke' TICs with 2.5fte paid staff plus any available volunteers.
9. Move Hereford TIC from its current location to new and less costly premises as close as possible to the historic city centre.
10. Find alternative accommodation for Leominster TIC in a central location as soon as possible.
11. Agree with Visit Herefordshire that the latter will take the lead in all aspects of the marketing of tourism in and to the County.
12. Explore with Visit Herefordshire how best to develop and improve the linkages between marketing information.

13. Seek to make improvements to the contents, user-friendliness and updating of website information.
14. The proposal for a hub and spoke structure should be monitored closely and a review and report prepared after the first year of operation.