

DECISION ITEM

REPORT OF	MEETING	DATE	ITEM NO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIRECTORATE	TOURISM AND LEISURE COMMITTEE	22 JUNE 2017	10
TOURIST INFORMATION WEEKEND OPENING			

PUBLIC ITEM

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

SUMMARY

This report has been produced following a request from elected members to explore options on opening the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) at St Anne's Town Hall at weekends and bank holidays in addition to its current Monday to Friday operation. This report provides a background as to the function of the TIC, current position, other sources of information that are available and a number of options that can be fully costed up in more detail for consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To establish the preferred option and for officers to work up a detailed costed proposal.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS DECISIONS

Council – 3 March 2008

Council agreed as part of the budget setting process a number of budget saving proposals which included incorporating the Tourist Information Centre into the Town Hall and ceasing to provide a service at weekends and bank holidays.

BACKGROUND

1. The purpose of a Tourist Information Centre (TIC) is to provide visitors and local residents with relevant information about what is going on and what to do in the locality. As experts on the local area, TIC's are for some the first 'port of call' for information on places to stay, places to eat, where to visit, information on present or upcoming events. They are a resource for visitors and at present there are over 200 in England (according to the Visit England website). In Lancashire (outside of Fylde), there are twelve TIC's, these being operated by local authorities.
2. In Fylde there was a dedicated TIC facility in St Anne's at the junction of Clifton Drive North and St Annes Road West for a number of years. In 2008 this facility was closed as part of council wide budget savings and moved to within the reception area of the Town Hall in St Anne's, the TIC facility was also delivered during normal working hours only and not open at weekends and bank holidays. There is a small TIC provision in Lytham Windmill which primarily operates as a visitor attraction to 35,000 visitors during its operational season (Easter to end September).
3. The TIC provides information on Fylde places to visit, local information (e.g. public transport/leisure facilities/parking/toilets), stocks a range of print and can sell tickets for a range of local visitor attractions – e.g. Blackpool Zoo, Merlin attractions and Viva Blackpool can now be purchased from the TIC desk at the Town Hall.

CURRENT POSITION

4. The TIC is currently operated within the Town Hall reception area during office hours Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays) and staffed by the Customer Support Team that also have a range of other corporate support responsibilities including 'meet and greet', print and post, administration etc. It has print provision (in part through a print distribution agent), a TV screen which can show pre-set information, information desk and the ability to sell attraction tickets on a commission basis.
5. As part of the refurbishment scheme for the Town Hall it was intended to keep separate the tourist information/general enquiry desk from the main customer service desk dealing with council tax, benefit enquiries. As part of the works implemented the tourist information/general enquiries desk has been located to the front of reception with a retractable screen installed part which allows the TIC facility to operate with the remainder of the reception area closed. The main enquiries at present are for bus timetables, local maps and what's on information. It is estimated that at present, 80% of visitors to the desk are tourists and 20% local residents.
6. Information is now more available, and accessed primarily through the internet, mobile devices and social media increasing significantly the channels for sourcing information driven by demand that did not exist when TIC's were first developed. Fylde Council operates the website www.visitlythamstannes.co.uk which benefits from 2.5 million page views per year as well as carrying information on www.visitlancashire.com (550,000 page views per year for Fylde content). A new visitor website www.discoverfylde.co.uk is under development for launch during summer 2017. Statistics show that over 50% of people now access web information through a mobile device so the Fylde internet provision is also supported by regular messages and interaction on social media through Facebook and Twitter.
7. The council has a digital transformation agenda based on 'Digital by Preference' (DBP) across all services to meet the ever increasing demand for online interaction with a reduction in demand for contact in person or over the phone. The second stage of the strategy will be 'Digital by Default' as face to face and phone contact continue to reduce and future generations expect to engage online.

PROPOSAL

8. Officers have received a request from elected members to investigate the options to open the TIC facility at weekends and bank holidays in the Town Hall reception area, either on a part or year round basis. The report outlines the options for this to be delivered and the associated costs.

OPTIONS

9. It is possible to open the TIC desk at weekends in order to be of service to visitors, provide information, sell tickets for attractions and stock a small range of merchandise.
10. The source of any additional funding would need to be identified because it is not costed into existing service budgets. The most efficient approach would be to have a pool of employees to operate the TIC facility, from which, one or two would work on each weekend day or bank holiday. There would be no requirement for the whole of the Town Hall to be opened because a limited area can be isolated from the rest of the Town Hall with the employee responsible for the safe opening, operation and closing of the facility.
11. Any weekend operation of the facility would require a minimum of two people, this does not need to be two paid employees. Many examples exist of TIC facilities operated by volunteers and / or charity organisations in partnership with the local authority.
12. There has been a request for volunteers to assist in the weekend operation of the TIC desk and at present, five volunteers have come forward with an indication that they would be willing to help staff the facility on a rota basis. A more proactive campaign to canvass for additional volunteers can be carried out to extend the pool of volunteers. It is proposed that volunteers would not have any connections or affiliations with any tourism service provider to ensure independence and confidence with the service. . The proposal would be to have the weekend facility operated by a paid employee working alongside at least one volunteer. However, volunteers cannot be required to attend and therefore it may be necessary to have the flexibility for two paid employees to operate the facility.

13. The estimated costings below have been based on the option of having one paid employee or two paid employees working with at least one volunteer for a period of six hours per day at weekends and bank holidays throughout different periods of the year
14. There are four options which can be considered:
- 1) TIC only open on weekdays during office hours at present – no change to existing cost
 - 2) TIC open all year round on weekend days, bank holidays and weekdays when Town Hall open – estimated cost for one staff member £11, 000; two staff members £22,000
 - 3) TIC Open only at weekends for six key events – e.g. Kite Festival, Music & Arts Festival, Lytham Festival, Food Festival, key golf events, Carnival Weekend – estimated cost £1,300 for one staff member; two staff members £2,600
 - 4) TIC open weekends and bank holidays May to September (19 weekends) – estimated cost £4,000.; two staff members £8,000
15. Members are asked to give officers an indication of which proposal they prefer, to allow officers to develop a further detailed costed proposal which would be included in any revenue budget growth proposals for 2018.

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)	√

IMPLICATIONS	
Finance	None arising at this stage. There may be cost implications that arise at a later point, depending upon which, if any, of the options described within this report is selected as the basis for the future operation of the tourist information service.
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
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BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Name of document	Date	Where available for inspection
Council minutes	3 March 2008	https://fylde.cmis.uk.com/fylde/MeetingsCalendar/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/692/Committee/33/Default.aspx