

DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIRECTORATE	TOURISM AND LEISURE COMMITTEE	8 NOVEMBER 2018	7
MOBILE TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE			

PUBLIC ITEM

This item is for consideration in the public part of the meeting.

SUMMARY

At the Tourism and Leisure Committee meeting of March 8th 2018 officers presented to members a proposal that the Tourist Information Desk at Fylde Town Hall would be open at weekends, during the summer season, in addition to its Monday to Friday operation during office hours and the seasonal Tourist Information desk at Lytham Windmill.

The Town Hall reception was opened for Easter weekend 2018 and weekends from May. However, the visitor numbers were very low even at times when foot fall was high despite promotion via social media, signage, press coverage and web coverage. The majority of the very few interactions were not tourism related, the service was not offering value for money and not achieving the required objective to deliver a tourist information offer.

The option of a mobile tourist information trailer to take the service to destination points and people across the whole of the Borough and beyond was proposed and piloted at a range of locations and high profile events during July and August 2018.

The mobile unit has been a major success with a high volume of engagement and interactions with visitors and residents on issues that are tourism related.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the committee support a full season pilot in 2019/20 of the Mobile Tourist Information Unit to be delivered from in year efficiency savings.
2. That the single fixed point service pilot at the Town Hall is discontinued to allow resources to be dedicated to the mobile unit.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

At the Tourism and Leisure Committee meeting held on 22 June 2017, elected members asked officers to explore the options in relation to opening the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) at St Anne's Town Hall at weekends and bank holidays, in addition to the current Monday to Friday operation.

CORPORATE PRIORITIES	
Spending your money in the most efficient way to achieve excellent services (Value for Money)	✓
Delivering the services that customers expect of an excellent council (Clean and Green)	✓
Working with all partners (Vibrant Economy)	✓
To make sure Fylde continues to be one of the most desirable places to live (A Great Place to Live)	✓
Promoting Fylde as a great destination to visit (A Great Place to Visit)	✓

REPORT

1. In June 2017 the committee agreed to explore the option of providing a TIC service from the Town Hall at weekends during the summer season. An initial pilot of the operation from the Town Hall was held during the Kite Festival weekend in 2017, despite high volumes of footfall very few visitors came to the Town Hall and the majority made enquiries about using the toilet or the car parking charges at the Town Hall.
2. The pilot was then continued for the 2018 summer season, opening at weekend and Bank Holidays from 10am to 3pm at the Town Hall. The service was promoted extensively across social media platforms where the council experiences the highest levels of engagement as well as in the press, where it received limited coverage despite several press releases, and on street presence with large promotion flags and 'A' boards appropriately located on council property.
3. Despite promotion of the service, during the May / June weekends (including two Bank Holiday Mondays) the service operated for 18 days and there was only 188 customers (approximately 2 per hour) who used the facility, once again the majority asking to use the toilet or enquiring about car parking. There was a very low percentage of genuinely tourism related enquiries about what events are on, where people can stay and what the coast and countryside have to offer.
4. Whilst only being open for five hours the employees operating the service were frustrated at the low use of service despite often high volumes of people passing the Town Hall to destination points on the Promenade or in the town centre, that they would stand outside and canvass for business. The feedback was that the service was not offering value for money, it was demotivating to work the weekend in such a quiet environment and that the service needed to be located where the people are. The employees had opted to work the weekend shifts as additional hours to the regular posts they held, and were drawn from various services across the council, with everyone operating to the same job description and person specification that had been created for the seasonal weekend TIC service.
5. Officers listened to the feedback from employees and looked at alternative options including the provision a quality mobile unit that can be located at destination points and events, the principle of taking the service to the people that had the added element of being able to service the whole Borough and even be located at events outside the Borough. The council had a very good quality mobile unit in storage that had not been used for about two years, it was possible with a small investment to brand and refurbish the unit and create a fit for purpose mobile display and contact point – see the pictures of the unit included as Appendix 1 to this report.
6. It had been agreed that the cost of the pilot service in the Town Hall would be funded from in year efficiency savings and that the service would be reviewed at the end of the season however, it was clear within the first few weeks of the pilot that the service was not effective based at the Town Hall and it was agreed that the mobile unit should be piloted for the remainder of the season using the resource that had been identified and planned in advance for the service at the Town Hall. It was not possible to identify enough resource in terms of employees available for additional weekend working and finance from in year efficiency savings to pilot both a mobile service and a fixed location offer at the Town Hall.
7. The mobile unit was used for 20 days from July to September, it was taken to 8 events including Lytham Festival, 1940s Wartime Weekend, Ricoh Women's British Golf (in partnership with Visit Blackpool), Staining Club Day and the Kite Festival. During this period there was a total of 2,235 customer contacts (approximately 22 per hour) the majority of which were about what is on the area, where can we go and what does the Fylde have to offer. The employees did get involved in event based information including; selling programmes for the 1940's weekend (over 1000 sold at the unit); programme line up and map of stalls for St Anne's Carnival; and course information at the Ricoh Open.
8. On non-event weekends the unit was positioned on St Anne's Promenade adjacent to the St Anne's Beach Huts. The benefits realised from having the mobile unit that is able to go to destination points include:
 - a. Vastly increased interest and customer engagement in the tourism offer across Fylde
 - b. More flexible hours of operation to coincide with events and demand i.e. evenings at Lytham Festival
 - c. The opportunity to locate the unit across, and outside the Borough not just a single fixed location service

