

 Executive Committee 12 February 2020		Agenda Item No. <h1 style="text-align: center;">12</h1>
Title	Future funding for Warwick Tourist Information Centre	
For further information about this report please contact	Martin O'Neill, Business Manager, Projects and Economic Development, 01926 456064 Martin.oneill@warwickdc.gov.uk	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Executive 5 th January 2017, item 9	
Background Papers	None	

Contrary to the policy framework:	No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	No
Key Decision?	No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes – Ref 991
Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken	No

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive		Chris Elliott/Bill Hunt
Head of Service		Dave Barber
CMT		Bill Hunt
Section 151 Officer		Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer		Andrew Jones
Finance		Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)		CLlr Alan Rhead
Consultation & Community Engagement		
Engagement with Warwick Town Council has taken place		
Final Decision?	Yes	
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 To consider the Business Plan provided by Warwick Visitor Information Centre (VIC), in conjunction with Warwick Town Council, which sets out the ambition, aims and objectives for the period 2020 – 2023.
- 1.2 Having considered the Business Plan, for Executive to continue ongoing financial support to the Warwick VIC enabling the centre to continue to provide a valuable visitor experience in the town of Warwick.

2. **Recommendations**

- 2.1 That Executive notes the contents of the new Business Plan for the Warwick VIC and its aspirations for the period 2020 – 2023.
- 2.2 That Executive approves the continued funding of the Warwick VIC in the amount of £25,000 per annum for a further 3-year period from 2020/21 to 2022/23
- 2.2 That Executive agrees that officers work in conjunction with Warwick Town Council to assist with, and monitor, the outcomes and objectives as set out in the Business Plan and that relevant support and guidance is provided as part of the Council's ongoing liaison with Warwick VIC.

3. **Reasons for the Recommendations**

Recommendation 2.1

- 3.1 At the Executive meeting in January 2017, it was resolved that the Head of Development Services, in consultation with the Business Portfolio Holder, be delegated authority to re-negotiate and agree the payment of the Tourism Grant to Warwick Town Council as a contribution to the running costs of Warwick VIC up to a maximum of £25,000 per annum.
- 3.2 Following that meeting, the original funding was reduced from £40,000 per annum (which included £15,000 per annum for staffing resources in relation to the Leamington VIC), to £25,000 per annum. As part of the negotiations, Warwick VIC produced a 3-year Business Plan designed to outline their use of the Warwick District Council grant along with the financial breakdown of other contributions to the associated running costs of Warwick VIC.
- 3.3 Officers have continued to work in close liaison with Warwick VIC, and Warwick Town Council throughout the period of the previous Business Plan to provide advice, support and guidance (where needed) in improving the visitor experience at Warwick VIC and to monitor footfall in terms of visitor numbers.
- 3.4 As the current Business Plan expires at the end of this financial year, officers have requested a new Business Plan to support the aspirations of Warwick VIC and the financial contribution from Warwick District Council going forward. The Business Plan is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

Recommendation 2.2

- 3.8 Financial support for Warwick VIC has been in place for many years in order to ensure that there remains a positive visitor experience and to ensure the future

of tourism activities in Warwick Town, recognising that Warwick is a major tourist destination within the District.

- 3.9 The revised Business Plan (attached at Appendix 1 to this report) sets out the financial breakdown in terms of the overall operating costs for the Warwick VIC, demonstrating the dependency of the Warwick District Council contribution currently set at £25,000 per annum. Consideration has also been given to the fact that, as a District, we are a more expensive location to be based within and, in offering this policy, we seek to ensure that we remain competitive and clearly appear to be 'business-friendly' and 'welcoming.'
- 3.10 It is clear that the withdrawal of the current grant would present Warwick Town Council with a financial pressure in terms of future operation of Warwick VIC, and this would pose a significant threat to the ongoing operation of the VIC.
- 3.11 Tourism is a major contributor to the economy in the District, generating in excess of £304million to the local economy in 2018 and supporting over 5200 jobs in the sector. It is clear that Warwick VIC provides a valuable service to visitors to the town and the footfall and other visitor usage of the VIC figures over 2018 and 2019 are shown in the table below.

Month	Counter		Tel, Email		Total	Total	Footfall	
	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019	2018
Jan	1089	1381	149	214	1238	1595	1302	1600
Feb	1082	833	127	209	1209	1042	1284	1203
March	1719	1048	104	192	1823	1240	1834	1483
April	2362	1737	176	176	2538	1913	2601	2211
May	2722	2706	179	139	2901	2845	3083	3023
June	2867	2503	177	171	3044	2674	3244	3123
July	3803	3480	257	176	4060	3656	4079	4030
August	4119	3550	167	162	4286	3712	4429	4115
Sep	2608	2439	184	171	2792	2610	2915	3685
Oct	2474	2879	143	161	2617	3040	2701	3266
Nov	2056	2145	163	187	2219	2332	2423	2335
Dec	1668	1089	114	130	1782	1219	1863	1218
	28569	25790	1940	2088	30509	27878	31758	31292

- 3.12 In addition, Warwick VIC hosts a website providing information and guidance to visitors in terms of local tourist attractions, associated businesses, accommodation and food and drink outlets. This is designed to drive footfall into the town from overseas and domestic visitors attracted primarily by the castle but in a concerted effort to promote the wider tourism offering of the town of Warwick. An analysis of website "hits" is shown below;

Year	Month	Visits	Year	Month	Visits
2019	Jan	4718	2018	Jan	4709
2019	Feb	5276	2018	Feb	4595
2019	Mar	5948	2018	Mar	4857
2019	Apr	7034	2018	Apr	5522
2019	May	7831	2018	May	6571

2019	June	6139	2018	June	6046
2019	July	7218	2018	July	6697
2019	Aug	8110	2018	Aug	8199
2019	Sept	5733	2018	Sept	5296
2019	Oct	5739	2018	Oct	5708
2019	Nov	4778	2018	Nov	5192
2019	Dec	3832	2018	Dec	4071
		72356			58200

Recommendation 2.3

- 3.14 There is an ongoing working relationship between officers of Warwick District Council and Warwick Town Council and Warwick VIC, specifically through the Strategic Economic Development Officer, the VIC Manager and Town Clerk. This ongoing dialogue has proved successful in creating a meaningful collaboration between the different stakeholders.
- 3.15 Given that a considerable level of financial support to Warwick VIC is being provided, it is felt prudent that WDC officers continue to meet on a regular basis with the VIC manager and the Town Clerk to review progress against the Business Plan and provide relevant advice, assistance and signposting to other organisations in order to optimise the use and effectiveness of the VIC.
- 3.16 This ongoing liaison and monitoring will ensure that the funding is being utilised with specific aims of improving the visitor experience and sustaining the economic benefits of the tourism industry in the Town of Warwick.
- 3.17 Whilst there are no specific KPIs being put in place, as this could leave the Council open to a procurement challenge on the basis that the funding arrangement could constitute a formal contract for services, the purpose of the grant funding is that it will be utilised in relation to tourism and visitor activities provided by the Warwick VIC and the ongoing liaison and monitoring processes will ensure this is the case.

4. Policy Framework

4.1 Fit for the Future (FFF)

The Council's FFF Strategy is designed to deliver the Vision for the District of making it a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. To that end amongst other things the FFF Strategy contains several Key projects.

The FFF Strategy has 3 strands – People, Services and Money and each has an external and internal element to it. The table below illustrates the impact of this proposal if any in relation to the Council's FFF Strategy.

FFF Strands		
People	Services	Money
External		
Health, Homes, Communities	Green, Clean, Safe	Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment

<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Improved health for all Housing needs for all met Impressive cultural and tourist activities Cohesive and active communities	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Area has well looked after public spaces All communities have access to decent open space	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Dynamic and diverse local economy Vibrant town centres Improved performance/productivity of local economy Increased tourism employment and income levels
Impacts of Proposal		
Given the reciprocal nature of the intended policy, benefits for the wider community should be felt. Here, the increase in the overall tourism offer in terms of activities spearheaded by the Warwick VIC	The operation of the VIC also aims to provide visitors, residents and businesses with a safe a secure environment in which to enjoy the experience of the town.	Successful implementation of the recommendations will contribute to these outcomes by incentivising and supporting business to increase their performance and their headcount. In particular, it seeks to support a more diverse workforce and tackle long-term unemployment issues.
Internal		
Effective Staff	Maintain or Improve Services	Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term
<u>Intended outcomes:</u> All staff are properly trained All staff have the appropriate tools All staff are engaged, empowered and supported The right people are in the right job with the right skills and right behaviours	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Focusing on our direct needs of customers at the VIC and the tourism industry to support the economy through effective support from WDC officers	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Better return/use of our assets Full Cost accounting Continued cost management Maximise income earning opportunities from Tourism related activities Ensure and monitor best value for money
Impacts of Proposal		
N/A	N/A	N/A

4.2 Supporting Strategies

The proposed Policy would directly support Fit for the Future, by encouraging and supporting the local tourism economy.

4.3 Impact Assessments

4.3.1 No impact assessment has been carried out at this stage

5. Budgetary Framework

5.1 The current level of funding to Warwick VIC is already provided for in the tourism budget. There is no current expiration of the ongoing budget

allocation. As stated above, funding for Warwick VIC has been in place for a number of years. This is therefore not a request for new or additional funding, rather than the existing funding that is in place is continued for the life of the revised Business Plan.

6. Risks

- 6.1 The key risk to the recommendations not being supported is that Warwick VIC as it currently stands may cease to operate. Additionally, the revised Business Plan, which is designed to increase and improve on the visitor numbers and their overall experience, may not be viable in the absence of continued financial support from WDC.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

- 7.1 Not to approve the continued financial contribution of £25,000 and utilise this internally to provide an alternative method of support for tourism in the Town of Warwick. This option is not supported as it is recognised by Visit England, the national Destination Management Organisation, that the existence of tailored, physical and bespoke tourism information within major tourist location sites one the most vital components in terms of the visitor experience, essential to most if not all overseas tourists. Whilst there is an increase in on-line tourism and tourism related activity, the existence of face to face local expertise remains a valuable asset to the industry on a local basis.

8. Background

- 8.1 Warwick Visitor Information Centre is the primary one-stop shop for visitors to Warwick from both regional, national and international tourist markets.
- 8.2 The VIC offers advice to tourists and visitors on the wide range of attractions in the town centre and the District as a whole, including entertainment, food and drink offerings to supplement the tourist hot spots such as Warwick Castle and the Lord Leycester Hospital.
- 8.3 The aim of The WVIC is to be on hand for visitors through the telephone, email and face to face promoting local attractions, businesses, events and selling tickets to a range of attractions. As well as providing tips on 'hidden gems' within the area, which do not have a strong online presence.
- 8.4 WVIC has received a grant from Warwick District Council over a number of years, the past three years Warwick District Council has provided £25,000 per annum toward the cost of the service.
- 8.5 The renewed Business Plan which has been developed in partnership with the District Council shows the ambition for the Warwick VIC over the coming 3-year period and the improvements to the visitor experience in the town offered by this valued service, with a vision and objectives set out in the plan.
- 8.6 The provision of a bespoke service in terms of visitor information and a centre to promote the town of Warwick and its close links with the rest of the District including Leamington Spa and Kenilworth is a vital element of the tourism sector offering and the wider economic benefits which derive from this in terms of jobs and business benefits.