- d. Working with partners to offer more to the customer and contribute to costs i.e. Blackpool Tourism and Lytham Festival
 - e. A selling point for event material i.e. programmes and tickets for future events (online payments)
 - f. Greater presence and higher profile in high footfall locations enhancing the reputation of the council and the tourism offer
 - g. An enjoyable and fulfilling experience for the employees delivering the service
9. Feedback from the staff working at the unit was positive with a greater sense of fulfilment, satisfaction and motivation having enjoyed the experience of greater engagement with a wider range of customers at different locations where there is something taking place. The feedback from partners and customers was very good with a large number of compliments about the unit and the service offered, the mobile unit was a success and offered value for money.
10. Staffing was drawn from services across the council with employees volunteering to work additional hours at the weekend on a rota basis, the employees were provided with appropriate training with a minimum of two members of staff present at any time. The employee cost for both the pilot at the Town Hall and the mobile unit was £5,373 plus on costs, it cost approximately £3,000 to brand, re-fit and make road worthy the unit, these were met from in year efficiency savings.
11. The unit features bright visuals, appropriate Fylde branding and interchangeable graphics for use at specific events with the facilities to display a wide range of tourism related literature for the Fylde and wider region. It was useful to promote forthcoming attractions closer to the event dates for carnivals, fetes, festivals etc.
12. The mobile unit proved to be a success which can be improved on, if continued in future years, through more diverse locations (a lot of club days and galas were missed in 2018 because it was only started in July) including events outside the Borough i.e. Blackpool Air Show. Members are asked to consider the approval of a full summer season pilot of the mobile unit in 2019, from Easter through to September, allowing appropriate time to plan and agree locations, events and partner contributions, as well as select and train employees and which will be delivered through in year efficiency savings.
13. The principle of taking the service to the destination points where the people will already be in attendance has proven far more successful and efficient than offering a single fixed location that is not a destination point for visitors. It is proposed that the resources are dedicated to enhancing and refining the mobile unit offer with a view to making it a permanent seasonal service offer.

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	There are no financial implications arising directly from this report
Legal	None arising from this report
Community Safety	None arising from this report
Human Rights and Equalities	None arising from this report
Sustainability and Environmental Impact	None arising from this report
Health & Safety and Risk Management	None arising from this report

LEAD AUTHOR	CONTACT DETAILS	DATE
Tim Dixon	Tim.dixon@fylde.gov.uk & Tel 01253 658436	8 NOV 2018

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Name of document	Date	Where available for inspection
T&L Committee Report	June 22 nd 2017	Website Link

Attached documents

Appendix 1: The Mobile TIC Unit

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